

Introduction

TESOL as a global trade: Ethics, equity and ecology

by Robert Jackson

The Australian Council of TESOL Associations (ACTA) is pleased to present this Special Edition S3 of our flagship journal *TESOL in Context*. The edition comprises a selection of papers from the ACTA International Conference ‘TESOL as a Global Trade: Ethics, Equity and Ecology’ held at Cairns Convention Centre from 2-5 July 2012. The conference was convened and hosted by the Association for Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (ATESOL) NSW.

The theme selected for our 2012 conference emerged from a deepening awareness of the changing roles and shifting spheres of interest and influence of English language teachers and the English language teaching (ELT) industry at large, both locally and globally, and a desire to interrogate the impact of those changes on learners and communities. Where Australian English language teachers could once have confidence that theirs was ‘an honest trade’, pedagogical aims and objectives into the current century appear more and more to be driven by economic rather than educational, or indeed ethical, imperatives. In fact, it is as likely now that we will be called upon by our employers to provide intensive business or vocational English language classes in special ‘targeted migration’ short course programs designed to equip temporary visa holders with the English language competencies required to ‘fast track’ their residency, citizenship and employment in Australia (essentially a form of government-sponsored ‘queue jumping’), than we are to be properly resourced to support the English language learning needs of migrants, refugees and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders living in our country in order to provide these learners with equitable access to the selfsame social, vocational and economic opportunities. On the bright side, perhaps, prospects for travel and employment overseas have never been better – plum jobs in EFL are there for the picking in English language colleges and educational institutions all across the globe, particularly in those places where the more highly-qualified local English language teaching professionals have the misfortune of being bilingual non-native speakers of English. Between sightseeing junkets we might even pick up a few weeks’ worth of pocket money through the British Council or TESOL International in its partnership with the U.S. Department of State training offshore call centre operators how to enunciate and converse on the telephone more like Britons or Americans – or Australians – and thereby assist to extend further the global reach of the multinational corporations who pay these employees subsistence wages, or less. On top of all this, of course, is the tendency for the English language in its spread and in the cultural identities it inoculates and carries

along with it to assimilate or attempt to subjugate all local traditional, indigenous and minority languages and cultures that cross its path ...

While these considerations and issues relating to the ethics of English language teaching are in no way new, and nor should they be surprising to professionals working within our field, the seemingly exponential expansion in recent times of ‘English as a global language’ – the phrase upon which the first part of our conference title plays – has brought them into much sharper relief. They are dilemmas which arise from careful examination of the ecology of English in the global context, and of how ELT and English affect the ecologies of other languages and cultures with which they come into contact. In their keynote papers, concurrent sessions and workshops at our conference, presenters were encouraged to explore both ELT as a ‘trade’ in the economic sense – in Australia and elsewhere – as well as the notion of ELT as a specialised pedagogical ‘trade’ or ‘craft’, as opposed to or as well as a ‘profession’, and the ways in which ‘language’ is positioned or conceptualised thereby. While still providing insights into and optimal approaches for ELT teaching and learning, arrived at by virtue of the special aptitude that comes as a result of being bilingual practitioners themselves or from a deep and well-grounded engagement or empathy with the language learning process, through the conference program our delegates were invited to come to terms with the realisation that ‘best practice’ can only be so when questions relating to the purposes and effects of ELT more broadly considered have been conscientiously and comprehensively explored and addressed. To this end, our keynote speakers for the conference were judiciously chosen on the strength of their expertise and engagement with some of the salient and most urgent issues and implications encapsulated in the second phrase used in our conference title (‘ethics, equity and ecology’), particularly in counterpoint to or conjunction with the first (‘TESOL as a global trade’).

Australia is unique in that it has always been a culturally and linguistically diverse place. Our modern nation is made up of people from many different ethnic backgrounds. Over 300 languages are spoken in homes and communities across Australia and consequently many students in Australian classrooms are English language learners. Within the Australian context, the nomenclature ‘learners of English as an additional language or dialect (EAL/D)’ is now used to refer to those students whose first language is a language or dialect other than Standard Australian English (SAE) and who require additional support to develop proficiency in SAE, which is the variety of spoken and written English language used formally in contemporary Australian society. The acronym has been officially adopted across the country and is intended to foreground the English language learning needs of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students who speak an Aboriginal or Torres Strait creole, or a variety of Aboriginal English, as their home language, as well as those who speak a traditional or heritage Indigenous language, and migrant and refugee students who speak an English-based creole or pidgin, as well as those who are learning English as a second or additional language (ESL/EAL). While some jurisdictions and research initiatives in the states and territories have been

slow on the uptake or reluctant to recognise the specific English language learning needs of students who speak a variety of Aboriginal English (or 'Koorie English' as it is called in Victoria), or of the increasing numbers of refugees arriving from west Africa who speak Liberian Pidgin English and other English-based dialects and creoles, or of students from Pacific Island nations who are fluent in various different oral registers and dialects of English but who lack academic language proficiency and literacy skills in SAE, or of the many migrants and international students who speak one of an increasing array of global Englishes, exclusion of these learners from specialist English language support programs is indefensible.

The first group of articles in the edition are likewise a timely reminder of other important differences which exist within language learning contexts and the broader EAL/D learner cohort in Australian schools. Jackie Coleman's case study highlights some of the difficulties facing generalist primary school teachers in non-metropolitan areas, particularly in terms of accessing the relevant specialist professional learning support they require to cater effectively to the English language learning needs of EAL/D students in their classrooms. Her paper outlines a model through which specialist English language teachers can act as mentors for their mainstream colleagues and provide professional learning support that starts with teachers' current practices and adapts existing professional learning resources and frameworks. Reporting on their implementation of an international research project with EAL/D learners in upper primary classes, Maureen Walsh, Maya Cranitch and Karen Maras reveal some of the distinctive challenges encountered by refugee students in reading and responding to visual texts, and in adjusting to the structures and processes of formal school education. Meg Wielgosz and Paul Molyneux draw on the interrelated themes of identity construction, negotiation of shared understandings and how students' cultural and linguistic capital can be activated and expressed through collaborative creative activities to investigate the ways in which integration into mainstream visual art programs in combination with the implementation of effective language learning pedagogies can benefit primary EAL/D students in their social and academic transition into the mainstream. In their paper, Jennifer Miller, Anne Keary and Joel Windle evaluate the suitability of different types of assessment practices for high school EAL/D learners. They drill down into assessments results to show the differences between reading and writing performance in overall assessments of EAL/D students' literacy and emphasise the importance for this learner group of strategic and targeted assessment, and particularly of the articulation of formative assessment within pedagogy and curricula.

The next swag of articles in the edition focuses on adult learners. Sue Ollerhead examines and compares the identity positioning of an experienced teacher of adult English language learners who have high literacy needs with that of one of her students to demonstrate the enormous potential and benefits of authentic tasks and student-centred literacy activities for this learner cohort. Applying insights from reader-response literary theory, the findings from Gillian Claridge's study of the reading habits of a group of English language learners undertaking a university preparatory course over a period of two years indicate that the difficulties

students encountered, due largely to the narrow view they held of the purposes for reading and their misconception that they should be reading texts which were above their current level of reading proficiency, resulted in a diminishment in the pleasure the students derived from reading and, consequently, a significant drop-off in their reading. Sorina Grasso's paper presents the ethical and pedagogical dilemmas of an English language teacher as she grappled with the pros and cons of relaxing the strict 'English-only' policy she and her colleagues had heretofore imposed on students in their university bridging classes. Adopting a systemic functional linguistics approach, Thu Ngo, Len Unsworth and Susan Feez demonstrate how the methodical technical analysis of a literary text can assist English language learners at university to develop more subtle and precise language for expressing their own attitudes and appraisals in both social and academic contexts. In her article, Karen Barber showcases an approach to language teaching and learning where students are provided with a model for noticing, collecting and analysing the incidental language and environmental texts they encounter in their everyday lives. Finally, adopting a narrative analysis approach, Parisa Ebtekar assesses the processes of identity construction and the transformative potential of enhanced English language ability which an Iranian refugee woman experienced through the course of her language learning and resettlement journey in Australia.

Turning farther afield, the next group of articles in the edition are devoted to particular contexts and challenges for EFL teaching and learning. Kasma Suwanarak's large-scale study surveyed the attitudes and beliefs about English language learning of a group of postgraduate Thai students and correlated these data with an analysis of students' implementation of learning strategies in order to address perceptions of their inadequacies as English language users. Focusing on orthographic and graphophonic differences, Pauline Bunce's paper examines some of the particular difficulties encountered by English language learners in Hong Kong. Juajan Wongpolganon's article pays tribute to the outstanding work done by Paweena Chumbia in developing and implementing a community-based indigenous language conservation project in northern Thailand. David Bright's case study of English language teachers working in Vietnam investigates how the teachers' attitudes towards language – and specifically their perceptions of the usefulness and superiority of English compared with Vietnamese – reveal and embody unquestioned assumptions and deeply-ingrained cultural biases that are subsequently transmitted to their students. Vincent Wang's paper provides an insight into how Chinese learners perceive themselves as English language users. He demonstrates how native-speaker models and cultural norms can be used explicitly in the language classroom – not as a language target to be emulated and unthinkingly reproduced by students but as a resource for critical reflection and learner self-evaluation. Hui Du evaluates the effectiveness of recent reforms to the College English teaching program in China, particularly in respect of recommendations for the increased use of ICT and communicative language approaches in classrooms and the lack of professional learning support provided for teachers. Trang Tran, Karen Moni and Richard B. Baldauf, Jr. focus on the nature and effects of foreign

language anxiety on Vietnamese university students in their English language learning and provide a range of strategies and recommendations designed to minimise its impact.

Rounding out the edition are some of the better papers from the conference strand on pronunciation teaching and learning. Addressing current research trends and conventional practice within the field, the articles offer insights into the importance of word stress in connected speech for English language learners and pedagogical approaches which are relevant to both EFL and ESL contexts. Martin Checklin provides a comprehensive critical overview of research and theory around the teaching of word stress along with useful practical advice and suggestions for teachers. In their paper, Hoa Phan and Sonca Vo present a detailed comparative analysis of the effects of errors in English language learners' pronunciation and word stress on interlocutors' perceptions of accent and intelligibility. Graeme Couper investigated his students' own perceptions of and understandings about word stress to inform a learner-centred approach to pronunciation teaching. Last but not least, Junko Chujo provides a rationale for EFL pronunciation teaching in Japan and shares an integrated language learning unit based on a travel scenario which is relevant to all EFL learners.

One of the particular goals in publishing this online conference edition of *TESOL in Context* has been to showcase the work of younger researchers and teachers, and entry-level academics, both in Australia and overseas, in order to provide a forum for their research and encourage them in their future careers, and I hope that we have achieved that aim. Other articles from the conference, including some of the keynotes papers, will be published in forthcoming regular editions of *TESOL in Context*, and subscription forms for the journal are available elsewhere on this website. Finally, I would like to thank our reviewers for their time and effort in reading over the manuscript submissions and providing detailed feedback and recommendations.

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