Review

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A review of language awareness (2020–2024): Current trends and future directions[1]

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Abstract

Language awareness, which refers to an individual's sensitivity to and understanding of the nature and function of language, has been shown to potentially impact language learning. The current paper reviews various sources, including journals, books, and historical documents, to provide a comprehensive overview of theoretical discussions and empirical studies on language awareness. It begins by outlining the domain of language awareness, then clarifies its definition, and then examines recent studies (2020–2024) that explore its effects, methods of cultivation, developmental patterns, and mediating factors in educational contexts, with a focus on the (meta)cognitive domain of language awareness among L2 learners, bilinguals, and multilinguals. Additionally, the paper discusses research on the cross-linguistic aspects of language awareness, highlighting how awareness across different languages influences learning outcomes. In conclusion, the paper summarizes current developmental trends in the field and emphasizes the need for further investigation to enhance our understanding and application of language awareness in educational contexts. The review aims to offer insights that may help refine strategies for cultivating language awareness and enhancing educational practices.

Keywords language awareness, effect, cultivation, developmental patterns, mediating factors

1. Introduction

Language awareness has evolved from a relatively obscure concept to a prominent term in language education, as demonstrated by the huge volume of recent research (e.g., Ali & Ghafar, 2024; Apaloo & Cardoso, 2022; Banegas & Arellano, 2024; Gorter, Cenoz & der Worp, 2021; Howerton-Fox, Falk & Kretschmer, 2023; McNeil, 2020; Van den Broek, 2022). Despite this surge in scholarly attention, there remains a significant gap in understanding among language educators and researchers regarding the precise definition of language awareness, its role in educational settings, and the breadth of existing research on the topic. This paper seeks to address this gap by providing a comprehensive review of the domain and definition of language awareness, evaluating empirical research within educational contexts, and outlining the developmental trends and future directions for research in this field. By doing so, it aims to clarify and consolidate knowledge about language awareness, offering valuable insights that can support and inform both current practice and future inquiries in language education.

2. Domain of Language Awareness

Language awareness encompasses a broad range of aspects, such as awareness of language in the learning process, comprehension of language in practical usage, and insight into language across different forms of communication, to name just a few. These facets of language awareness highlight how it integrates various dimensions of language study and application.

Considering the multifaceted nature of language awareness, it is beneficial to explore the frameworks designed to capture these dimensions. One prominent framework is proposed by James and Garrett (1991), which delineates five distinct domains of language awareness:

1) The affective domain. This aspect of language awareness involves cultivating attitudes and fostering attention, sensitivity, curiosity, interest, and aesthetic appreciation concerning language.

2) The social domain. This aspect of language awareness can be seen in how advocates use it to help learners from diverse backgrounds recognize their language and its place in the global language landscape.

3) The power domain. This aspect of language awareness focuses on the connection between language and the exercise of power, aiming to counteract linguistic complacency and equip learners to combat prejudice and antagonism.

4) The cognitive domain. This aspect of language

awareness highlights the importance of understanding language patterns, units, categories, and rules, as well as the ability to reflect on them.

5) The performance domain. This aspect of language awareness examines whether understanding language enhances one's language performance or command of it, or if analytical knowledge influences language behavior.

Except for James and Garrett's (1991) five domains of language awareness, Kumaravadivelu (2003) classifies language awareness into two categories: general language awareness, which focuses on linguistic and sociolinguistic features that govern language usage, and critical language awareness, which emphasizes the awareness of social and political factors influencing language use. James and Garrett's domain categories provide a more detailed framework, while Kumaravadivelu's categories offer a broader overview. Despite the difference in specificity, both approaches serve as valuable tools for researchers to explore various aspects of language awareness.

3. Definition of Language Awareness

Unlike the domain of language awareness, the definition of language awareness is rather ambiguous. Researchers have used various terms for it, leading to a lack of clarity and consensus regarding the meaning of language awareness (James & Garrett, 1991). To solve this problem, the NCLE Working Party on Language Awareness agreed on a simple definition: "a person's sensitivity to and conscious awareness of the nature of language and its role in human life" (Donmall, 1985, cited in James & Garret, 1991, p. 4). Despite this widely accepted definition, significant confusion persists, primarily due to various similar constructs and terms.

3.1. Awareness as cognition vs. awareness as metacognition

After a detailed analysis of the relationship and differences among different terms such as language awareness, linguistic awareness, consciousness, and sensitizing, James (1999) concludes that there are two variants of language awareness. The first variant, language awareness as cognition, works from the outside in. One first acquires new language information or learns something previously unknown about a language, and then either stops at that point or applies this 'objective' knowledge to improve one's language proficiency. The second variant, language awareness as metacognition, works in the opposite direction: one begins with personal intuitions and, through reflection, connects these intuitions to one's knowledge of language as an external object. In simple words, the first variant is subjectivizing outside knowledge whereas the second variant is objectivizing personal knowledge.

Corresponding to the two variants of language awareness, the teaching of language awareness in schools should involve both making explicit the knowledge and skills learners have already built up and developing the skills to observe and analyze the language in the environment (Donmall, 1991). A good illustration is the

three cases of language awareness work James and Garrett (1991) describe. In the first case, where language awareness work is conducted with groups sharing a mother tongue, the focus is making learners more aware of the intuitions they hold about their mother tongue. In the second case, where language awareness work is conducted with groups from diverse linguistic backgrounds, the focus is making each learner aware not only of his or her own implicit language knowledge but also of others' explicit language knowledge. In the third case, where language awareness work is conducted with foreign language learners, the focus is both on making the learners aware of their mother tongue intuitions and on increasing their explicit knowledge of what happens in the foreign language. In the first case, the focus is turning learners' implicit knowledge into explicit knowledge, while in the second and third cases, learning takes place in both directions: apart from working at what they know (mother tongue), learners also work on what they do not know (the mother tongue of peers or the foreign language).

3.2. Language awareness vs. consciousness raising

James (1999) refers to the first variant of language awareness, the subjectivizing of outside knowledge, as *consciousness raising*, and the second variant, the objectivizing of personal knowledge, as *language awareness* (with the term in its narrow sense). To him, language awareness means "having or gaining explicit knowledge about and skill in reflecting on and talking about one's own language(s)" (p. 102), whereas consciousness raising is "becoming able to locate and identify the discrepancies between one's present state of knowledge or control and a goal state of knowledge or control" (p. 103). Thus, to James, consciousness raising is distinctly different from language awareness: language awareness is metacognition while consciousness raising is cognition; language awareness starts from what one knows while consciousness raising starts from what one does not know; language awareness is declarativizing procedural knowledge while consciousness raising implies first declarativizing and then procedualizing new knowledge.

Unlike James, some scholars regard consciousness as a more overarching term than awareness. For example, Schmidt (1994) identifies awareness as one of the four senses of consciousness (consciousness as intentionality, consciousness as attention, consciousness as awareness, and consciousness as control). Van Lier (1998) also subsumes awareness in the four levels of consciousness he identifies:

Level 1: *Global ('intransitive') consciousness:* This level pertains to the basic state of being alive and awake.

Level 2: *Awareness (or "transitive" consciousness):* This level involves perceptual engagement with objects and events in the environment, including activities such as attention, focusing, and vigilance.

Level 3: *Metaconsciousness*: This level involves awareness of the mind's activities, including language awareness, knowledge about mental processes, and metalinguistic awareness of formal linguistic properties.

Level 4: *Voluntary action, reflective processes, mindfulness:* This level involves deliberate and purposeful engagement in actions, reflecting a higher degree of

intentionality and mindfulness.

Amongst the four levels of consciousness, Level 2 corresponds to language awareness as cognition. It entails attending to and perceiving language in a way that goes beyond the immediate or familiar scope, aligning with the first variant of James' notion of language awareness. Level 3 corresponds to language awareness as metacognition. It entails "thinking about thinking, or language about language, or language about thinking, or thinking about language" (Van Lier, 1998, p.132), aligning with the second variant of James' notion of language awareness.

3.3. Language awareness vs. other terms

The term *language awareness* coexists with a variety of similar terms, such as *knowledge about language*, *linguistic awareness*, and *metalanguage awareness*. For some researchers, these terms can be used interchangeably with language awareness. For example, Van Essen (1997) makes it clear at the beginning of a review article that *language awareness* and *knowledge about language* will be used interchangeably unless stated otherwise. For other researchers, however, these terms should be used differently. James (1999) gives a full discussion on the differences between *language awareness*, *knowledge about language*, *linguistic awareness*, and *metalanguage awareness*. Knowledge about language encompasses encyclopedic information, such as words and grammatical rules. Linguistic awareness consists of linguistic intuitions that have been raised to consciousness. It is gained through personal reflection and active engagement with language, rather than through direct instruction from a teacher. Metalanguage awareness is a more complicated construct. In the linguistic sense, *meta* refers to the ability to use language to discuss language itself, while in the psychological sense, *meta* denotes cognition about cognition. Thus, linguistic metalanguage awareness pertains to knowing the terminology for various language elements, such as parts of speech and types of sociolects. In contrast, psychological metalanguage awareness pertains to understanding one's own knowledge and the ability to articulate it. After examining the use of these terms in the literature, James concludes that language awareness is a blend of knowledge about language, linguistic awareness, and metalanguage awareness.

A fourth term related to but distinct from language awareness is metalinguistic knowledge. In the introduction of *Knowledge about Language* (*Encyclopedia of Language Education*. Vol. 6) edited by Van Lier and Corson (1999), one paragraph is specifically dedicated to the distinction between the two:

> *...there may be a significant difference between metalinguistic knowledge and language awareness...The former is what you come up with if you test or interview people, because it is limited to that which can be expressed in technical words, or metalanguage; the latter accompanies and guides the conscious language user's language use, but is not easily amenable to explicit scrutiny or comment. The former may be the tip, the latter the submerged bulk of the iceberg of language knowledge. (p. xiii)*

Here we can see that the authors view metalinguistic knowledge as a tangible body of knowledge that can be articulated, whereas language awareness is seen as a more elusive and difficult-to-describe concept. Despite this distinction, metalinguistic knowledge and language awareness are closely interconnected. They can be metaphorically represented as parts of an iceberg, with metalinguistic knowledge representing the visible and measurable tip, and language awareness constituting the hidden and profound bulk beneath the surface.

A fifth term frequently discussed in the literature is metalinguistic awareness. Tunmer, Herriman, and Nesdale (1988) define it as the ability to "reflect on and manipulate the structural features of spoken language" (p. 136). This definition confines metalinguistic awareness to spoken language and focuses on structural features as the objects of reflection and manipulation. Nagy (2007) argues that the focus of this definition is too narrow and suggests removing the word *spoken* to encompass reflection and manipulation of both spoken and written language. More recently, Riehl (2021) defines metalinguistic awareness as "the ability to pay attention to the structural features of language and language properties...and to the functions of language" (p. 1). This updated definition expands the scope of metalinguistic awareness to include not just structural features but also the functions of language. Regardless of the specific scope ascribed to it, a key feature of metalinguistic awareness is its focus on the reflection of language, which is congruent with James' (1999) notion of awareness as metacognition. Therefore, metalinguistic awareness can be regarded as a particular type of language awareness.

In summary, there are various perspectives on what constitutes language awareness, and arriving at a precise definition is challenging. Even after examining the different interpretations of language awareness and clarifying its complex relationships with similar terms, confusion may remain. Moreover, as researchers examine learners' awareness of different aspects of language, domain-specific subcategories of language awareness, such as phonological awareness, grammatical awareness, and radical awareness (e.g., T. Chen, 2022; Kieseier et al., 2022; Leonet, Cenoz & Gorter, 2020; Yuan, Segers & Verhoeven, 2020), have been proposed, making the construct of language awareness even more complicated.

4. Empirical Research on Language Awareness

The field of language awareness has evolved with great diversity over the years (Krogager Andersen, 2024); therefore, it is impossible to address all existing studies in a single paper. This section selectively reviews studies published from 2020 and onward. The selection of studies followed a few criteria: 1) the studies were conducted in educational contexts; 2) the studies concerned the (meta)cognitive domain of language awareness; and 3) the studies primarily involved L2 learners, bilinguals, or multilinguals. Terms from the selected studies that are not prevalent in the literature and therefore not discussed above (e.g., practical language awareness and radical

language awareness) are briefly explained based on the reports from those studies.

4.1. Research on the Effect of Language Awareness

The first strand of studies demonstrated the effect of language awareness on L2 acquisition. Hyltenstam (2021), for example, interviewed and tested 10 university-level polyglots for their language awareness, language aptitude, motivation, and use of language learning strategies. Results showed that it was the combination of strong motivation and high levels of language aptitude and language awareness that made these polyglots unusually successful L2 learners. Moreover, it was found that much of the dynamism sometimes ascribed to language aptitude was actually language awareness. Haryanti and colleagues (2022) examined the effect of language awareness, along with writing attitude and writing anxiety, on 100 fourth-semester Indonesian college English learners' writing achievement. The results of path analysis revealed that language awareness significantly contributed to participants' writing achievement. In addition, writing attitude had a significant indirect contribution to writing achievement through the mediation of language awareness. Seis (2022) studied the impact of language awareness on 13 Turkish university students' learning of English deixis. The learners' performance in finding deictic expressions and their referents before and after an awareness-raising intervention was compared. It was found that the number of deictic expressions and referents learners identified significantly increased after the intervention, suggesting that language awareness had significantly facilitated participants' L2 deixis learning.

Amongst studies on language awareness, one topic that has generated great interest is the effect of metalinguistic awareness on language acquisition. For example, Riehl (2021) examined the correlation between metalinguistic awareness and bilinguals' writing ability. The participants were 175 ninth and tenth graders with Italian, Greek, or Turkish as their first language (L1) and German as their L2. Analysis of a corpus of narrative and argumentative texts composed by learners in both their L1 and L2 and the result of a language awareness test revealed a significant correlation between learners' metalinguistic awareness and their writing abilities in both their L1 and their L2, indicating a potential effect of metalinguistic awareness on language acquisition. Kieseier and colleagues (2022) tested the effect of metalinguistic awareness on 200 primary school L2 English learners' English vocabulary and grammar acquisition. With interview and phoneme manipulation and letter fluency tasks as research instruments, two components of metalinguistic awareness were analyzed: metalinguistic analysis, the ability to compare and select language items, and metalinguistic control, the ability to detect and manipulate rule-based linguistic patterns. Linear mixed effect regression analyses revealed that metalinguistic analysis fostered vocabulary outcomes whereas metalinguistic control benefited grammar skills. D'Angelo and Sorace (2022) explored the effect of metalinguistic awareness on bilinguals' third language acquisition. Forty-two bilinguals with different proficiency levels and metalinguistic awareness in German L2 were tested for their ability to learn an additional language through an artificial language task. Correlations and multiple regression analyses showed that bilinguals with higher levels of explicit metalinguistic awareness performed better in third language acquisition, providing further evidence for the facilitative role of metalinguistic awareness in language learning.

All the above studies demonstrate that language awareness—both in its broad sense and through its subcomponents—plays a significant role in language learning. Methodologically, these studies employed a range of approaches: interviews and tests (Hyltenstam, 2021), path analysis (Haryanti et al., 2022), pre- and post-test comparisons (Seis, 2022), text analysis (Riehl, 2021), mixed methods (Kieseier et al., 2022), and regression analyses (D'Angelo & Sorace, 2022). Despite the methodological diversity, these studies collectively underscore the crucial role of language awareness and highlight the pressing need for effective strategies to cultivate it, a topic garnering growing scholarly interest.

4.2. Research on the Cultivation of Language Awareness

A huge body of research has been conducted to explore how to develop learners' language awareness, and a large variety of approaches have been proposed, such as integrating language awareness in Language for Specific Purposes courses (Ali & Ghafar, 2024), engaging learners in analyzing online comments (C. Chen, 2020), developing learners' metalinguistic insights in social interaction (Gonzalves, 2020), taking linguistic landscapes as a resource to enhance language awareness (Gorter et al., 2021), employing translanguaging pedagogies to develop learners' morphological awareness (Leonet et al., 2020), adopting data-driven approaches to help build learners' lexical awareness (Tang, 2022), and using TV discourse (Werner, 2020) and dual-language books (Zaidi, 2020) to foster learners' language awareness. Through interventional experiments (e.g., Leonet et al., 2020), action research (e.g., Zaidi, 2020), or corpus analysis (e.g., Werner, 2020), almost all studies provided evidence for the effectiveness of the suggested approach in raising learners' language awareness.

Different from these studies, a few studies have yielded mixed results. Loo (2020) examined whether grammar lessons and feedback in graduate students' academic writing drafts support their language awareness. Results of the surveys completed by 48 Singaporean graduate students and analysis of the errors and revisions of their academic writing drafts showed that although participants held a positive attitude toward grammar lessons and feedback, the impact of the lessons and feedback was largely centered on the revision of grammar errors in the drafts of the same task, not on other higher order writing skills in a new writing task, suggesting a limited effect of feedback in supporting learners' language awareness. McNeil (2020) attempted to determine whether student-selected, entertainment-purposed digital games in foreign language teaching and learning supported or impeded the development of learners' language awareness. Sixteen Korean L1 and English L2 university students participated in instructional tasks that were designed to enhance their language awareness and to

present possibilities for socialization into gaming discourses. It was found that the students exhibited language awareness in many ways, but there were missed opportunities for them to develop an understanding of language as a social medium. Van den Broek and colleagues (2022) asked 10 EFL teachers in the Netherlands to provide examples that they believed stimulated students' language awareness. A total of 41 teaching practices were analyzed. The results indicated that approximately half of the self-reported practices could be characterized as awareness-raising but many other practices could not be characterized as such.

In brief, research has investigated various methods for developing language awareness. These approaches have generally proven effective. However, studies such as those by Loo (2020) and McNeil (2020) reveal mixed results, indicating that the effectiveness of methods can vary by context. These variations suggest the need for further research to better understand and refine effective strategies for enhancing language awareness. To truly promote learners' language awareness, however, it is necessary to comprehend its developmental process, which will help in designing more targeted and effective interventions.

4.3. Research on the Developmental Patterns and Mediating Factors of Language Awareness

In the past few years, some researchers have begun exploring the developmental patterns of language awareness. T. Chen (2022) investigated how L2 Chinese learners developed radical awareness, namely, the ability to identify, analyze, and manipulate radicals within compound characters. Forty-five beginning-level L2 Chinese learners at an American university completed a radical identification task, a radical analysis task, a radical manipulation task, a character knowledge task, and a vocabulary knowledge task. The results showed that stronger and weaker character readers had similar developmental patterns of radical identification, but differed in their developmental patterns of radical analysis and radical manipulation. Furthermore, the sub-ability of radical awareness of the stronger learners improved faster than those of the weaker learners after Week 4. Krogager Andersen (2024) examined students' metalinguistic awareness, critical language awareness (the dimension of language awareness that involves a critical perspective on language and language use), and practical language awareness (the dimension of language awareness that covers a range of linguistic practices indicating awareness of language and characterized by active control) in a Danish upper secondary school classroom, in the context of a compulsory, plurilingual language awareness course. Analysis of observation data, interviews, and collections of student work revealed that the three dimensions of language awareness were interlinked. Krogager Andersen noted in particular that practical language awareness and metalinguistic awareness might be closely related and perhaps even interdependent. These findings indicate that to develop learners' language awareness, we should consider the relations among different dimensions of the construct.

Some researchers are interested in the mediating factors that affect the development of language awareness. One such factor is learners' linguistic exposure. Rojo and colleagues (2022) studied the influence of non-native language exposure on children's language awareness. Sixty-three 5–7-year-olds compared utterances in English and Lithuanian (unfamiliar to all participants). Half of them also compared English utterances to Spanish (widely spoken in the children's community and exposed to 94% of these children) and the other half compared English utterances to Tagalog (unfamiliar to all participants). Data analysis revealed that children in the Spanish condition were significantly more likely than those in the Tagalog condition to agree that a Lithuanian and an English speaker could be saying the same thing. From this finding, the researchers concluded that children's experience with Spanish as a community language, together with explicit questioning about commonalities between languages, served to scaffold an understanding of language awareness.

Another factor that has been found to affect learners' language awareness is the number of languages one learns. Dolas and colleagues (2022) observed the possible cognitive advantages of multilingual learning on metalinguistic awareness, working memory, and L1 lexicon size. One hundred and seventeen mono-, bi-, and multilingual children from regular and gifted education programs were tested on their working memory, vocabulary size, and metalinguistic awareness. Regression analysis of test scores showed an overall tendency in both the gifted and non-gifted groups that bilingual children outperformed monolingual children and multilingual children outperformed both their mono- and bilingual peers. The advantages of bi- and multilingualism, the researchers observed, could have resulted from the complex and interrelated structures of two or more linguistic systems in mind.

The studies reviewed above show both strengths and limitations. T. Chen's (2022) study revealed useful developmental patterns of radical awareness, but the small sample size might have limited the generalizability of the results. Krogager Andersen's (2024) study offers significant insights into the interconnections among different subtypes of language awareness, but it is specific to the Danish educational context. Rojo and colleagues' (2022) study highlighted the role of community language exposure, but a larger sample would have strengthened the findings. Dolas and colleagues' (2022) study demonstrated notable cognitive benefits of multilingualism, but it potentially overlooked the qualitative aspects of language development. In a nutshell, while these studies offer valuable insights into the development of language awareness, their methodological limitations, combined with the overall scarcity of research in this area, call for further investigation to refine our understanding.

4.4. Research on the Cross-linguistic Aspect of Language Awareness

Language awareness is a research field that originated from mother tongue education (at least in the British context) and has since developed in connection with L2 acquisition and multilingualism research (Hofer & Jessner, 2019; Krogager Andersen, 2024). It is therefore natural to assume that cross-linguistic variables may play a role in

the development and functioning of language awareness. Two studies addressing the cross-linguistic aspect of language awareness are Yuan and colleagues' (2020) examination of factors affecting learners' L2 phonological awareness, and Apaloo and Cardoso's (2021) research on the effect of cross-linguistic awareness on the acquisition of English possessive determiners.

In Yuan and colleagues' (2020) study, 30 Mandarin Chinese-Dutch bilingual children and 24 monolingual Dutch children completed tasks assessing their rhyme awareness, speech decoding, and receptive vocabulary in Dutch. Chinese vocabulary and phonological awareness were also evaluated in the bilingual group. The study found that the bilingual children's Dutch rhyme awareness was predicted by Dutch speech decoding via Dutch receptive vocabulary. Additionally, when their Chinese proficiency was considered, Chinese rhyme awareness was found to mediate the relationship between Dutch speech decoding and Dutch rhyme awareness. According to these results, the researchers concluded that the bilingual children's L2 (Dutch) phonological awareness was affected by both their L2 speech and vocabulary levels and their L1 (Chinese) phonological awareness. Unlike most existing studies that treat L1 and L2 language awareness as a single construct, Yuan and colleagues' study demonstrates that L1 and L2 awareness are distinct constructs. This finding opens avenues for new research, such as whether L2 awareness influences L1 awareness, and how L1 and L2 awareness interact in language learning. Given the significant role of language awareness in language acquisition, exploring these questions holds substantial pedagogical importance.

In Apaloo and Cardoso's (2021) study, 39 Brazilian Portuguese speakers at beginning to low-intermediate levels, whose L1 possessive determiner system is similar to English, completed two written tasks, two oral tasks, and a stimulated recall task. The results indicated that participants had advantages in acquiring the English possessive determiners *his* and *her* compared to those in previously studied L1 groups. Furthermore, learners who verbalized an awareness of a cross-linguistic possessive determiner rule performed better on two of the possessive determiner tasks compared to those who did not. This study is notable for focusing on learners' awareness of a linguistic feature present in both the L1 and L2. It is reminiscent of Rojo and colleagues' (2022) study, which involved comparing different languages and likely raised cross-linguistic awareness. Both studies highlight the importance of examining language awareness across languages. This emphasis on cross-linguistic perspectives, by exploring how language awareness functions in different languages, could provide valuable insights that enrich understanding in the other three research strands mentioned earlier. Key questions for further investigation include: If awareness of similarities between languages aids learning, does awareness of differences also enhance learning? Do awareness of similarities and differences affect learning in the same way? Which is more beneficial: awareness of similarities or awareness of differences? Addressing these questions is also of significant pedagogical relevance.

Building on the importance of cross-linguistic perspectives, it is crucial to address the limitations in current research on language awareness across languages. Although existing studies have begun to explore how awareness operates across different languages and its implications for language learning, they are limited in scope. For instance, Yuan and colleagues' (2020) study had a small sample size, which might impact the broader applicability of the findings, and Apaloo and Cardoso's (2021) research was constrained by a lack of diversity in linguistic features. Moreover, research in this domain is very limited. To achieve a more comprehensive understanding of how cross-linguistic awareness of similarities and differences influences learning, further empirical investigation is imperative.

5. Conclusion

Language awareness is a multifaceted construct encompassing various domains, definitions, and related terms. It includes not only awareness of language form and function but also its broader sociocultural and cognitive dimensions. Research in this field has adopted a range of approaches. Some studies adhere strictly to established definitions, providing a clear framework for investigation, while others lack precise definitions or operationalizations of the concept. This variability in definitions and conceptualizations has resulted in diverse research designs and findings, contributing to significant ambiguity and confusion within the field. To advance our understanding and ensure the coherence of research outcomes, it is crucial for scholars to explicitly define and articulate their specific understanding of language awareness in their studies. Clear definitions will facilitate more consistent and comparable research efforts, ultimately enhancing the overall rigor and applicability of the findings.

The review of empirical studies reveals that recent research has predominantly concentrated on two key areas: the impact of language awareness on language learning and the methods for enhancing learners' language awareness. These topics are central to current investigations and may remain significant in the foreseeable future. In addition to these primary areas, there has been growing interest in understanding the patterns and mediating factors that influence the development of language awareness. These dimensions are critical as they offer valuable insights into how language awareness can be effectively cultivated. Therefore, further exploration of these elements can be expected to yield important findings and practical implications in the coming years. Moreover, there is an emerging area of research: the cross-linguistic dimension of language awareness. This dimension explores how awareness of linguistic similarities and differences across multiple languages can impact language learning processes. Although research in this field is still in its early stage and faces challenges due to the complexity of studying multiple languages, it is highly relevant to second language acquisition. As researchers continue to address these challenges, this area of research is most likely to attract more scholarly attention.

In terms of methodology, the reviewed studies employed a variety of approaches, including experimental tasks, observational studies, and qualitative analyses.

Experimental tasks often provide controlled conditions to measure specific aspects of language awareness, while observational studies offer insights into how language awareness develops. Qualitative analyses, on the other hand, explore the nuanced experiences and perceptions of participants. Despite the diverse methodologies employed and their respective advantages, several limitations might have affected the findings of existing studies. For instance, small sample sizes and a focus on single linguistic features, as previously noted, may constrain the generalizability and applicability of the results. Addressing these specific methodological issues would enhance the robustness of future research and contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of language awareness.

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Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that the research was conducted in the absence of any commercial or financial relationships that could be construed as a potential conflict of interest.