Book Review. The L1 as a consciousness-raising tool in learning L2 grammar, by Aleksandra Wach, 2019


Martyna Awier
University of Białystok

The role of consciousness in foreign language acquisition has raised interest among researchers (Ahmadi & Gilakjani, 2012). The scholars acknowledge the importance of consciousness in the process of instructed foreign language teaching (Ellis, 2002a). However, the monograph of Aleksandra Wach, *The L1 as a consciousness-raising tool in learning L2 grammar*, broadens the scope of interest and expands to explore not only consciousness but also the importance of L1 in the process of acquiring L2 grammar. The book emerges as a ground-breaking contribution to the study of learning and teaching L2 (second language or foreign language) grammar. The Author undermines a traditional dominant Communicative Approach banning the presence of L1 (first language or native language) in L2 classroom (Richards & Rodgers, 2014; Wach, 2019).

The volume consists of 7 chapters, preceded by an Introduction and followed by Final Conclusions. The book is divided into two parts: theoretical and methodological. Chapter 1, *Consciousness in Second Language Acquisition: A theoretical perspective*, introduces the main topic of the book, which is the appreciation of consciousness-raising strategies in foreign language learning. The chapter
begins with the definitions of basic concepts referring to the subject matter. It delineates the concept of consciousness, which is followed by a detailed review of terms underlying consciousness. The chapter uncovers complexity of consciousness underlying its overlapping concepts, such as awareness, attention or noticing. Additionally, it explores concepts related to consciousness, such as working memory, explicit and implicit learning and process and product perspective on second language learning. The chapter closes with the presentation of findings on awareness, noticing and attention in the field of L2 education.

In chapter 2, titled *Consciousness-raising in instructed L2 grammar acquisition*, the issue of instructed conscious-raising teaching of L2 grammar is thoroughly discussed. The chapter outlines the variety of instructional options, with a special emphasis on grammar conscious-raising instructions. The Author adopts a broad understanding of conscious-raising grammar instructions, which covers a multitude of explicit pedagogical techniques aiming to encourage students to observe certain grammatical regularities and formulate underlying rules. Different realizations of conscious-raising instructions are demonstrated. The chapter outlines, *inter alia*, the conscious-raising instructions based on the input, task-based instructions, or problem-solving instructions. Then, the Author proposes a set of practical grammatical conscious-raising exercises. Finally, the selection of previous research studies on the effectiveness of grammatical conscious-raising instructions in L2 pedagogy is reviewed and commented on.

Chapter 3, *The role of L1 in learning and teaching L2 grammar* addresses the place and role of learners’ native language (or L1) in teaching and learning the L2 grammar system. To underscore the role of L1 in L2 pedagogy, the chapter discusses the notion of cross-linguistic influence and the cognitive processes underlying the L1 approach in L2 learning. The Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis, the Interlanguage Hypothesis, the Universal Grammar Theory, and the Multicompetence Theory are underscored. It concentrates on the influence of L1 on teaching and learning L2 grammar, focusing on the issue of language transfer. The chapter also enumerates a set of examples of practical application of L1 in L2 use. Moreover, it enumerates advantages and disadvantages of using L1 instructions in the L2 classroom. The concluding part of this chapter centers around the account of the previous studies on L1 presence in L2 teaching instructions. The chapter proceeds with a focus on teachers and students’ perception of L1 in foreign language environment. It also reports on the effects of L1 on the grammar absorption. The Author puts a particular emphasis on the use of L1 while explaining grammar, comparing the L1 and L2 grammar system, translating sentences.
The chapters 4-7 comprise the empirical part of the book, serving as a bridge between the theory and the methodological assumptions of the study conducted by the Author. Chapter 4, titled *Methodological concerns in research on consciousness in instructed learning of L2 grammar*, is devoted to the methodological problems and challenges behind investigating consciousness in L1 and L2 teaching and learning. The chapter provides information of direct relevance to the research design adopted in the reviewed book. It discusses the recent literature and presents the utilized methodological and data elicitation techniques in the consciousness-oriented experiments, among others, concurrent and retrospective verbal reports, eye-tracking procedures, and various types of test tasks. The chapter specifies a great number of available methodological choices, even those not used in the experiment, to justify the technique chosen for the Author’s research design. It is revealed that introspective methods may be helpful in the task of measuring consciousness and explicit grammar knowledge. Special attention is drawn to the studies utilizing Think Aloud Procedures (TAP) as this method is applied in the Author’s experiment.

Chapter 5, *The study: Research methodology*, is one of the three chapters elaborating upon the Author’s empirical research. As Litosseliti (2010) notices, every linguistic experiment requires the description of the research design. Similarly, this chapter offers an insight into methodological assumptions of the empirical investigation conducted by the Author of the book. The purpose of the study, the description of its sample, data collection tools and procedures are reported on and reviewed thoroughly. The study employs a triangulation method making use of qualitative and quantitative data elicitation methods (Barczewska, 2017). The sample, consisting of 30 adult participants and English learners, is divided into two groups of participants: bilinguals who received the L2 input followed by L1 translations, and monolinguals who were exposed to only L2 input. The research applies mixed research tools, featuring TAP, grammar tasks or de briefing interviews. Qualitative methods provide an insight into the learner’s conscious processing of the given grammar input, emphasizing the role of L1 in this processing. Quantitative methods, in turn, reveal the frequencies of the mental strategies applied by participants.

Chapter 6, *The study: Results*, engages with the findings of the conducted research study on the role of L1 as a conscious-raising tool in the process of learning and teaching L2 grammatical structures. It unveils the types of cognitive processing strategies, of both lower (noticing) and higher (understanding) levels, identified in the analysis of TAPs. The role and functions of these processing strategies
in L2 acquisition are discussed in qualitative and quantitative analyses. The Author describes the participants’ performance in gap-filling and grammatical judgement tasks. Other variables, such as confidence rating scores and grammatical sensitivity tests are also mentioned. The last section of this chapter is devoted to the qualitative description of results of the debriefing interviews. The results of the study indicate that L1 can effectively influence the conscious processing of the grammatical content in L2. More specifically, the study reveals that both groups, monolinguals and bilinguals make use of cognitive processing strategies while being exposed to the given input. However, the differences are in frequencies as the bilingual group use mental strategies of both higher and lower lever more frequently than the monolingual one.

Chapter 7, *The study: Discussion of the results*, contains a critical analysis of the findings obtained in the Author’s empirical investigation. The chapter dissect the most frequent mental strategies used in participants’ verbal reports. It is followed by insightful comments on functions of these mental strategies in the process of using L1 in learning of L2 grammar. It also includes the participants’ opinions on L1 as a conscious-raising tool in learning and teaching L2, which adds a value to this book. It closes with the discussion on limitations and the presentation of some suggestions for future research. Most limitations proceed from inefficacy of TAPs as they do not capture all mental processes and the whole thinking process. The study shows that L1 directs learners’ attention and promotes noticing some of the target structures. The grammar instructions embedded in L1 clues enhance conscious processing, since they contribute to the detection of form-meaning connections, search of analogies or differences. Finally, the L1 input facilitates making inferences and formulating underlying rules.

The *Conclusion* section contains general comments based on the experimental study, the previously conducted studies and the theoretical premises. The Author emphasizes the preeminence of L1 in the field of the foreign language education. It is concluded that L2 grammar should be explained with use of explicit instructions. The author claims that learners absorb grammar in an explicit way, however the teacher must create communicative situations to facilitate the implicit knowledge of the L2 grammatical structures. In this way, the teachers can foster learners’ autonomy as it is advised by Belkhir (2020) or Ellis (2002b). The presence of L1 encourages cognitive conscious processing and, as a result, the inclusion of L1 improves learners’ linguistic performance. The Author advises to treat L1 as a supplementary tool which enhances the process of forming learners’ grammar.
Wach’s *The L1 as a consciousness-raising tool in learning L2 grammar* is a compelling proposal which will be of interest to a wider readership. It offers a plethora of inspiration for researchers and students in the field of L2 education. Additionally, the teachers may enjoy this publication because it also shares a range of practical ideas pertaining to the use of L1 in L2 classroom. The book complements the previous research on consciousness and the place of L1 in L2 grammar learning. The strength of the book is that it combines the responses to different research questions in one volume. The description of learning L1 from a product and process perspectives enriches this book, as the earlier investigations have neglected the learning-as-process orientation. The tables and graphs added to the empirical chapters are of great importance. Not only do they illustrate concluding remarks, but they also facilitate the processing and comprehension of the results, serving as a great visual summary of the results. To sum up, it can be said that the reviewed monograph is an important contribution to studies on teaching foreign languages, thus it is a highly recommended book for educational researchers, students, and teachers.

**REFERENCES**


MARTYNA AWIER

Martyna Awier is a PhD student at the University of Białystok, Poland. Her academic interests are in the areas of cognitive linguistics and discourse studies. Her current research focuses on conceptual metaphors and Critical Discourse Analysis.

martyna.awier@o2.pl
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5371-8871


https://revistes.uab.cat/jtl3/