CHAPTER 58

RESEARCHING AND DEVELOPING TEACHER LANGUAGE AWARENESS:

Developments and Future Directions

STEPHEN ANDREWS

The University of Hong Kong, China

ABSTRACT

Teacher language awareness (TLA) is receiving increased attention among researchers, teacher educators, and those responsible for quality assurance in language education. This chapter aims to summarize current thinking and research about TLA and to consider future directions for work in the area. Whilst acknowledging the need for TLA to encompass a broad awareness of language in communication, the chapter concentrates specifically on TLA as it relates to the language systems. The first section of the chapter outlines the nature of TLA and explores its potential significance in pedagogical practice. The next section examines the main research findings within TLA and also in interconnected areas such as L2 teachers’ cognitions about the linguistic content of their teaching. This is followed by an outline of current approaches to the development of TLA in teaching English as a foreign language (TEFL) programs. The chapter then considers issues of current debate, in particular the TLA of native-speaker (NS) and non-native-speaker (NNS) teachers, before concluding with a discussion of future directions in researching and developing TLA.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher language awareness (TLA) has been defined by Thornbury as “the knowledge that teachers have of the underlying systems of the language that enables them to teach effectively” (1997, p. x). Those who work in the area of TLA are therefore researchers interested in the nature of the L2 teacher’s subject-matter knowledge and the impact of that knowledge on pedagogical practice, and/or teacher educators seeking to develop the subject-matter knowledge of L2 teachers in ways that may have a positive influence on the quality of the teaching and learning that takes place in classrooms.

TLA AND LANGUAGE AWARENESS

TLA is closely associated with the so-called language awareness (LA) “movement” (e.g., Donmall-Hicks, 1997; Hawkins, 1984; James, 1999; James & Garrett, 1991). LA had its precursors in mainland Europe (see, for example, the discussion in van Essen, 1997), but the movement came to the fore in the UK in the early 1980s, when

The major focus of LA is explicit knowledge about language and the role of such knowledge in language learning, language teaching, and language use. The associated term, knowledge about language (KAL), appears in much of the related literature, reflecting a broadly similar focus (see, for example, Carter, 1990). The LA movement, embracing both mother tongue and second/foreign language teaching, has been particularly influential in the UK and also in other parts of Europe (see, for instance, Candelier, 1999, for discussion of the European EVLANG project, focused on developing “l’éveil aux langues” among children in the last 2 years of primary school).

Those who seek to improve the language awareness of students and of their teachers assume that there is a direct relationship between knowledge of formal aspects of language and performance when using the language. They believe that students who can analyze and describe language accurately are likely to be more effective users of that language. They also believe that teachers’ understanding of the language they teach and their ability to analyze it will contribute significantly and directly to their effectiveness as teachers.

**TLA, SUBJECT-MATTER KNOWLEDGE, AND PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS**

The recent growth of interest in TLA can also be linked to the increased attention currently being paid to the knowledge-base of second language teacher education (e.g., Freeman & Johnson, 1999; Andrews, 2003) and the professionalization of ELT, as well as to the generic notion of the teacher as professional (see, for example, the various papers in Darling-Hammond & Sykes, 1999), and attempts to set professional standards for teachers (see Coniam & Falvey’s chapter in Volume 1 for discussion of standards setting for L2 teachers). According to Shulman (1999), teachers are professionals because they need to take thoughtful, grounded actions under conditions that are inherently uncertain and complex. Shulman argues that for those actions to be effective, they need to be grounded in a deep knowledge of subject matter.

Subject-matter knowledge is thus seen as an essential component of teacher professionalism, underpinning the teacher’s professional autonomy and responsiveness. At the same time, however, the teacher needs to be “a knowledge worker oriented towards the interpretation, communication, and construction of such knowledge in the interests of student learning” (Shulman, 2000, p. xiii). This view of pedagogy places teachers in a central mediating role in their classrooms, both in relation to what students learn and also to how they learn (Freeman, 2001, pp. 608-609). Within the context of the L2 classroom, such a view of the teacher’s role highlights the need to focus attention on the teacher’s subject-matter knowledge and its potential impact on the effectiveness with which that teacher mediates input for learning. These are the principal concerns of TLA research.

The core of any teacher’s language awareness is subject-matter knowledge. However, as Turner-Bisset (2001) observes, “subject knowledge means different things to different people, and it is important to determine exactly what is meant by subject knowledge” (p. 21). The L2 teacher’s subject-matter knowledge base in
principle embraces the full range of LA-related issues, including not only grammar but also “other aspects of language in use, including those relating to culture and context, to discourse, to variety, to change and to power” (Arndt, Harvey, & Nuttall, 2000, p. 11). While not denying the importance, for teachers as well as learners, of these broader aspects of LA, including those associated with “critical language awareness” (e.g., Clark & Ivanic, 1999; Fairclough, 1992), the present discussion has a narrower focus, concentrating on teachers’ knowledge and understanding of the language systems, in particular grammar and vocabulary, in the belief that those systems are at the heart of the language acquisition process, and that they must therefore form the core of teachers’ subject-matter knowledge and of their language awareness.

**TLA AND PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICE**

*What is TLA?*

In relation to English language teaching, Wright and Bolitho (1993) assert, “the more aware a teacher is of language and how it works, the better” (p. 292). But what is the nature of such awareness, and how does awareness of language differ from knowledge? The following paragraphs will address these issues.

Edge (1988), writing about NNSs of English, identifies three roles that the TEFL trainee must learn to take on: those of language user, language analyst, and language teacher. Competence as a *language user*, which determines a teacher’s adequacy as a model for students, is dependent on that teacher’s language proficiency. Competence as a *language analyst* refers to the teacher’s ability to understand the workings of language in general and the target language in particular, and is therefore dependent on the teacher’s language systems knowledge base. Competence as a *teacher of the language* relates to the teacher’s creation and handling of opportunities for language learning, including that teacher’s mediation of input for learning.

TLA is centrally related to the second of those two roles: however, it is more than just subject knowledge about the language systems. In pedagogical practice, the three roles identified by Edge (1988) interact, and the harmony of their interaction is dependent upon the extent to which the teacher is “language aware.” Wright (2002) relates TLA to the teacher’s overall sensitivity to language and illustrates how the different domains of TLA (Edge’s three roles) interact:

A linguistically aware teacher not only understands how language works, but understands the student’s struggle with language and is sensitive to errors and other interlanguage features. The linguistically aware teacher can spot opportunities to generate discussion and exploration of language, for example by noticing features of texts which suggest a particular learning activity. (Wright, 2002, p.115)

In other words, TLA is at the heart of successful language teaching. As Wright’s (2002) characterization of the language-aware teacher suggests, however, the relationship between subject-matter knowledge and classroom teaching is very complex. One factor contributing to that complexity is the relationship between knowledge of subject matter (i.e., the teacher as language analyst) and language proficiency (the teacher as language user). In those teaching situations where the L2 is taught through the medium of the L2, the relationship is in part one of mediation,
with the teacher’s knowledge of subject matter being mediated through her language proficiency. At the same time, TLA is also, as Wright implies, metacognitive, involving an extra cognitive dimension of reflections upon both knowledge of subject matter and language proficiency that provides a basis for the tasks of planning and teaching. Brumfit (1997) makes a similar point when he refers to “the central role of teachers as educational linguists (i.e. as conscious analysts of linguistic processes, both their own and others’)” (p. 163). Because of its metacognitive nature, TLA has sometimes been referred to as teacher metalinguistic awareness (e.g., Andrews, 1997, 1999b, 1999c). TLA also, as Wright suggests, encompasses an awareness of language from the learner’s perspective, an awareness of the learner’s developing interlanguage, and an awareness of the extent to which the language content of materials/lessons poses difficulties for students.

TLA is therefore very closely linked to the more generic construct of pedagogic content knowledge, or PCK (e.g., Brophy, 1991; Gess-Newsome, 1999; Shulman, 1986, 1987; Turner-Bisset, 2001). Turner-Bisset outlines a model of PCK as an amalgam of all the interacting knowledge bases that underpin expert teaching. TLA is concerned with a subset of those knowledge bases: specifically, substantive and syntactic subject knowledge (Schwab, 1964), i.e., “knowing that” and “knowing how” (Ryle, 1949), and beliefs about the subject. TLA has been proposed as a major subcomponent of PCK rather than as a synonym for the language teacher’s PCK because of its specific focus on subject matter and also because of the uniqueness of the process of language teaching in which language is taught through language (see, for example, the discussion in Andrews, 2001, 2003).

Why is TLA important?

In order to understand why TLA is important, it may be helpful to consider the relevance of TLA to each of the three options in language teaching outlined by Long and Robinson (1998), options that are linked to different teaching/learning foci: (a) “focus on formS” (concentrating on the teaching of discrete points of language); (b) “focus on form” (where the emphasis is on meaning-focused activity, with attention switching to language as the need/opportunity arises in the course of communication); and (c) “focus on meaning” (the “non-interventionist” approaches associated, for example, with Krashen, 1985; Newmark, 1966; and Prabhu, 1987, which advocate abandoning a focus on language forms).

If we take the first option, it should be clear that TLA can potentially play a crucial role in determining the success of any focus-on-formS approach designed to help develop learners’ explicit knowledge. Whatever the nature of the focus-on-formS approach adopted, if the syllabus is broadly linguistic, then TLA will necessarily be a significant factor at each stage from lesson preparation through to the provision of corrective feedback.

Less obviously, perhaps, the second option, focus on form, poses no less of a challenge to a teacher’s language awareness, because of the teacher’s need to consider such factors as the potential linguistic demands of the task and the linguistic capacity of the learners to cope with those demands. In fact, a focus-on-form approach may actually increase the demands on a teacher’s language awareness because of the emphasis on language-related activity arising spontaneously out of the tasks rather than being determined in advance. TLA would
significantly affect both the teacher’s judgment of whether and when to intervene and also her ability to intervene in ways likely to promote learning.

It is with the third option, focus on meaning, that the importance of TLA is perhaps the least obvious. However, even within the most non-interventionist of approaches, one could argue that TLA is significant in determining the effectiveness or otherwise of what takes place in the classroom. If, for example, a teacher (following Krashen, 1981, 1985) wanted the classroom to be a major source of comprehensible input and therefore an “acquisition-rich” environment, then she would presumably need to make decisions about the current stage of development of the students’ acquired systems (or interlanguage) and select texts providing comprehensible input, devise tasks entailing an appropriate level of linguistic challenge, and control her own language to a level a little beyond the students’ current level of competence. All of these tasks would pose considerable challenges to the teacher’s language awareness.

From this it would appear that although TLA is of particular importance where teachers are employing focus-on-form or focus-on-form approaches, it can also have an impact upon a teacher’s effectiveness even within the most extreme of meaning-focused approaches. It therefore seems reasonable to argue that TLA is an essential part of any language teacher’s knowledge/skills base.

How Does TLA Affect Teacher Behavior?

In recent years, there have been various attempts to characterize how language awareness affects teacher behavior. Wright and Bolitho (1993) identify a number of pedagogic tasks where TLA may have a significant positive impact, including preparing lessons; evaluating, adapting, and writing materials; understanding, interpreting, and designing syllabuses; and assessing learners’ performance. They suggest that a lack of awareness most typically shows itself at the classroom level: “for example when a teacher is unable to identify and compensate for shortcomings in a coursebook, or is ‘caught out’ by a learner’s question on the language” (Wright & Bolitho, p. 292). They emphasize that these points about TLA apply equally to NS and NNS teachers. Thornbury (1997) extends the list of potential consequences of a weakness in TLA to include the teacher’s inability to anticipate learners’ learning problems and therefore to plan lessons that are pitched at the right level, and “a general failure to earn the confidence of the learners due to a lack of basic terminology and ability to present new language clearly and efficiently” (p. xii).

Leech’s (1994) profile of the language-aware teacher outlines the knowledge, awareness, and ability that the teacher brings to the task of dealing with issues relating to input—“the target language samples to which the learner is exposed” (Ellis, 1990, p. 96). According to Andrews (2001), the significance of TLA comes from its impact upon the ways in which input is made available to learners. Andrews (p. 80) uses the metaphor of a filter to show how a teacher’s language awareness can affect the way in which input from each of the three main sources—teaching materials, other learners, and the teacher—is made available to the learner in the L2 classroom.
TLA-RELATED RESEARCH

Wright and Bolitho (1997), echoing James and Garrett (1991), point out that LA remains in general an underresearched area. This continues to be the case, although recently there has been an increase in TLA-related research. This section outlines the nature of such research, with specific reference to L2, and highlights some of the more significant findings.

Early research relating to teachers’ KAL (or TLA) was mainly conducted in relation to primary teachers, teachers of English as an L1, and teachers of modern foreign languages (e.g., Chandler, Robinson, & Noyes, 1988; Williamson & Hardman, 1995; Wray, 1993). Much of this research was concerned with measuring aspects of teachers’ KAL and finding out about teachers’ understandings of KAL, rather than with examining the effects of their KAL on classroom teaching. However, the Southampton KAL project (e.g., Brumfit, Mitchell, & Hooper, 1996) switched the focus of research attention to the classroom. The Southampton project, designed to investigate how language is talked about in UK classrooms, gathered empirical evidence regarding L1 and L2 teachers’ beliefs and classroom practices in relation to five dimensions of KAL: language as system, language learning and development, styles and genres of language, social and regional variation, and language change through time. According to Brumfit et al., (1996), although there were individual variations in teacher style, there seemed to be distinctive subject-specific approaches to KAL. The approach of the L1 teachers was text focused, and their KAL-related classroom comments were mainly concerned with features of whole texts. The L2 teachers, in contrast, focused their KAL work on language as system, their rationale being the potential contribution of such activity to the development of students’ proficiency in the target language.

More recent research (e.g., Andrews, 1999b) has concentrated specifically on the nature of the subject-specific approach to KAL among L2 teachers. Andrews investigated the TLA of 17 teachers of English (all NNSs working in Hong Kong secondary schools), exploring their beliefs, knowledge, and instructional practices relating to grammar, with a particular focus on the interaction between subject-matter knowledge (the declarative dimension of TLA) and pedagogical practice (the procedural dimension). The study found that while explicit knowledge of grammar is vital to the consistently successful application of TLA in practice, the possession of such knowledge is not sufficient to ensure that the teacher will deal with grammar-related issues in ways most likely to be conducive to learning. Language proficiency was shown to play a crucial role in the application of TLA in pedagogical practice, not only affecting the quality of teacher reflections about language but also impacting the quality of teacher output and the teacher’s mediation of all three potential sources of input for learning: teaching materials, other learners, and the teacher. There was also considerable evidence to suggest that the TLA filter has a marked effect upon the teacher’s performance of a number of tasks widely believed to facilitate learning: for instance, making salient the key grammatical features within input, providing examples and explanations, helping learners to make useful generalizations, and limiting potential sources of learner confusion. A follow-up study (Andrews, 2005) investigated the TLA of three of the original 17 teachers after a gap of seven years, and found that their knowledge and beliefs about grammar were largely unchanged.
Andrews’s work (from Andrews, 1994, onwards) has focused specifically on TLA as it relates to grammar (although Andrews and McNeill, 2005, report a study focusing on TLA as it relates to both grammar and vocabulary). Research by Morris (e.g., Morris 2002; 2003) has also looked at grammatical knowledge, specifically of pre-service teachers, in order to identify correlations between participant traits and their pre-service learning. Morris (2002) suggests that age is a very good predictor of responses to different pedagogical approaches in TESL training.

McNeill’s research (e.g., 1999) has concentrated on teachers’ knowledge of vocabulary, in particular their awareness of lexical difficulty. McNeill’s work is noteworthy for highlighting the role of awareness of the learner in any conceptualization of both TLA and of the language-aware teacher (see also Wright, 2002). McNeill argues that, given the text-based nature of so much EFL pedagogical practice, the effectiveness of such teaching may be crucially affected by teachers’ ability to identify the vocabulary content of texts that their students find difficult. As McNeill shows, awareness of learners’ vocabulary difficulties varies widely among teachers.

Tests of metalinguistic awareness have been used by a number of researchers, to measure the LA of both students (e.g., Alderson, Clapham, & Steel, 1996; Bloor, 1986) and teachers (Andrews, 1999a, 1999b, 2004; Andrews & McNeill, 2005). LA tests are also commonly used by centers offering preservice TEFL training for the practical purpose of screening applicants. Recently, the predictive value of such testing has become the subject of research in TLA. Morris and Cobb (2004), for example, report on a study forming part of a broader project (see also Morris, 2002, 2003) to examine the relationship between the metalinguistic awareness of preservice TESL trainees and their performance on their initial training program. Morris and Cobb’s study investigates the predictive power of trainees’ vocabulary profiles, based on analysis of their entrance essays using a modified, online version of Hwang and Nation’s Vocabulary Profiler (Cobb, 2002). According to Morris and Cobb (2004), the results indicate that vocabulary profiles have great potential as predictors of academic and pedagogic success on TEFL programs.

Knowledge of metalanguage, though not synonymous with metalinguistic awareness, has formed the basis for the aforementioned tests of metalinguistic awareness, because, as Alderson, Clapham, and Steel (1996) observe, “whatever explicit knowledge is, it must include metalanguage” (p. 2). A number of TLA-related research studies have also focused on metalanguage. Murray (1998), for example, has investigated ELT trainees’ acquisition of TEFL metalanguage, which she suggests is part of their professionalization, helping them to become members of the ELT professional discourse community. Borg (1999c) focuses specifically on teachers’ practices in using grammatical metalanguage and the motivation for their decisions about how metalinguistically explicit to be. Meanwhile, Berry (1997) has investigated teachers’ awareness of learners’ knowledge of grammatical terminology, basing his research on the premise that, if metalinguistic terminology is used in L2 classrooms, teachers need to be aware of their student’s knowledge of metalanguage. Berry’s research, which, like McNeill’s (1999), highlights the importance for TLA of awareness of the learner, revealed major discrepancies between students’ knowledge of terminology and teachers’ estimates of that knowledge, with teacher overestimation of that knowledge being far more common than underestimation.
The area of L2 teachers’ cognitions (their beliefs, knowledge, assumptions, theories, and attitudes) in relation to grammar has recently become an increasingly important part of TLA-related research (see, for example, Andrews, 1999b; Borg, 1998, 1999a, 1999b, 2003; Palfreyman, 1993). Borg (1999a) makes a powerful case for researching this area, given our lack of understanding of teachers’ practices and cognitions in L2 grammar teaching and of the reasons for their instructional decision-making, and he argues that improved understanding could have a significant impact on the process of teacher education. Borg’s 1998 study is an example of such research, providing a detailed examination of the personal pedagogical system that shapes the approach to grammar pedagogy of one experienced EFL teacher. A recurrent theme in Borg’s work is the interactive, and sometimes potentially conflicting, nature of the cognitions informing teacher decisions about grammar pedagogy. Borg (2003) provides an overview of studies of teacher cognition in relation to the teaching of grammar in first, second, and foreign language classrooms.

Recent research by Walsh (e.g., 2001, 2003) has focused on the teacher talk aspect of TLA and has suggested the need to add an additional dimension to the conceptualization of TLA: L2 teachers’ interactional awareness. Walsh’s work employs a sociocultural theoretical framework to investigate teacher’s own use of language in teacher-fronted, multiparticipant L2 classes. The study uses the constructs quality teacher talk and L2 classroom interactional competence to describe how teachers’ enhanced understanding of interactional processes can facilitate learner involvement and increase opportunities for learning. According to Walsh, training in interactional awareness, making use of procedures such as the self-evaluation of teacher talk (SETT) grid, can help teachers to develop appropriate teacher language and strategies for potentially enhancing learning opportunities in the L2 classroom. Training to enhance interactional awareness is premised on the belief that, as Walsh observes, “so much of what ‘good’ teaching is about…depends on developing L2 classroom interactional competence and making the most of the interactional choices available” (p. 337).

APPROACHES TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF TLA

Language awareness work has formed an integral part of TEFL courses ever since John Haycraft set up his pioneering preservice courses for NSs at International House (IH) in London in the 1960s (see Haycraft, 1988). Language work in TEFL programs, variously labeled in syllabus documents as language analysis, language awareness, or, ambiguously, LA, has become an area of increasing interest and debate (beginning with Shaw, 1979). This section outlines some of the issues relating to LA work on teacher development courses.

The IH “four-week” courses provided a blueprint for similar programs in many parts of the world, via the RSA/Cambridge CTEFLA preservice training scheme (now known as CELTA, and targeted at both NSs and NNSs). From the outset, the IH courses included a certain amount of language analysis because it was felt that the NSs for whom the courses were designed had no experience of analyzing language from the perspectives of learning and the learner.

According to Kerr (1993), much of the LA work on courses following the IH or CTEFLA model has emphasized the analytical process of studying language at the expense of the application of any insights that might be gained from such analysis.
As a result, LA activity has typically focused on the transmission of knowledge about language rather than on fostering an awareness of implications for the learner or the teaching/learning process (p. 41). In 1996, the CTEFLA scheme gave way to CELTA, which had a more enlightened Language Awareness syllabus than its predecessor. However, Kerr (1998) found that the LA component of training courses in 30 CELTA centers was largely unchanged, with recent developments in the analysis of computer corpora, of collocation, of spoken grammar, and of discourse having had “very little impact in the way that CELTA trainers have conceived of and packaged language awareness for their trainees” (p. 5).

The problem noted by Kerr (1998) is, at least in part, the result of a dilemma in preservice training: on the one hand, trainees need the security of predigested “facts” about language that will enable them to survive their initial classroom experience without their confidence being too severely dented; on the other hand, if they are to develop professionally, they must be ready to question and reflect on the adequacy of such facts. As Wright and Bolitho (1993) point out, basic knowledge about language may be a necessary part of TLA work, but it is not in itself sufficient to produce a language-aware teacher. For Wright and Bolitho, LA is a process intended to help both preservice and in-service trainees “to develop their sensitivity towards language, as part of a strategy aimed at enhancing classroom teaching and learning” (p. 302). LA activity therefore needs to focus on the procedural dimension of TLA as well as the declarative dimension.

The first published LA materials aimed primarily at teachers (Bolitho & Tomlinson’s “Discover English”) appeared in 1980, to be followed by Wright (1994), the second edition of “Discover English” (Bolitho & Tomlinson, 1995), and Thornbury (1997). These materials consist in the main of data-based language analysis tasks intended to stimulate the user’s reflections on the workings of different parts of the language systems. Many of the activities in these materials focus primarily on the declarative dimension of TLA, encouraging the user to question predigested facts and preconceptions about language. Wright (2002) suggests that the materials published up to now do not always make a successful link between the declarative dimension and the procedural dimension of pedagogical practice. Arndt, Harvey, and Nuttall (2000) take a broader view of LA (see section on TLA, Subject-matter Knowledge, and Professional Standards earlier in the chapter) and attempt to link the declarative and procedural dimensions of TLA through tasks that explicitly encourage the user to relate information and ideas to their individual teaching situations. However, the success of any materials in integrating the declarative and procedural dimensions of TLA is inevitably dependent on how those materials are used.

Wright and Bolitho (1997) outline an “experiential” approach to LA work, which is intended to make that link between the declarative and procedural dimensions. In proposing this approach, which they see as especially appropriate for in-service work, they associate TLA with more general views of teachers’ professional development, arguing that “no teacher of any language should ever stop learning about their subject” (p. 173). This experiential approach requires teachers to focus on a language problem deriving from their own experience, to analyze and review that experience, to explore the problem in order to gain deeper insights into the particular area of language, and to plan for subsequent classroom action. The approach is seen as having a number of benefits, with the increased knowledge about language and the ability to link such knowledge to pedagogical practice giving
teachers increased confidence in their subject-matter knowledge and a consequent readiness to be a discriminating, critical master of textbook materials, rather than an uncritical slave.

A number of the most recent proposals for developing TLA derive from research, for example, Walsh’s (2001, 2003) training in interactional awareness, Murray’s (2002) activities to promote error detection, and Borg’s (1999b) strategies for encouraging teachers to explore the theories underlying their pedagogical practice when teaching grammar. Increasingly, approaches to developing TLA are also making use of the ease of access to large corpora of language data and the development of powerful concordancing tools. Such developments as the Telenex computer network, for instance, which links hundreds of teachers in Hong Kong schools, make use of corpus data both in online grammar files and in responses to queries from teachers about language points (e.g., Allan, 1999; Tsui & Nicolson, 1999). The impact of corpus linguistics on TLA is undoubtedly set to grow in the coming years as technology opens up new opportunities for LA work, both on courses and via self-access.

**ISSUES IN TLA**

A number of the major issues in TLA, in both research and teacher development, were discussed earlier. These include the nature of the subject-matter knowledge of the L2 teacher, the impact of such knowledge on pedagogical practice, and how best to handle language work at different stages of the L2 teacher’s professional development. The aim in this section of the chapter is therefore to focus on another issue only briefly touched upon earlier: the TLA of NS and NNS teachers and professional standards.

The relative merits of NS and NNS teachers of English have been increasingly debated in recent years (e.g., Andrews, 1999a; Medgyes, 1994; Seidlhofer, 1999; and the papers in Braine, 1999). Conventional wisdom in the early days of the ELT profession held the ideal teacher of English as L2 to be an NS of that language. This view, the so-called *native-speaker fallacy* (Phillipson, 1992, pp. 193-199), has been seriously questioned as part of the ongoing debate, stimulated by Kachru (for example, Kachru, 1985, 1990), about the status of non-native World Englishes and the implications of using them as pedagogical models in the classroom. It was, however, a fallacy that was widely accepted in the 1960s and 1970s, making NS graduates of that era easily employable as EFL teachers.

The inclusion of an LA component in the first, previously mentioned, IH TEFL courses in the 1960s was already an indication of the potential limitations of the NS graduate as a teacher of EFL. The need for increased attention to TLA on such programs became more and more apparent in the 1980s and 1990s, particularly as providers of training realized that most NSs of English below a certain age had no experience of studying English grammar, even at school (see Andrews, 1994). The experience of one NS teacher of English working in Hungary is perhaps typical: “Most native teachers I know never really came across grammar until they started teaching it. So you have to learn it as you go along” (Arva & Medgyes, 2000, p. 361).

Fewer doubts have generally been voiced about the TLA of NNS teachers of English. According to Arva and Medgyes (2000), there may indeed be a common perception that such teachers “speak poorer English, use ‘bookish’ language, and
use English less confidently” than NS teachers (p. 357). However, it has also been assumed that NNS teachers have “more insight into and better meta-cognitive knowledge of grammar” than their NS counterparts (p. 364), because of their educational background and training. Seidlhofer (1999) also emphasizes the strengths of NNS teachers, not just in terms of the high level of declarative knowledge of the internal organization of the language that they possess as a result of their own language learning experience, but also because of their ability to “get into the skin of the foreign learner” (pp. 242-243).

In recent years, however, assumptions about the high level of subject-matter knowledge of NNS teachers have been called into question in many parts of the world because the demand for appropriately qualified teachers of English has far outstripped the supply. The inevitable result of this shortage in those countries affected is that there are large numbers of NNS teachers of English in both the public and private sectors who lack the necessary educational background and training. The consequences for their TLA, both the declarative and procedural dimensions, are highlighted in studies such as Andrews (1999b).

Given the importance of TLA in pedagogical practice and the potential TLA limitations of both NS and NNS teachers, as noted above, it is hardly surprising that TLA has become an increasingly important component of the professional standards expected of the L2 teacher. Recognition of the importance of TLA in professional standards setting can be seen in the greater emphasis accorded to the teaching and assessment of language awareness within such TEFL programs as the CELTA and DELTA (UCLES, 1996, 1998). At the same time, it is noteworthy that CELTA and DELTA are unifications of previously separate training schemes for NS and NNS teachers of English. A major aim behind the unification of these schemes was to focus on the similarities between NS and NNS teachers, and on the need for all teachers of English to achieve certain professional standards. TLA has therefore been highlighted as an area of crucial importance for every L2 teacher, whether an NS or NNS of the target language.

There are, however, a number of challenges relating to TLA and NS/NNS teachers. One such challenge arises in situations where NS and NNS teachers are working together as colleagues, namely, the challenge of making the best possible use of the often complementary strengths of such teachers, particularly in relation to their knowledge of language and knowledge about language, in ways that are maximally beneficial to the students and also of mutual benefit to the NS and NNS teachers.

Another major set of challenges faces those charged with implementing the wish of policymakers to assess the language knowledge and language proficiency of L2 teachers to ensure that they meet minimum professional standards. These challenges, which affect both NS and NNS teachers, concern what to assess (language proficiency, declarative TLA, and/or procedural TLA) and how to assess, as well as the crucial issue of how and where to set the benchmark, or minimum acceptable standard, in each of the assessed performance dimensions (see Coniam & Falvey’s chapter in Volume 1 for further discussion of some of these issues). As professional standard setting becomes more widespread, these issues are set to assume even greater importance for the ELT profession.
FUTURE DIRECTIONS

As indicated in the earlier discussion, many of the future directions in TLA development are likely to be associated, at least in part, with advances in technology. Those responsible for the LA component of teacher development courses will be able to make full use of the possibilities opened up by easy access to corpora and concordancing tools, and to set up improved networks of communication allowing trainees (both preservice and in-service) to interact electronically with each other and/or the trainer on language-related issues. Increasingly, too, technological developments will allow self-access work on TLA to become a focal point for the L2 teacher’s ongoing professional development.

In research, TLA is such an underinvestigated area that there is enormous scope, as well as a great need, for TLA-related research activity of all kinds. Freeman (2001) outlines a number of the key questions, such as the role of subject-matter knowledge in instruction, what it is that L2 teachers need to know about language in general and the target language in particular in order to teach, and the amount and type of subject-matter knowledge needed to teach different levels of learner. Some of the studies discussed earlier have attempted to address these questions, but they and other questions remain to be investigated further, including the issue raised by Borg (2003): the relationship between teacher cognition, classroom practice and learning. The following are examples of TLA-related issues that would all warrant further investigation:

1. The TLA profiles of different types of teacher (i.e., with different language, educational and professional backgrounds)
2. The impact of TLA in contexts where the prevailing approach to language pedagogy emphasizes a focus on form or focus on meaning approach
3. Systematic comparison of the TLA of NS and NNS teachers
4. Influences upon the development of TLA, including the potential impact of professional training
5. Dimensions of TLA other than grammar, and the links between grammar-related TLA and teacher awareness of other aspects of the language systems
6. The impact of TLA upon learners and learning
7. The relationship between the declarative and procedural dimensions of TLA, and between TLA and general teaching competence
8. How TLA might best be developed, both the declarative dimension and, more especially, the procedural dimension
9. Factors affecting the impact of TLA upon pedagogical practice, including the teacher’s willingness to “engage” with language-related issues and teacher confidence
10. The relationship between the L2 TLA of the NNS teacher and that same teacher’s LA in L1.

Above all, it is to be hoped that future directions in TLA bring research and practice in TLA closer together, so that practice becomes a focus for research and is also informed by research. Creating such a bridge between research and practice can only serve to strengthen the professionalization of EFL teachers.
REFERENCES


