# Introduction

The assumption underlying this book is that teachers of English not only need to be able to speak and understand the language they are teaching, but that they need to know a good deal about the way the language works: its components, its regularities, and the way it is used. It is further assumed that this kind of knowledge can usefully be gained through the investigation – or *analysis* – of samples of the language itself. Accordingly, the core of the book consists of sequences of tasks, the purpose of which is to raise the user's consciousness about language, that is, to promote language *awareness*.

## What is language awareness?

In Molière's play *Le Bourgeois Gentilhomme*, Monsieur Jourdain was famously unaware that he was speaking 'prose' – until it was pointed out to him. He may have been equally surprised to know that he was speaking 'grammar', for example, or that he was pronouncing 'phonemes', or that he was producing 'discourse'. Most speakers of a language are similarly vague when it comes to identifying what it is they implicitly 'know' about their language that enables them to speak it – the underlying rule system that Chomsky termed their 'competence'. It usually requires someone to point it out to them – to make it explicit. This is what language awareness is: explicit *knowledge* about language.

But, so simply defined, the term allows multiple interpretations. In first language education the focus of language awareness is broad, encompassing not only the linguistic domain, for example, the grammar of the language, but the sociolinguistic and cultural domains as well. In the words of The National Council for Language in Education Working Party on Language Awareness: 'Language Awareness is a person's sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language *and its role in human life*.' (Donmal 1985, emphasis added). Typical activities for children might involve the exploration of the differences between written and spoken language, for example, or the researching of dialect diversity and its effects. In second language education the term has a narrower compass, referring – traditionally, at least – to linguistic knowledge only, and to the teacher's knowledge rather than the learner's. Put simply, language awareness is the knowledge that teachers have of the underlying systems of the language that enables them to teach effectively.

This is not to suggest that the broader picture – the role of language in human life – has no relevance to second language education. On the contrary, the learning of another language is significantly influenced by cultural and attitudinal factors and this is increasingly reflected in the content and approach of current EFL materials. Nevertheless, it is not within the scope of this book to explore these factors. So, if this book is 'about' language, it is about language in the narrower sense, that is *the analysis of the linguistic systems that constitute language*.

## What is language analysis?

If language awareness is the goal, then language analysis is the route to it – or one route, at least. A more direct route might simply be to get hold of an up-to-date grammar and read it from cover to cover. It is a basic tenet of this book, however, that working out something for oneself pays greater dividends in terms of memory and understanding than simply having it explained. In other words, an inductive – rather than a deductive – approach to learning underpins the design of the tasks that follow. This is also consistent with the view that a discovery approach to grammar is an effective pedagogical option in second language classrooms. Language analysis, then, is a form of guided research into language. The aim of this research is to discover the language's underlying systems, in order to be in a better position to deal with them from a pedagogical perspective. Hence, the tasks do not stop at the point where the rules are laid bare – they are designed to invite the teacher to consider the pedagogical implications and classroom applications of these rules and systems.

It is perhaps important at this point to emphasise what language analysis is *not*. It is not the formal study of language known as 'linguistics'. The object of study is not language as an end in itself. The point of view is strictly a pedagogical one, i.e. what is it that a teacher needs to know about English in order to teach it effectively? While it is the case that most pedagogical descriptions of English might ultimately derive from linguistic models, or at least be accountable in terms of linguistic theory, they do not depend on these models and theories for their validity. Their validity is determined by their relevance to classroom practice – and, ultimately, learner outcomes. After all, languages were being taught successfully and pedagogical rules were being formulated long before the advent of linguistics as a science.

## Why language awareness and language analysis?

It would seem to be axiomatic that knowledge of subject-matter is a prerequisite for effective teaching, whether the subject be mathematics, history, geography, or, as in this case, a second or foreign language. This is certainly the perception of learners: in a survey of several thousand former foreign language students who were asked to identify the qualities of 'outstanding' language teachers they had been taught by, the quality that was most frequently cited was that the teacher had had 'thorough knowledge of subject matter' (Moscowitz 1976). This was a characteristic quoted more often than, for example, the fact that the teacher was 'fluent in the use of the foreign language' or was 'enthusiastic, animated'.

This view is echoed throughout the literature on language awareness. For example, Wright and Bolitho (1993) are emphatic: 'The more aware a teacher is of language and how it works, the better'. It is an assumption that is manifested in the design of teacher training programmes, both at pre-service and in-service level: there are few courses that do not have a prominent

language awareness component. And it is weakness in the area of language awareness that is a major cause of trainee failure on such courses. To quote from the Examinations Report for the RSA/UCLES Diploma in TEFLA examination for the year 1991/1992: 'It is a matter of concern that so many teachers of English seem to have such a limited knowledge of the language they are teaching'.

Among the consequences of such a limited knowledge of language are: a failure on the part of the teacher to anticipate learners' learning problems and a consequent inability to plan lessons that are pitched at the right level; an inability to interpret coursebook syllabuses and materials and to adapt these to the specific needs of the learners; an inability to deal satisfactorily with errors, or to field learners' queries; 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.

And yet there is a school of thought that argues that language awareness – or, at least, familiarity with the grammar – is incidental to effective teaching, and may even be prejudicial to it, especially when it becomes, not simply the means, but the object of learning a language. This view, which dates back at least to the late nineteenth-century Reform Movement and its reaction to grammar-translation methods, has been fuelled more recently by the work of Krashen (1982) and Prabhu (1987), among others. Each, independently and for different reasons, has argued that language proficiency is naturally acquired, rather than formally learned. For his part, Krashen claims that language acquisition takes place only through exposure to comprehensible input. The teacher's role is simply to facilitate comprehension and to provide the necessary input, by means, for example, of actions and simultaneous commentary. Krashen's claims for 'acquisition', as opposed to 'learning', are supported by a growing body of evidence that suggests that many grammatical items are learned in a predictable order (the 'natural order') irrespective of the order in which they are taught. Prabhu, meanwhile, argues for a strong form of the communicative approach: language learning takes place only when learners are communicating (and not before). The language learning programme is organised around a series of communicative tasks, first modelled by the teacher and then performed by the learners. Despite the differences in their methodology, both Krashen and Prabhu question the need for formal instruction, including explicit attention to grammar and error correction.

Krashen's, and, to a lesser extent, Prabhu's, views have had a wide following, despite critiques of their theoretical probity, on the one hand, and their research methods, on the other. There is a strong intuitive appeal in the idea that language acquisition simply 'grows', like a plant, given the right conditions of nurture. And it is this strong non-interventionist, 'anti-grammar' view that has led some language teachers to argue that they, unlike their colleagues in the mathematics or the history department, are exempt from the need to be authorities in their subject matter. They don't need to know their grammar.

The best that can be said about such a position is that it is somewhat ingenuous. (It is also a view that both Krashen and Prabhu would probably wish to disassociate themselves from.) Essentially, this argument confuses the