Bringing the ‘folk’ into applied linguistics

An introduction

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As applied linguistics is mainly concerned with solving the language-related problems of laypeople, the examination of folk views constitutes an important research field and its relevance is illustrated in this issue of the AILA review. In this introductory article, we address some of the more general aspects that need to be considered in the scientific investigation of folk views of language and communication. Among those aspects are the nature and significance of folk knowledge and folk attitudes for applied linguistics, the social construction of the roles of expert, scientist and layperson, and the connection between folk linguistic research and other related approaches. As a general introduction into the topic, this contribution prepares the ground for the other articles collected in this issue.

1. Why folk linguistics?

It is not an entirely new idea to consider the beliefs, views, attitudes and theories of the everyday language user as an object in scientific investigation. In the past, researchers from various disciplines and fields within linguistics have taken an interest in those concepts (Hoenigswald 1966, Brekle 1985, Antos 1996), but their insights were not explicitly linked in a coherent framework of research with a common understanding of the research interests, objects and applications. Mainstream linguistics continued to keep to the traditional — and often still prevalent — view of anything a non-linguist has to say about language as uninteresting, unqualified, uninformed or even dangerous. Even if this might be true in some cases, in many others the views of non-linguists can be a source of valuable and important information.

Applied linguistics in particular, with its clear focus on the language-related problems of the non-linguist, needs to take notice of investigations and findings of folk linguistic discourses.

The growing importance and relevance of language-related problems and topics among non-linguists, such as the many manifestations of multilingualism, the spread of languages as *linguae francae*, communication in and with the new media, to name only a few, justify the initiation of a Research Network (ReN) on folk linguistics within AILA, the International Association of Applied Linguistics, and to present the network in this issue. The authors are all members of the Research Network, working on a variety of topics that share an interest in the nature and value of lay knowledge, beliefs and theories for the development of theoretical frameworks and practical solutions for everyday language problems. Therefore, this issue builds on earlier studies on folk linguistics and broadens the view of what can be regarded as a folk linguistic approach to language by presenting and discussing theoretical as well as methodological and practical implications for the study of non-linguists’ views on language.
Investigating folk linguistics is particularly salient for anyone calling himself or herself an ‘applied linguist’. Applied Linguistics (AL) is defined as an:

interdisciplinary field of research and practice dealing with practical problems of language and communication that can be identified, analysed or solved by applying available theories, methods and results of Linguistics or by developing new theoretical and methodological frameworks in Linguistics to work on these problems. Applied Linguistics differs from Linguistics in general mainly with respect to its explicit orientation towards practical, everyday problems related to language and communication.” (www.aila.info/about.html, 12.6.2011)

With this explicit orientation towards language in everyday life and in particular the problems and concerns of the language users, anyone working in AL is forced to consider beliefs, views and opinions of the language user as a non-linguist and to take those views seriously. From a scientific point of view, taking them seriously of course cannot mean taking their truth value for granted or propagating the lay language user as the true and only expert on language. This would make linguistics obsolete. Rather, the aim is to consider those views as data with relevant information for the study of language and language use and the development of solutions for problems that the language user encounters in an increasingly complex communicative environment. The analysis of non-linguists’ views, therefore, is necessarily part of an applied linguistic approach to language.

2. Folk knowledge: Nature, relevance, basic concepts

Linguistics is not the only discipline within which folk or lay views are relevant. There is an extensive literature dealing with folk medicine, folk botany, folk physics, folk epistemology and the like, and there is current popular interest in non-expert views, often labeled ‘myths’, compiled in books intending to dispel those myths.

Traditionally folk beliefs have been viewed as being in strict opposition to scientific approaches, but this rather simplifying and rarely considered view of a clear-cut and a priori demarcation line between ‘folk views’ and ‘scientific theory’ has become a lay view itself. The constructivist turn taught us that even scientific research findings and theories are at least partially results of discursive constructions (cf. Knorr-Cetina 1981), and this is also valid for the differentiation between ‘folk’ and ‘scientific’.

There is a very special additional affinity between AL and the differentiation just mentioned: AL, and especially discourse and conversation analytic studies, can (and should) analyze the specific discourse strategies by which the difference between ‘folk’ and ‘scientific’ is constructed in the philosophy of science, in individual disciplines such as linguistics as well as in non-scientific discourse. The general public and the discourses in the public sphere also play a role in the interactional and discursive construction of the distinction between ‘scientific’ and ‘lay’, or — to take the matter further — the construction of the scientist, the expert and the non-expert or layperson as social roles rather than as externally predefined positions. The insight that the process we are dealing with is social construction does not mean that the distinction between science and folk is random and therefore irrelevant or unimportant. On the contrary, it reminds us that the application of these categories needs to be done with more care and less apodicticity.

The constructionist aspect of the folk view vs. science-discussion can also be illustrated by the fact that it is by no way immediately evident whether certain views are to be classed as ‘folk’ or as ‘scientific’ merely by looking at their form or structure independently of the content expressed and equally, whether laypeople only and automatically hold folk views and scientists only scientifically grounded views. Instead, it is more likely that the subject matter as well as the social construction of
roles determine whether we are dealing with the folk or the scientific category or — very often — a hybrid form of something in between.

In general discussions about folk views, the label lay theories is very popular, especially since Furnham’s investigation of lay theories in the social sciences (Furnham 1988). In some cases, folk linguistics might indeed be considered to be concerned with lay theories about language (and communication). However, a theory in its strict sense is a fairly complex structure, even when it is ‘lay’, so that it does not seem suitable to use such a specific concept as an umbrella term for the varied phenomena that are the objects of an investigation into folk linguistics. Therefore, we prefer to use the generic expression ‘views’ which we mean to cover all related and similar concepts such as attitudes, beliefs, opinions, subjective theories, everyday concepts and the like.

One of the most important scientific disciplines which have investigated folk views is social psychology in an attempt to explain peoples’ behavior with respect to aspects relevant in their daily lives. Therefore, much inspiration for the application of the cognitive concepts in linguistics can be gained from social psychological research.

Within social psychology, a number of concepts have been identified which relate to the human ability to recognize something — an object, an event, a relationship — to categorize it, to evaluate it and to explain it. These concepts — such as beliefs, attitudes, opinions, subjective theories etc. — are often defined in different ways or their definitions overlap, so that their boundaries and sometimes their very nature become unclear, fuzzy or even incompatible. It is not within the scope of this introduction to go into every detail of such definitions, but in order to understand what it is that applied linguists are interested in when they investigate folk views it is useful to give a brief overview of the most important of those concepts.

According to Goodenough (1990: 597), a belief is a combination of a proposition and a commitment towards this proposition. The proposition is based on a person’s experience of the world and on the person’s way of perceiving and structuring the world around him or her. It is important to understand that categorizations of objects and events, but also of patterns and relationships, are necessary to make decisions and to act in a physical and social environment. A belief in this basic sense does not necessarily involve a particular evaluation of the proposition other than that it is held to be true or false by the person committing him/herself to it.

If the evaluation becomes a vital part of the construct, we are inclined to classify it as an attitude. An attitude is a person’s favorable or unfavorable evaluation of an object (or the like), thus forming a function of that person’s “beliefs about the object (…) and the evaluative aspect of those beliefs” (Fishbein 1965: 117). An idea central to attitude and attitude-change theory is the role of attitudes in the shaping of actions. A positive or negative view of an object clearly influences the person’s actions with regard to that object. Consequently, research in areas such as sociology and social psychology, but also in applied linguistics, aims not only at discovering such attitudes but also investigating their influence on people’s behavior and the possibilities of changing attitudes in order to change behavior.

An opinion also has an evaluative aspect in that the person judges an event or an object: “Individual opinions are judgmental outcomes of transactions between individuals and the environments in which they live.” (Crespi 1997: 11). As such, individual opinions are not very different from attitudes. However, it is felt that an attitude is not exactly the same as an opinion, and various researchers have refined the definition of opinion to clarify the differences between opinion and attitude. According to Rockeache (1968), for instance, an opinion is the verbalization of attitudes (referred to in Crespi 1997: 17). This implies that an attitude is an implicitly held stance towards an object, which, when it is voiced, becomes an opinion. Implicitness is therefore characteristic of attitudes, and this would mean that access to such attitudes can be gained via the analysis of opinions. Voicing
a belief or an attitude — uttering an opinion — brings another dimension into the characterization of such concepts: as long as beliefs and attitudes are held implicitly, they are certainly shaped by the individual’s interaction with the physical and social world, but they are not shared with other individuals in that environment. Expressing opinions enables the individual to share them with others. Sharing opinions and shaping them through various processes of social interaction can result in what is called ‘public opinion’ (Crespi 1997) or at least ‘widespread beliefs’ (Fraser & Gaskell 1990). The process of sharing might also result in the encoding of widely shared beliefs in formalized elements of language such as sayings, proverbs, received wisdoms, myths etc.

Lastly, a subjective theory is a reflexive cognitive system of an individual acting in everyday life (”reflexive Kognitionssysteme des Alltagsmenschen”, Dann 1982: 1). From a traditional dichotomous viewpoint, subjective theories stand in opposition to objective theories, which are the scientific theories held and/or developed by (a community of) researchers. Albeit regarded as opposites, subjective and objective theories are thought to be structured in a similar way in that subjective theories have an identifiable argumentative structure (ibid.: 5), which links different concepts and statements through argumentative relations (e.g., if-then). A subjective theory, therefore, is more complex than a belief or an attitude, but, like attitudes, subjective theories are mostly implicitly held and not verbalized. Their function is to accompany and in particular to guide actions in everyday life, giving a sense of security to the individual (”Verhaltenssicherheit”, ibid.: 8). It is stated that objective theories do not have this guiding function unless they are perceived as subjective theories. More important, however, is the fact that cognitive psychology regards subjective theories as mental structures which are relatively stable and long-lasting, not entirely immune, but fairly resistant, to changes.

Subjective theories, attitudes, and other cognitive concepts are for the most part not entirely ‘subjective’ in the sense that they are totally idiosyncratic or independent of specific social and political (discourse) contexts. On the contrary, they are shaped by the individual’s orientation in such contexts, thus also reflecting overindividual ideological positions. In fact, some authors prefer the term language ideology to refer to such shared, but individually held concepts (cf. Schieffelin, Woolard & Kroskrity 1998). Language ideologies, therefore, can also be included in the semantic field we are discussing here.

From a methodological point of view, all these different cognitive concepts are accessible in at least three ways: beliefs and attitudes that are encoded in fixed expressions such as sayings and proverbs can be analyzed as elements of a language, reflecting a ‘sediment’ of shared beliefs, irrespective of the individual speaker. Secondly, researchers can observe how people reflect and comment on language in everyday life, thus taking a sociolinguistic field work approach (Paul 1999). Thirdly, one may deliberately make informants verbalize their views by methods of elicitation. The latter are often regarded as unreliable in that elicited views need not reflect accurately the actual beliefs a person holds, but nevertheless an elicited opinion sheds light on the motives and the argumentative structure/s an individual employs to position him/herself towards a certain issue. Preston (this issue) reviews the methodology of folk linguistic investigation, giving examples from research on dialectal perception in the US.

Language, languages and communication are such topics — they are part of human life, they shape, constitute and sustain social life and social and individual identity. It is only natural that every person, being a speaker of a language or several languages within a social environment, has views, opinions, attitudes and theories about language, communication and interaction, just as they have such views on other issues of daily life. Janicki (this issue) presents among others a study where he is especially interested in what laypeople themselves perceive as language-related ‘problems’. To identify such a problem — which can be quite different in nature from a problem identified by a linguist
— non-linguists draw on their own knowledge about everyday language use. However, the kind of knowledge that informs a particular view of language is thought to be different for the linguist and the non-linguist. Scientific knowledge is gained by specific procedures of scientific investigation, analysis, evaluation and dissemination. The results are subject to assessment by the respective research community. These processes differ significantly from the generation of everyday knowledge in that they are disconnected from the course of everyday life and experience, they are not intended to have an ad hoc impact on everyday actions (Paul 1999: 1). Individual, subjective and unsystematic knowledge are marginalized in most scientific contexts, although we have to keep the usual caveat in mind that no knowledge is entirely free from subjectivity and individual evaluation. It is therefore useful to briefly review how everyday knowledge might be conceptualized and how it interacts with the formation of everyday beliefs and subsequent decision making.

3. Folk vs. scientific and expert knowledge

Traditional scientific approaches tend to favor binary distinctions, and it is very tempting to adopt the very comfortable dichotomy of ‘folk (= non-scientific) — scientific’. It is indeed useful and interesting to identify and investigate the views of language and communication that are held by people who do not have any formal training in linguistics as opposed to those that do — as done, for example, by Niedzielski & Preston (2003). Generally, we subscribe to this distinction. However, we must keep in mind that in terms of the knowledge which informs any kind of view we cannot easily uphold a dichotomous distinction. Research in the sociology of knowledge and related disciplines has identified a number of different kinds of knowledge which, when contrasted, are rather the ends of a continuum than absolute categories (see below). The distinction between the linguist and the non-linguist does not necessarily imply that folk conceptions are exclusively informed by non-scientific knowledge, as non-linguists learn about linguistic issues from various sources through education and the media, and a linguist’s view is not exclusively informed by scientific insights only. Instead, linguists’ and non-linguists’ views are related and mutually influence each other.

A strictly binary distinction might also obscure the fact that types of knowledge are ascribed to certain social roles: an important issue in the investigation of folk beliefs is the role of the expert, which seems to be a position that is linked to, but not necessarily identical to the scientist in various ways. We will return to the role of the expert below, after giving a brief overview of the types of knowledge relevant for the investigation of folk linguistics.

Everyday or ordinary knowledge can be gained in various ways — resulting in the hybridity mentioned above. However, one important feature of everyday knowledge is the fact that it is gained and used within social interaction and interaction with the environment to guide and inform people’s actions. Everyday knowledge has to prove its worth in everyday life, and every time an individual makes a decision, the usefulness of this knowledge is put to the test.

Scientific knowledge, on the other hand, is usually, and to a greater extent than everyday knowledge, gained under different conditions — free from the pressure of its application in everyday social interaction. Thus linguists, investigating the structure and use of language, first of all engage in what Paul (1999: 1 ff.) calls “handlungsentlastete Sprachreflexion”. In any ‘applied science’ such as applied linguistics, the knowledge gained using scientifically approved methods and serving as a basis for theory development needs to go one step further: it is not only used to gain insights into the situation investigated, it also is the basis for the development of solutions and for the improvement of the very processes that are the object of investigation. Therefore, from the initial investigation through to the development of applications, knowledge gained in applied linguistics will always reflect the role it will play in everyday life.
Going back to the sources of everyday knowledge, it can be said that we come by our everyday knowledge first and foremost through primary socialization. In growing up, we are presented with our physical and social environment as an objective reality, we experience seemingly objective elements in our environment and learn about them, thus gaining knowledge that has been passed on from generation to generation, modified to various degrees, but is always experienced as ‘given’ and ‘objective’ and often remains unquestioned (Berger & Luckmann 1966). Gaining knowledge in primary socialization means knowing something as a fact of the world, or as how things are done, how phenomena are explained by those who socialize us. In growing up, we also gain knowledge by experiencing our environment. Such experiential knowledge is not mediated in any way by any external authority and therefore informs us first-hand about our world.

In an economic theory of ordinary knowledge, Hardin (2009) identifies three distinct sources of ordinary knowledge: firstly, we can deliberately seek knowledge, for instance because we are faced with the task of making a decision and feel under-informed about the issue at hand. Very often, we seek knowledge that we evaluate as true, useful or established, because it is generated or transmitted by some sort of authority. Such an authority can be what is known as an ‘expert’, whose role we will explore in more detail below. Secondly, we might just happen to come across knowledge. A large part of primary socialization can be described as infants happening upon knowledge. Knowledge in this way “rains on us while we are engaged in some other enterprise. In this sense, much knowledge is an opportunistic by-product.” (Hardin 2009: 7). Thirdly, we might have the feeling that knowledge is imposed on us, as in schooling. This view is reflected in those well-known and reiterated complaints of pupils that they have to learn things that they most likely will never ever need again in their lives. Not surprisingly, people are less likely to accept, integrate and use knowledge that they feel has been imposed on them. Hence an individual might judge the value of knowledge according to its usefulness for everyday decisions and actions. To an individual, it might seem much more economical to keep old, reliable knowledge and reject new knowledge, because the restructuring process required seems uneconomical. This is an important aspect to take into account when conceptualizing someone as a layperson — the history of this term implying someone who has to be taught and guided (see Wilton & Wochele, this issue). Applied linguists need to be aware of the fact a) that laypeople hold a different, but not inferior kind of knowledge which fulfills vital functions in everyday decision making, and b) that efforts to correct seemingly incorrect lay knowledge must take resistance to knowledge that is perceived as ‘imposed’ or ‘uneconomical’ into account. Furthermore, it is unrealistic to assume that the various types of knowledge can always be found in their pure form. Knowledge changes and evolves during its transmission from its source of origin to consumers of that knowledge, who in turn might further disseminate it (Dann 1985, Antos 1996). Knowledge also changes in the process of its application (Stehr & Grundmann 2010), that is, in its realization as an alternative for acting in a particular context.

As explained above, the sources of everyday knowledge are manifold. One of the characteristics of everyday knowledge is the fact that we do not generate most of this knowledge ourselves, but rely on some kind of authority to provide us with knowledge. If we trust this authority and judge the knowledge as reliable, we might come to believe that what we know from a particular source is true (Hardin 2009: 11). Keeping in mind that any knowledge an individual holds is hybrid with respect to its source and nature, we will concentrate in this section on how authority for knowledge sources is established and how this influences the categorization of someone as an expert or a layperson.

Modern society is characterized by a differentiation of knowledge. No individual can hold all knowledge that is theoretically available, not even all knowledge that is needed to master the tasks of everyday life in modern society. We might accept some fact as true and act upon the knowledge that we gained from a certain authority. This is particularly the case with issues in which we feel we are
not competent enough ourselves. We turn to authorities, experts on the subject in question, to help us make informed decisions in our everyday lives. Increasingly, the need to appeal to expert knowledge arises in areas of everyday life which are on the one hand the responsibility of the individual, but on the other a domain of professional expertise. Such areas are for instance the upbringing and education of children and personal health and well-being. By seeking advice from an authority, people put themselves in the position of a layperson, in other words, they disqualify themselves in that they regard themselves unqualified with respect to the issue at hand. Experts, on the other hand, identify areas in which they assume people have a deficit in knowledge or competence, and offer their expertise. The provision of expert knowledge and competence is reflected in the establishment of certain professions, training curricula and institutions which offer such training. Thus, areas of everyday life which used to be in the hands of the individual are restructured and the knowledge, the practices and their dissemination are institutionalized and professionalized (Dewe 1988).

Taking an objective approach, it is possible to identify scientists, experts and laypeople on the basis of formal qualification. In any particular field, a scientist is identified by his or her education, university degrees, titles, research and publications, and position in a university or research institute. A layperson is identified by the lack of all formal qualification, the lack of special training and degrees. The expert can also be identified by formal qualifications such as certificates (Hitzler 1994). More often, however, the expert is identified as having a certain kind of specialized and exclusive knowledge, either through intensive involvement in some field or at least in comparison to other people in the environment (Stehr & Grundmann 2010). Following this tripartite distinction, one can roughly say that a researcher generates knowledge using scientific methodology. Unlike the applied scientist, the theoretical scientist is not, however, under the immediate pressure to prove the validity of such knowledge for the solution of everyday problems. An expert disseminates and applies knowledge which he/she gains from other — often scientific — sources and his/her own experience. His/her expertise is judged by those who are supposed to benefit from it. A layperson is the receiver of such knowledge — for him/her, it has to prove its usefulness in everyday life.

However, categorization according to formal criteria is complemented by the social construction of the roles of expert and layperson. The status of an expert is the result of an interplay of actions by the expert himself and those who seek his/her expertise. By offering expertise, the expert reinforces his/her own role and creates laypersons, by seeking expertise, people reinforce the status of the expert, and their own status of laypersons. In an extreme form of the social constructionist view, an expert need not actually possess any special knowledge, he/she only needs to make credible to others that he/she has such knowledge. In turn, the layperson needs no actual proof that an expert has special knowledge, the layperson only needs to believe that someone is an expert. Thus, the role of expert is staged: the expert does not appear as someone who is competent, but as someone who is able to create a plausible impression of being competent (Hitzler 1994: 27). Similarly, the role of the layperson is at least partially socially constructed. In any field, there are people whose personal interests and/or professional activities give them some knowledge that is more specialized than the everyday knowledge of the layperson. Paveau (this issue) asks whether proofreaders, writers or even lawyers with their work-related linguistic activities are to be seen as non linguists or as linguists, even if their metalinguistic statements are based on non-scientific positions. In her typology of non-linguists, Paveau investigates the status of non-linguist as a discursive position, not a discrete category. Thus, the role of the non-linguist can be discursively constructed; it is non-permanent, and can even be taken up by linguists themselves. Therefore, the idea of a continuum or categories with permeable and negotiable boundaries is more appropriate when it comes to language issues than a strictly dichotomous distinction. The prototypical researcher described above is more of a pure theoretician; the applied linguist, who develops application-oriented theories or engages in what
Wodak (2001) calls "theoretical applied linguistics" takes up a position between the pure scientist and the traditional 'language expert' such as communication trainers, language teacher and the like. Such 'language experts' are engaged in "applied applied linguistics" (Wodak 2001) or "linguistics applied" (Widdowson 2000).

When it comes to issues which are close to our identity, self-image, and emotional involvement, we perceive ourselves as possessing the necessary and — more importantly — the 'right' knowledge to deal with the issue adequately. With respect to issues about language and communication, there are those on which people often and willingly turn towards an authority for help — such as uncertainty about correct, i.e., standard norms of orthography, style, and the like. When a language issue affects individual and/or group identity, personal attitudes often challenge the authorities' view, claiming that the people themselves know best what is good or true for them. McKenzie & Osthus (this issue) exemplify the disparity of views and the resulting mutual distrust between linguists and the general public by showing how the evaluation and perception of language varieties is different for both groups. In particular, they stress two points that anyone investigating folk views should support: a) non-linguists' views need to be taken seriously by scientists and b) anyone attempting to judge and/or change attitudes that are deeply rooted and emotionally held needs to be mindful and considerate when trying to do so.

The applied linguist is in a special position: being applied, he/she has to consider the application of scientifically generated knowledge in everyday life by taking people's needs seriously and to develop solutions for everyday linguistic problems. The applied linguist — in his/her relay position between theory and everyday knowledge and practice — is predestined to occupy the position of language expert in a positive sense of the word, turning science into expertise that is developed in interaction with the lay customer. He/she therefore links all three positions: a linguist is the expert who gives the layperson what he/she needs by applying what the scientist knows.

4. Folk linguistics issues and related approaches

For our Research Network we decided to adopt a very broad and anti-dogmatic position which is open for all existing and potential approaches to folk linguistics issues. This position is reflected in the collection of contributions to this AILA Review. For a systematic overview of the issues, we have to integrate both the semasiological and onomasiological point of view, i.e., we need to ask on the one hand what kind of research activities are conducted under the label 'folk linguistics' and on the other hand which similar activities are conducted in other research communities and under other labels.

Furthermore, for an international perspective we need to integrate approaches developed in non-English-speaking countries. In France, Paveau is the most prominent researcher in the domain of folk linguistics and she proposes the French term *linguistique populaire* as the French equivalent of *folk linguistics*. In the German speaking area, we have two competing expressions: *Volkslinguistik* and *Laienlinguistik* (or *Laien-Linguistik*). *Volkslinguistik* was used by Brekle (1985), but most contemporary German speaking linguists are slightly uncomfortable with this term because of the negative connotations with *Volk* since World War II. Antos 1996 introduced the term *Laien-Linguistik*. Although he was primarily interested in guides for effective communication, which are very often written by non-linguists for non-linguists, his much more general introduction on lay conceptions of language and communication suggests that his own understanding of *Laienlinguistik* goes beyond the scope of such guides, and might thus become the German standard equivalent of the English term *folk linguistics*.

The research field which is the nearest to folk linguistics is without any doubt language awareness (cf. the international Association for Language Awareness with its regular conferences and the journal *Language Awareness*). The language awareness movement was born in the 80s in Great
Britain, when the school authorities discovered considerable competence deficiencies in English among many pupils. It seemed that the behaviorist approach to language teaching, which placed an emphasis on language learning as habit formation, needed to be reviewed in the light of new findings by research on communicative competence development. One of the proposals setting the agenda for language awareness research was to include reflections about language — the language to be learned as well as the native language of the learners — in the school curriculum (Hawkins 1987). So there is a strong affinity between language awareness research and language acquisition and learning. In the context of the cognitive turn, language awareness became especially important to second and foreign language teaching and learning (James & Garrett 1992). In sociolinguistics, surveys dealt with speakers of minority languages or language varieties and their awareness of their language and its relationship to the language of the majority (Cichon 2005). These two threads seem to be converging gradually, in the multilingual situation of Europe and — more generally — in our globalised world, where language awareness is almost always also multilingual awareness (cf. the homonymous motto of the 2006 conference of the Association of Language Awareness).

The previously mentioned semasiological and onomasiological ways of analyzing a term also have to be applied to language awareness: What is understood by language awareness by different authors? Which similar terms refer to the same or similar phenomena (linguistic awareness, metalinguistic awareness, etc.)? What is the situation in other languages (in German: Sprachbewusstsein, Sprachbewusstheit, Gnutzmann 2003, Sprachreflexion, Paul 1999; in French conscience linguistique, éveil aux langues, Candelier 2003 etc.)?

‘Awareness’ seems to cover the whole field from pre-verbalized attention phenomena to more theoretical reflections (Knapp-Potthoff 1997), showing considerable overlap with research into folk linguistics. Theoretically, language awareness studies could also investigate the awareness of linguists, but the ordinary research object is again the non-specialist. The main difference between language awareness studies and the studies of folk views about language lies, once more, in the different research communities involved, rather than in different research questions or methods. It might be that the language awareness researchers are more interested in the pre-verbalized phase of awareness than folk linguistic scholars are. The only conceptual difference between the two fields of research might be found in the fact that the investigation of folk linguistics puts the focus more explicitly on the non-linguist than is the case in language awareness research.

Future contacts between the research communities will show which are the similarities and differences between the two approaches, although both ‘schools’ are in no way homogeneous. As language awareness is still mostly associated with language acquisition and learning, we prefer the label folk linguistics, which seems to be broader and potentially closer to the whole spectrum of research areas applied linguists are interested in.

5. Folk linguistics and its relevance for applied linguistic issues

Research into folk linguistics need not necessarily be applied — it might be conducted with a purely theoretical interest in folk views about language. In our ReN and in this AILA Review, however, we aim to illustrate the special relevance of folk linguistics for applied linguistics. Without going into the detail of the ongoing discussion of which scientific activities can be considered as belonging to AL and which can not, we start once more from a very anti-dogmatic point of view: For every topic which has ever been mentioned in AILA-related webpages, in applied linguistics conference programs, in introductions to AL etc., we can potentially always identify folk as well as expert or scientific views. Laypeople have something to say about language learning, multilingualism, language peculiarities of other people, communication problems, language use in the media and so on. Either they spontaneously develop opinions about certain aspects of language or communication or they
take a certain commonplace or idiosyncratic position when asked by linguists about their views. In principle, then, folk linguistics is relevant for any established or potential subfield of AL.

This issue presents some of the topics that are addressed within AL, taking a folk linguistic perspective into account. The articles therefore can be seen as representing examples of the encounter between FL and AL, while at the same time their choice is determined by the individual research interests of the members of our ReN.

As stated above, an idea central to attitude and attitude-change theory is the role of attitudes in the shaping of actions. A positive or negative view of an object clearly influences the person’s actions with respect to that object. Consequently, research in areas such as sociology and social psychology, but also in applied linguistics, aims at discovering such attitudes and investigating their influence on people’s behavior and the possibilities of changing attitudes in order to change behavior. In linguistics, this has most prominently been done in the field of second language acquisition and foreign language learning research:

If, as research and theory suggest, attitudes influence the efforts that students expend to learn another language, then teachers need a clear understanding of attitudes and attitude-change theory in order to address these issues in the classroom. (Mantle-Bromley 1990: 373)

With a research history of about thirty years the investigation of beliefs about the nature of second/foreign language learning has a comparatively long tradition in applied linguistics compared with research into other lay conceptions. From the mid-1980s onwards, there has been a growing interest in researching what learners believe and think about the process of second and in particular foreign language learning. Ferreira Barcelos (2003: 8) states that from the beginning, researchers have used the term belief for different psychological constructs and, accordingly, refined their terminology. This resulted in an abundance of terms such as folklinguistic theories of learning, learner representations, learners' philosophy of language learning, metacognitive knowledge, cultural beliefs, learning culture, culture of learning (languages), conceptions of learning and beliefs. As a consequence, the studies can be grouped into three main approaches which are characterized by differences in methodology and the conceptualization of learner beliefs. This section briefly reviews these approaches according to Ferreira Barcelos (2003).

Ferreira Barcelos identifies three approaches, beginning with the phase of normative approaches. Normative approaches are characterized by their definition of beliefs as negatively evaluated concepts, i.e., as misconceptions or myths that have to be corrected by imparting true scientific knowledge to the learner about the nature of language learning. The methodology used by this approach is questionnaires that leave little or no room for an elaboration on the questions by the learner. The negative evaluation of the nature of learner beliefs is motivated by a tendency of many studies to compare the identified beliefs with the ideal of the good language learner (Ellis 2004). As with other ideals in linguistics such as the ideal native speaker (Chomsky 1965), such a comparison does injustice to the learners, evaluating learners' beliefs as wrong, therefore obstructing the way to effective language learning.

These disadvantages are partly overcome by approaches of the metacognitive type, which define belief as metacognitive knowledge about learning. In order to assess this knowledge, studies in the metacognitive approach use interviews in addition to questionnaires to give the learners the opportunity to elaborate on their views. Although this is an advantage compared to the normative approach, the view of the relationship between beliefs and actions of the learner is not much different.

Studies in the third group, labeled the contextual approach, are very heterogeneous with respect to their definitions of beliefs, their methodologies and the types of data they collect. According to Ferreira Barcelos, their common characteristic is the implementation of data triangulation and, in
particular, the attempt to investigate learners’ beliefs in context. Thus, the methodologies employed include and/or combine observation (typically in the classroom), learners’ diaries, narrative analysis, discourse and metaphor analysis. The overall aim is to understand learners’ beliefs from the perspective of their learning experience, thus enabling the researcher and eventually the teacher to assess which contextual parameters influence the learners’ experiences. One of the advantages of such an approach is that the learner is viewed less negatively but is seen as an individual reacting to and within a social environment. This view is more in line with an objective and unprejudiced approach to non-linguists’ views (see for instance Paul 1999).

Pasquale (this issue) reports on extensive studies into the beliefs of foreign language learners, developing a taxonomy of beliefs that is guided not by the predetermined categories of traditional language pedagogy, but by the data themselves. Such a taxonomy gives an insight into the learners’ beliefs and their interrelation, rather than just classifying them as positive or negative.

Language learning, however, does not only include second or foreign language learning. One’s first language, or, as Cruz-Ferreira rightly argues (this issue), one’s first language(s), are also learned. In her article she explains how the monolingual bias is reflected in the views on first language learning by researchers, teachers, and other people in the child’s environment. This monolingual bias is deeply entrenched, and the beliefs connected to it can do injustice to anybody growing up in a multilingual situation.

One area of AL where the interplay of professional, expert and lay knowledge about linguistic issues has far-reaching consequences is language policy. Policymakers influence the way in which a language is represented within a certain society or speech community. Decisions to include a minority language in the regional or national school curriculum, giving it the status of an official language, or making available media and public services in that language have a direct impact on the vitality and status of a language and the linguistic patterns within a society. External regulations of language use — such as the banning of anglicisms in some German ministries and companies and the prohibition to use certain anglicisms in France, at least in official texts, affect not only people’s daily lives but also the development of the language. It is therefore imperative that policy makers are well informed — also by applied linguists — about the needs and perceptions of the society or speech community in question.

Language policies do not only affect public service or education. Many companies have language policies of some kind (including implicit forms of language policies, for the term “implizite Sprachenpolitik” see Kremnitz 1990) and it is interesting to see what managers think about languages and their role in international communication. There exist different, partially contradictory folk opinions: on the one hand business people affirm the importance of knowing more than one foreign language and may see this as a key intercultural business competence; on the other hand they may argue that ‘English only’ is enough for business contacts. Business people who are non-native speakers of English may often believe that a policy of ‘English only’ is the only practicable option given the multiplicity of languages business people encounter. Sometimes we find these contradictory affirmations stated by the same individual, thereby exhibiting a typical feature of folk theories — their potential contradictoriness. Most international companies decide on a corporate language (even if in practice it may be evaded), and these decisions are not taken by language experts, but by top managers. Folk linguistic studies are therefore interesting in this domain, because they show that lay people are not only the subjects or receivers of language policies, but often enough the actors: decisions on language policy are frequently taken by non-linguists who may or may not claim to be experts on linguistic issues.

In order to get empirical evidence of companies’ language needs, linguists traditionally use questionnaires, which are (sometimes) answered by more or less language-friendly employees.
Besides telling us something about the actual needs of employees, they are also evidence of the folk beliefs of the people interviewed — i.e., what they think they need. Such needs analyses can be regarded as studies of folk beliefs and attitudes, even if they are not explicitly conducted under this label.

Going back to the language policies of the state, we need, once again, to investigate — if not even critically question — the expert status of all those who are responsible for language policy decisions. As argued above, there is no clear-cut demarcation line between experts and non-experts, and we refer again to the idea of a continuum outlined above. From a professional point of view, the ideal expert on multilingualism would probably be a linguist who has specialized in sociolinguistics and language policy and who also has a well-founded training in law. However, just as an academic qualified in political science cannot give final recommendations about the ideal political party or government (and his personal voting behavior is not the behaviour of an expert, but of a citizen), an academic qualified in sociolinguistics can give recommendations with his or her expert background, but the decisions must be taken at a political level.

As stated above, language policy might also affect the regulation of ‘correct’ language use. Non-linguists, everyday language users, are often very interested in norm questions. In some countries, such as Germany, it is very popular to seek external expert advice on questions about correct language use (cf. the DUDEN helpline at http://www.duden.de/sprachberatung), to criticize fellow citizens for their ‘incorrect’ language use (in particular in internet fora) or even to entertain oneself with the linguistic and stylistic blunders of others <http://www.bastiansick.de/start>.

For linguists, the idea of unambiguous, prescriptive norms (in the sense of something being right or wrong in an absolute, not a situated, way) is less important, as they accept more readily the existence of parallel or ‘plural’ norms. This is not only relevant for the L1 context, but also for the competence ideals we might have for the L2 speaker and his or her potential communication partners. Foreign language pedagogy, especially in the ELF domain, is moving towards a liberal attitude and the native speaker norm is not considered as an absolute valid norm for language learners any more.

However, even though science respects a plurality of norms, the everyday language user might not have reached this liberal attitude him/herself and is irritated by performances which are (too) far away from native norms (Stegu & Wochele 2006).

Applied linguistics is a science predominantly conducted for the benefit of laypeople. Therefore, we consider the detailed investigation of lay views of language(s) and communication as very important, if not essential, for applied linguists. On the one hand, linguists can learn a lot from laypeople for their own understanding of linguistic issues; on the other hand, in order to act as experts and advisors on linguistic issues, linguists need to know what non-linguists think of the issues at hand, how their knowledge is generated, and how it can be enriched in order to help them solve language-related problems or change negative attitudes. As space is limited, in this issue of the AILA Review we cannot touch upon the relationship of scientist, expert, and layperson in all fields of AL, but we hope to be able to make the importance of folk linguistic research visible and stimulate interest in further projects within AL.

Note
1. We are aware that ‘linguist’ can be and is used in another sense in English, namely for a person who is particularly good at using language(s) and may or may not earn a living by using languages. As such, he/she might acquire the status of a language expert in the eyes of the general public. Nevertheless, in this sense, being a linguist is more a personal quality than a professional label. In our article, however, we will use ‘linguist’ as referring to a ‘language scientist’ in the narrow sense of the word.
References


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