

# **‘She teaches ill, who teaches all’**

Assessing the Effects of a Discovery-based Language Awareness Approach on Learners Aged 16 to 17 at an Austrian Upper-level Secondary Academic School (Gymnasium) Through the use of Popular Sitcoms

**Bernhard Rychetsky,**  
**Norwich Institute for Language Education**

**Submission for the British Council's ELT Masters Award 2012.**

**'She teaches ill, who teaches all'**

***Assessing the effects of a discovery-based Language Awareness approach on learners aged 16 to 17 at an Austrian upper-level secondary academic school (Gymnasium) through the use of popular sitcoms.***

**Bernhard Rychetsky, candidate for the Degree of Master of Arts in Professional Development for Language Education, validated and awarded by Leeds Metropolitan University and taught at and by Norwich Institute for Language Education**

### ***Summary***

The research aims to ascertain the effects of a Language Awareness approach on learners aged 16 to 17 at an Austrian upper-secondary academic school (Gymnasium) and evaluate to what extent *Language Awareness* materials and activities reflect the benefits highlighted in previous research.

The baseline for the research is the candidate's own dissatisfaction with both traditional approaches to language work and current course book content. Traditional approaches with their atomistic, over-simplistic and rule-based theory of language do not appear to prepare language learners adequately for independent language work outside the classroom or higher academic education. English language course books available for upper-level secondary schools in Austria also fail to cater for these needs. Besides they often provide misleading explanations for students at this level and focus on written language, largely ignoring the idiosyncrasies of spoken language.

The research addresses the following questions:

- 1) To what extent can *Language Awareness* activities augment knowledge of the (spoken) language in upper-secondary students at an Austrian *Gymnasium* more effectively than traditional approaches?
- 2) To what extent can *Language Awareness* activities alter students' attitude to, and perception of grammar, especially in spoken texts, from a complex body of rules to a carrier of meaning.
- 3) To what extent do *Language Awareness* activities increase student motivation and promote autonomy in upper-secondary students at an Austrian *Gymnasium*?

The material used for the research is based on the language used in popular British and American situation comedies (sitcoms). It consists of video clips, transcripts and tasks/questions designed in the tradition of language awareness to help students to *notice* and *think about* key features of informal spoken interaction in English. The second chapter is a very comprehensive review of the literature in the field of Language Awareness and its impact on language acquisition. The research data draws on classroom discussions, personal observations, questionnaires and

interviews as well as tests at the beginning and at the end of the project to ascertain students' knowledge of language at the outset and end of the project as well as to determine their individual progress during the research period.

The conclusion and reflections are thoughtful and realistic, addressing both the potential and the limitations of this kind of approach in the classroom.

### ***Potential for Impact***

The candidate, Bernhard Rychetsky, is involved in a number of initiatives in testing and training in Austria and is an active team-member of CEBS (Center für berufsbezogene Sprachen; The Centre for Vocational Languages) which is responsible for many training and CPD initiatives across Austria. He is an excellent communicator as well as a clear thinker, and he has the potential to make a very significant contribution to ELT in his sector and beyond.

This work, underpinned as it is by an excellent understanding of principle, may well shake at the roots of the very conservative, rule-based language teaching traditions in Austria. A key factor in all of this is the very welcome focus on the spoken language and Bernhard's choice of sitcom data to work from, thus ensuring both 'up-to-dateness' and relevance to the interests of his teenage learners. His material is lively and engaging, and learners using it have access to a body of language and a set of tasks which coursebooks simply fail to provide. This work also offers encouragement to other teachers to write their own materials, and to work on key areas of the language syllabus from a fresh perspective: the tasks address traditional grammar areas such as expressing future time, neglected areas such as discourse markers, and even the otherwise taboo area of swearing, which interests teenagers whether teachers like it or not.

The whole study is written in a fluent and highly readable style, and it could and should form the basis for further practical, classroom-based research in this important area.

*Rod Bolitho*

*MAPDLE Course Leader and Academic Director*

*Norwich Institute for Language Education*

*14 November 2012*