Wide-scale social changes, mass immigration, the climate crisis, new communication technologies and media platforms, the increasing presence of Artificial Intelligence (AI), not to mention the global pandemic, have fundamentally changed the context of modern business and professional life. With the growing concerns about the relationship of modern work and the natural environment (Stibbe, 2015), AI (McKee and Porter, 2017), society (Brueckner et al., 2018) and human well-being (Linstead et al., 2014) the need for criticality, ethical action and reflexivity in current and future professionals is more important than ever. This book has a simple premise, namely that greater awareness of how language and communication function as means of transaction and as constitutive of our social reality is crucial to achieve such criticality, reflexivity and ethics in professionals.

In this introduction, I make a case for this idea, but further evidence comes from a wide range of communication contexts and empirical research in the individual chapters. In Section 1.1, I explore in greater detail what the various functions of language and communication entail. In Section 1.2, I show how the understanding of these functions translates to different types of awareness, and how such awareness leads to the higher level and ethical thinking I call for here. In Section 1.3, I discuss the problems related to raising language awareness and propose potential ways of overcoming such problems. I conclude the introduction with a brief overview of each chapter and make a case for a paradigmatic change in thinking about language awareness as a key soft skill. And making such a case is necessary: for many years the study of and knowledge about language have been relegated to foreign language classes and distinct corners of humanities departments in universities. Even though for over 20 years there have been louder and louder calls to notice the ‘power of words’ in business and professional contexts (Czerniawska, 1997; Thompson, 2003), and even though recent political events and the public health crisis have thrown further light on the crucial importance of language, frustratingly, perceptions about and acknowledgement of linguistic and discourse knowledge are still lacking in the public sphere.
This volume grew out of this frustration – and the honed-eared reader will indeed notice it in every chapter of this book. The authors speak out about the problems of the disciplinary silos that prevent conversation between researchers who set out to explore issues through the language lens and those who make the study of language their main object of enquiry. Several of the chapters expose the dangers of popular and oversimplified understandings of language and communication. Others critique the ignorance about the crucial role language plays in various arenas of public and professional life.

However, the real value of the chapters goes beyond mere criticism. The wide range of business and professional contexts discussed in the chapters – from financial and health communication to environmental sustainability, from human resource management to business management, and from business pitches and negotiations to political statements – showcase some of the many areas where language matters. Through empirical analyses and rich, real-life samples of communication, the authors make a strong case in point: they demonstrate the importance of both language and communication, and they show how and why these matter.

1.1 But Why Do Communication and Language Matter?

Communication and language play fundamental roles in our everyday lives. So fundamental, in fact, that ‘we tend to take it for granted, rarely pausing to consider what it involves or just how important it is to us’, as aptly pointed out by business consultant Neil Thompson (2003, p. 9). Perhaps because they are considered to be natural skills people are born with, or perhaps because they are all-encompassing, taken-for-granted and, for most, invisible, there does not seem to be an urge to understand the complexities of communication and language, and how they affect people’s perceptions, relationships and, generally, human experience – beyond the relevant scientific disciplines, that is. A testimony to this observation is the proliferation of theories that draw on questionable scientific foundations, for instance neurolinguistic programming (Tosey and Mathison, 2009), linguistic determinism (see e.g. McVeigh, 2018 on the use of linguistic determinism in economic research), folk-linguistics (for example, on how social media ruins language, see Tagg, 2015), communication training programmes conducted by professionals without sufficient theoretical knowledge of communication (e.g. drama teachers or actors) and oversimplifying, prescriptive advice and ‘easy recipes and quick fixes ... which are ill-suited to deal with the ever-changing complexity’ of professional life (Mautner, 2016, p. 4).

Communication is a complex affair. It can be viewed from an instrumentalist perspective as a means of achieving one’s personal goals, as a means of doing work and as a means of conveying information. In this sense,
communication and linguistic skills are part of a technical skillset, a conceptualisation which implies a direct correlation between the communicator’s intentions, appropriately applied linguistic, verbal and non-verbal strategies and the resulting outcomes (see also Chapter 2). Such thinking influences instruction when, for instance, public speakers are encouraged to use specific hand gestures to positively impact their audiences (Talley and Temple, 2015), or when email writers are discouraged from using (or downright forbidden to use) emoticons because it is considered unprofessional (see Loglia and Bower, 2016). However, such instrumentalism should be handled with great care – or even avoided altogether. This is because communication, apart from being the means of expressing or representing internal thoughts and the means of achieving goals, is the site of sense-making. This means that meaning does not originate in internal cognitive processes, but is ‘actively produced, reproduced, negotiated, and maintained in social interaction’ (Jian, Schmisseur and Fairhurst, 2008, p. 302). It is in and through communication that people share and create meaning about their everyday realities. This is how people establish, negotiate and maintain interpersonal relationships, for instance by expressing solidarity and by reinforcing hierarchies and individual and group identities. Organisations, the sites of professional life, can also be viewed as such communicative constitutions, because, as Boden (1994) notes, they are constantly created and recreated through the unfolding dynamism of everyday talk (p. 202).

The double helix of communication as transaction and discourse as social practice infuses all aspects of professional and organisational life. I mention a few areas to illustrate this duality, but the list is by no means exhaustive. In recruitment, for example, job ads inform prospective applicants, but they do so in a way that not only enhances the company’s image but portrays those who wish to find employment in a positive light (Breeze, 2013). During an induction period, the carefully selected wording of glossy brochures re-frames organisational realities so that the work and workplace sound more appealing than they really are (Brannan et al., 2015), and communication during induction discursively creates the image of an ideal employee as an example to adhere to (Chapter 4). During a regular working day, the cultures of organisational life, norms and processes are passed on and reinforced in everyday interactions (Boden, 1994). Performance review interviews, which on the surface are means of information exchange, are in fact sites where the interviewees’ answers are institutionalised so that they match the goals and values of an organisation (van de Mieroop and Schnurr, 2014). Meetings are not only the sites of decision making but sites where organisational power and status are enacted (Angouri and Marra, 2011; see also Chapter 8), and mission statements and visions serve as management tools in such a way that they discursively create the ‘ideal’ employee (Koller, 2011).
1.2 Why Does Awareness Matter?

A conscious awareness of language is crucial to understand how these processes work in an indivisible manner. An awareness of language enables us to reflect on the purpose of spoken and written language, and importantly how that purpose is achieved in the specific contexts of the production/consumption of the text. In an experiment, Llewellyn and Harrison (2006) tested employees’ ability to recognise and interpret PR and corporate communication texts. The participants were able to recognise a wide range of linguistic strategies, for example ones that aimed to shift the blame or responsibility in corporate documents. But the authors noted a crucial difference between lay linguistic awareness and conscious knowledge about language. Their findings have shown that participants ‘spoke most explicitly and confidently about aspects of language where they had a grasp of relevant terminology’ (p. 508). Knowledge of metalanguage and terminology enabled participants to notice how language works in achieving different objectives. This type of awareness, as theorised by Lier (1998) in his model of various levels of awareness, is a higher level of awareness that enables noticing, analysis and metalinguistic commentary, a ‘practical’ awareness that leads to people’s ability to control, play with or use language creatively for their own objectives.

The highest level of awareness, however, refers to much more than an understanding of grammatical terminology: people become critically aware of the constructive and constitutive power of language, and its situated use in wider social and ideological contexts (Lier 1998, also Chapter 8).

Such critical orientation, as Fairclough (1992) notes, is called for by the social circumstances we are living in (…) power relations are indeed increasingly coming to be exercised implicitly in language (…) People cannot be effective citizens in a democratic society if their education cuts them off from critical consciousness of key elements of their physical and social environments. (p. 6)

This realisation has become painfully obvious in the last decade or so. The increasing recognition of and growing public attention to the roles of language and communication in major national and global issues proves this point. Take climate change, for example: due to the complexity of interconnected events, and the intangible, and for most unobservable, nature of the various processes that affect our climate, society’s knowledge and opinion (!) is primarily formed through media reporting; political speeches and policies; stories and actions of activists; and social media interactions. Climate change is a social construction. The articulation of problems, responsibilities and solutions affects how policy makers and the wider public think and act. Pettenger (2016) warns that even the facts are for the most part social. Is it a fact that the earth’s climate is changing, or is it merely fluctuating? Are we in fact responsible or not? Can we do something or is
it too late? These questions can only be answered, if at all, by deciding first what we mean by such terms as “change” and “responsibility”, by deciding who “we” are and what we might could “do.” (p. xiv)

The burgeoning scholarship of the role of language in affecting public perceptions (Molek-Kozakowska, 2018; Sedlaczek, 2017) or political decision making regarding climate change (Feindt and Oels, 2005; Willis, 2017) draws attention to the fact that language and discourse awareness are critical both for understanding these issues and to be able to achieve action (see also Chapter 7). Similarly, scientific and public interest in how media discourse and the language of politicians influence public opinion has increased considerably. Publications and popular writings about the polarising language of politicians (e.g. Schneider and Eitelmann, 2020) or the visual and rhetorical manipulation during the UK’s Brexit process (Koller, Kopf and Miglbauer, 2019) are just a few examples (see also Chapter 10). More recently, communication and language have been found to play key roles in influencing public perception, trust and consequently compliance with health policies, through misinformation, the power of discursive framing (Rafi, 2020) and metaphors (Oswick, Grant and Oswick, 2020).

These examples demonstrate that in our information-based society, where ‘knowledges are constituted through discourses’ (Fairclough, 1999, p. 74), it is crucial that future generations are able to notice both the process of ‘construction’ and its elements. This kind of criticality is particularly important to expose the roles of communication and language in the environmental, political or public health situations discussed earlier. Educating professionals who are able to notice and reflect on the constitutive and constructive power of language must therefore be one of education’s key priorities.

1.3 Becoming Aware of Language Awareness

The benefits of language and discourse awareness in professionals – as discussed in the previous sections – are evident. Yet, to change perceptions of language and communication in professional life, and influence policy, educational programmes and popular knowledge, we must raise awareness of language awareness. This volume sets out to do just that. It joins previous scholarly efforts that set out to initiate a paradigmatic change in how language and discourse awareness are viewed, acknowledged, researched and taught (e.g. Handford, Garrett and Cotts, 2019; Spilioti et al., 2019). Thus far, ‘language awareness’ has almost exclusively been associated with language education and language learning, as reflected by the many theorisations and definitions, including that of the Association for Language Awareness (ALA). However, there have been increasing calls to extend the scope of language awareness to include all spheres of social life, such as political, workplace and...
professional communication (Handford et al., 2019, p. 163). The chapters of this volume answer this call and demonstrate how language matters in a wide range of settings. The volume also aims to provide a precedent in how to raise awareness of language awareness through the following steps:

(1) Promoting, articulating and emphasising the complexity of communication and the role of language beyond the language classroom;
(2) Demonstrating the relevance of linguistics and language-oriented discourse analysis in other disciplines in research, teaching and professional practice;
(3) Using the findings and techniques of the resulting empirical scholarship to nurture analytical skills, critical language and discourse awareness, which consequently will lead to both better communication and better critical thinking skills in future professionals.

The first step is raising awareness of the complexities and double function of communication and the role of discourse as social practice beyond classes of linguistics and foreign language. In the early 2000s, social sciences, and specifically business and organisational studies, embraced the ‘linguistic turn’ (Alvesson and Kärreman, 2000), a shift that was characterised by the examination of the role of language in the constitution and reproduction of organisational processes and practices and the acknowledgement that ‘meanings are social constructs, produced, reproduced and transformed in particular social contexts’ (Musson, Cohen and Tietze, 2007, p. 46). Despite this turn in scholarship, the dialogue between linguistically focussed disciplines and organisational sciences was never fully established, and the focus on communication other than its instrumental function has rarely found its way into classrooms. Several authors, including Musson and Cohen (1999), Weninger and Kan (2013), Hünerberg and Geile (2012) and myself (Darics, 2019), have argued for raising awareness of language and discourse in students of business, but there is still some way to go for this advice to gain ground in teaching. As demonstrated by Kastberg and Ditlevsen (Chapter 4), Parhankangas and Darics (Chapter 3) and Palmieri (Chapter 6), education about language could have its rightful place in education programmes on human resource management, entrepreneurship and business finance, respectively.

The second proposed step is the demonstration of the relevance of linguistics and language-oriented discourse analysis in other disciplines in research, teaching and professional practice. A recent increase in scholarship exploring organisational and professional realities through the language lens, for example, provides strong evidence of the utility of such convergence: from edited volumes showcasing the impact of linguistic and discourse analytic research (Alessi and Jacobs, 2016; Mautner and Reiner, 2017; Mullany, 2020) to handbooks that feature accounts from different professions on the use of
applied linguistics (Bhatia and Bremner, 2014; Vine, 2018) and discourse analytic work on specific areas within organisation studies such as management (e.g. Greatbatch and Clark, 2005) or leadership (Clifton, Schnurr and van de Mieroop, 2020), to mention only a few. In this volume, authors make a case for the convergence of linguistics and areas such as leadership (Chapter 2), entrepreneurship (Chapter 3), business management (Chapter 11), healthcare (Chapter 5), climate change (Chapter 7) and media studies (Chapter 10).

Finally, the third step is to show how such interdisciplinary work can form the basis of the education of critical language awareness raising. In Lier’s (1998) awareness model, awareness comprises ‘discursive awareness’, that is, metalinguistic knowledge, analysis and technical control, and ‘practical awareness’, which manifests in language play, creativity and control in practice. Education, therefore, plays a key role in promoting both ‘discursive awareness’ through explicit instruction of metalinguistic knowledge and ‘practical awareness’ through the nurturing of analytical skills and the promotion of reflexive practice. These skills lead to improved communication skills because, as Thompson (2003) notes, they ‘help promote forms of practice that are well informed and well-thought through and which do not rely simply on habit and routine, unquestioned assumptions and (uneducated) guesswork’ (p. 4). These two layers then feed into the highest awareness level, the recognition of the role of language in social and ideological contexts and its role in the negotiation and maintenance of identity and power. Köster’s chapter on business communication (Chapter 8), Cyphert’s developmental model of critical thinking (Chapter 9) and Mullany’s chapter on linguistic consultancy for professional development (Chapter 11) provide practical demonstrations of the need for and success of such educational content.

1.4 Chapter Summaries

Chapter 2 starts by challenging the traditional assumptions that view communication as a mere tool that assists leaders in achieving their aims. In the chapter, Schnurr provides an overview of the broader concept of leadership and then focuses on ‘discursive leadership’, a school of thought that examines how leadership is enacted in and through discourse. Along with the overview of a wide range of relevant literature, the chapter provides a gentle introduction to interactional sociolinguistics. This is an analytical framework that guides attention to the interplay between the smallest detail in conversation and broader contextual factors that may affect human interaction, such as power, culture or, indeed, management and leadership. Schnurr’s argument for greater acknowledgement of the role and importance of language in leadership is further backed up by the four detailed analyses of real-life interactions collected in a New Zealand Information Technology consultancy. Through the
close examination of excerpts from her fifteen hours of recorded data, Schnurr demonstrates just how much we can learn about the ‘in situ’ construction of leadership if we look close enough at the small details. She provides a practical demonstration of how and what to look for, while also exemplifying the role of concrete communication strategies in the interactional negotiation/construction of leadership: for instance, the role of conjoint laughter in reducing the tension of hierarchical asymmetries or the role of summarising as a tool for ‘sensegiving’ (Gioia and Chittipeddi, 1991).

Chapter 3 is a demonstration of the relevance of linguistics and language-oriented discourse analysis in other, more practically oriented areas of study, such as entrepreneurship and alternative finance. The chapter offers a detailed review of work addressing various aspects of language published in entrepreneurship-oriented outlets, such as the *Journal of Business Venturing*, *Entrepreneurship Theory & Practice*, *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*, *Academy of Management Journal* and *Academy of Management Review*, among others. Unsurprisingly, the review exposes that even though studies address language-related questions, many fail to engage with language-oriented scholarship, for instance routinely interpreting linguistic signs in an acontextual manner. However, research that focuses on language and discourse in entrepreneurial genres does not evade scrutiny either: the authors highlight that such studies do not tend to consider sufficiently the broader context of entrepreneurial activity. These realisations lead to a call for closer collaboration between the two disciplines. The case study of the online crowdfunding pitches serves as a case in point and illustrates the utility of genre awareness in future entrepreneurs.

In Chapter 4, Kastberg and Ditlevsen direct their scrutiny at a specific managerial/organisational activity: onboarding. The authors examine a corpus comprising texts, images and videos from the *Welcome Onboard* section of a global pharmaceutical company’s website. While on the surface the onboarding process ‘simply’ aims to turn a newcomer from an outsider to an insider in an organisation, the chapter exposes deeper issues relating to organisational socialisation by juxtaposing approaches to onboarding in strategic human resource management, organisation studies and business communication. The authors find evidence of integration of newcomers into the organisation’s norms and values, ‘moulding’ into organisational identity and even effects on personal identity. The chapter shows the crucial role language use plays in this process, especially through the conflation of individual and organisational identities, which is achieved by portraying the company as a catalyst for self-actualisation and by articulating shared altruistic purposes for the organisation and individual. Using the texts and employee testimonials as ways to gain deeper understanding of onboarding as a process and as an organisational strategy, Kastberg and Ditlevsen offer, in a Habermasian sense, hermeneutic

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knowledge; knowledge of how onboarding happens at the intersection of organisational, human resource and individual interests; as well as emancipatory knowledge, the knowledge of why and by what means onboarding is achieved. Indeed, reflecting on the results of their analyses, the authors show that in spite of ‘grand theories’ that promote mutual discussion in newcomer socialisation, actual organisational practice is closer to coercion, and is clear evidence of the corporate colonisation of the individual’s life world (Deetz, 1992).

Ideologies and values are also crucial in Galasiński’s and Ziolkowska’s chapter (Chapter 5) on communication guides in healthcare settings. In the chapter, the authors provide a brief overview of the ‘discovery’ of the role of communication in the clinical context and set out to examine how the fields of medicine and psychology ‘instruct’ their representatives to communicate. Through the analysis of guides for three communicative contexts – mental health, general interview guide and writing to patients – the authors focus on the act of instruction on the one hand and the content of the instructions on the other. By doing so they raise metalinguistic awareness of vocabulary, question types and medicalisation of language, as well as demonstrating critical awareness of the power such instructions carry. The examination of the act of instruction in two guides exemplifies the role of language in the enactment of power: in the mental health communication guide, the strong command carries an implicit threat that those who do not use language in the way shown in the document will place themselves outside the community; in the general interview guide, the phrasing of sentences in the third person presents advice as natural and obvious laws of communication. The scrutiny of the content of the guides exposes similarly concerning problems of values and ideologies and the authors conclude that often the instructions are presented as a linguistic problem, when in fact they are not. The chapter urges authors of medical language guides to consider the reality of language use, steer away from prescriptive advice and seek out collaborations with linguists and discourse analysts!

Chapter 6 is concerned with the role of language in financial communication, specifically in investor relations. The chapter’s starting point is critical, exposing the ‘dark side’ of organisational behaviour (Griffin and O’Leary-Kelly, 2004), and specifically deceitful corporate communication. Palmieri argues that by becoming aware of the role of language in deception, people are more likely to resist attempts of manipulation. The framework the chapter presents is argumentation. Apart from functioning as an analytical/awareness raising tool for stakeholders, the knowledge of argumentation also allows corporate leaders to develop business communication strategies which are effective, ethical and reasonable. The chapter offers insight into the historical development of Investor Relations (IR), the role of communication and
argumentation, and a useful overview of the repertoire of argumentation skills required for those working in the IR profession. The chapter discusses data from interviews with IR officers and sheds light on professionals’ implicit awareness of communication. It also demonstrates that the reflection prompted by the interviews themselves can help to make such knowledge explicit (see also Spilioti et al., 2019).

Chapter 7 starts from the premise that language shapes society’s perceptions of nature. In the chapter, Stibbe focuses on our physical selves to explore how language shapes perceptions of our own bodies, the bodies of other people and animals, and our relationship with the natural world. Introducing the concept of *ecosomatic awareness* – first-person appreciation of our embodied, emplaced and interconnected nature – the chapter argues that such awareness is now crucial for members of society to reconnect with their physical and biological environments. Drawing on a kaleidoscope of viewpoints from cogent disciplines, a case study of the language of weather forecasts and a unique reflection on a lived bodily experience, Stibbe exposes how patterns of language unconsciously shape our thinking, and demonstrates their prevalence and how they reinforce our cultural norms below the level of consciousness. Apart from the personal empowerment that comes from ecosomatic awareness, Stibbe’s chapter calls for a much deeper change: shifting the fundamental stories of our society to challenge social injustice, exploitation and address the key factors in the climate catastrophe.

The concept of ‘language awareness’ returns home to the field of foreign language learning in Chapter 8, where Koester discusses it in the context of English for Specific Purposes (ESP). Drawing on her extensive experience as business communication educator, Koester provides a compelling argument for ‘humanistic’ language teaching: foreign language teaching that goes beyond a utilitarian instruction and equips students with critical and ethical ways of thinking. Koester provides a historical overview of the development of the concept of critical language awareness, and exposes the lack of acknowledgement of its importance both in published work and the perceptions of her own students. Drawing on examples from her teaching, Koester makes a case for using authentic language data as an instructional resource and demonstrates how such work can lead to both *metapragmatic* and *sociopragmatic* awareness. She uses authentic extracts of spoken and written texts to teach genre awareness, extracts from recorded meeting data to teach about relational aspects of language, such as politeness, and a managerial interaction to show what language use can reveal about values and ideologies in a workplace. Her final example makes a case for using reflection as a technique to increase critical language awareness.

Cyphert’s chapter (Chapter 9) directs attention to the duality inherent in communication education, in both stability-producing conformity and the
critical capacity to question, resist or adapt the community norms. Her entry point is the instruction of rhetoric, the dominant paradigm in North America that incorporates both pragmatic rhetorical competence and an awareness of the constitutive nature of discourse, especially concerning organisational power. Cyphert argues that an integrated practice of rhetorical education enables students to get their own ideas across effectively and protect themselves from being manipulated by others. Through juxtaposing the findings of a survey of both employer needs and whether – and how – these are met by higher education curricula in the United States, the chapter provides a thorough breakdown of rhetorical behaviours and skills at various stages of career progression. The detailed descriptions of specific rhetorical behaviours required by employers show a need for a stepwise development from rhetorical conformity to critical reflection and strategic communication activity. However findings show that these skills are not addressed in the right order and to the right extent in higher education curricula, and there is little effort to teach and demonstrate how they are connected in day-to-day rhetorical practices. Cyphert calls for a pedagogy that goes beyond teaching ‘appropriate discourse’ but rather nurtures autonomy, and addresses the potential for perpetual, internal critique that allows and fosters organisational change.

Chapter 10 from Whittle and Mueller demonstrates how the knowledge of and attention to visible, but not necessarily consciously noticeable linguistic practices – such as categorisation – can inform us about our social world. The chapter starts with the premise that the way speakers or writers categorise others is not simply a labelling exercise but rather a normative practice through which people generate and manage implications and inferences. Drawing on a case study and providing a detailed empirical analysis of a political speech, Whittle and Mueller demonstrate both the utility and practice of bringing together the ethnomethodology-based approach of Membership Categorization Analysis with the critical study of language. The authors’ aim is to ‘sensitize’ both scholars and practitioners to categorisation as normative practice and show what the various category devices can reveal about the interests, ideologies and political agendas of the speakers. The analysis of Theresa May’s speech guides the reader through both the process of the analysis and the exposure of how language use creates versions of reality that later become a justification for action. The chapter thus demonstrates how categories in language (re)produce social reality and, as the authors warn, the awareness of this process should be a basic requirement in areas such as political communication, PR and journalism.

Chapter 11 is an expert statement from Mullany, of the positive and long-lasting impact language and discourse awareness has on the working lives of professionals. Drawing on her 20 years of experience as a scholar, consultant and director of Linguistic Profiling for Professionals (LiPP, a research and
business unit in the University of Nottingham), Mullany joins the critical voices of the volume to argue that popular understanding of language has to move beyond unscientific approaches and has to engage with well-established linguistic research, such as sociolinguistics. Case studies from her consultancy practice and her sharp scrutiny of popular training materials provide tangible evidence of how scientifically grounded sociolinguistic understanding in professionals will lead to awareness of damaging stereotypes and language. The chapter provides a unique insight into the activities of LiPP and reflections on the identify struggles that affect linguists, calling for a change in perceptions about the field and what it can offer to practically oriented disciplines. Mullany’s concluding thoughts echo a key message of the entire book, namely that in order to develop reflective language awareness, simplistic and stereotypical understanding of language and communication has to be replaced by the scientific approaches to language.

1.5  Language Awareness As Key Soft Skill

In this introduction (and elsewhere, e.g. Darics 2019), I have shown the crucial importance of language awareness both as a means of improving communication skills as well as critical thinking. This point has become ever more important in the context of the increasing employability agenda of higher education. As part of this agenda, a lot of effort is devoted to defining skills, knowledge and attributes that make up employability. In a major literature review of 187 pieces of research, Artess et al. (2017) show that the main problems of the conceptualisation, and consequently the definition, teaching and assessing of ‘employability’ is that it is viewed as a ‘shopping list’ of skills. A brief overview of the various ‘shopping lists’ shows the extent of the problem related to their conceptualisation: for example, interpersonal skills often appear as separate from communication skills, while the actual definitions of these two hugely overlap (Clokie and Fourie, 2016). Concepts such as teamwork, problem-solving, people skills and leadership are also often discussed separately from oral and written communication skills, and separately from the knowledge of the local language, foreign language or English proficiency (Government Office for Science, 2017), even though they are clearly closely interlinked.

This volume proposes a change in thinking about communication and argues for making critical language awareness a key element of the soft skill repertoire. As the chapters demonstrate, a conscious awareness of language is crucial to understanding language as an instrumental tool for achieving a purpose and as socially constitutive work in an indivisible manner. Several of the chapters reflect on the – at times inconsolable – duality of instrumentality of communication and critical awareness of discourse: for example,
Cyphert’s chapter on the development of critical thinking in higher education (Chapter 9), Galasiński and Ziółkowska’s chapter on language training in medical professionals (Chapter 5) or Parhankangas and my chapter (Chapter 3) on reporting on and teaching entrepreneurship. Other chapters speak about the urgency of equipping future professionals with discursive consciousness, that is, the ability to notice the role of language in constituting and reproducing social realities: Whittle and Mueller’s chapter on political discourse (Chapter 10), Stibbe’s chapter on the role of language in affecting perceptions of ecological issues (Chapter 7) or Palmieri’s chapter on the constitutive role of language in financial communication (Chapter 6).

The chapters also provide an important addition to scholarship that criticises communication education that is based on linguistic regulation, prescription and pre-set formulae. An increasing number of scholars and educators now point out that in order to teach effective communication, curricula and textbooks must draw on empirical research and not on introspection or ‘educated hunches’ (e.g. Chan 2017; Bremner 2018), which may or may not reflect what happens in real life.

Through examples taken from a wide range of real-life contexts and examined through a variety of analytical lenses this is exactly what this book offers.

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