

## Voices and Insights into Language, Linguistics and Literature

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Volume 17 (1) is the first issue of 3L The Southeast Asian Journal of English Language Studies for the year 2011 and carries eight research - based and two review articles. The eight research - based articles deal with a range of issues such as political language, overcoming linguistic problems, applying a cultural concept to understand language use, improving learner proficiency, and applying theory and concepts to analyze literary texts. The two review articles explore materials available for teaching Language for Specific Purposes and examine how learning - centered community colleges can help ESL programmes.

George Orwell (1946) in the essay *Politics and the English Language* criticized contemporary written English for hiding the truth behind vague and meaningless language to avoid expressing the truth. Orwell lamented the insincerity of the way language is used today and points to politicians who in their struggle between real and declared aims mask their agenda with euphemisms, question begging and sheer vagueness. Savo Karam's insights into manipulative political language are demonstrated in *Truths and Euphemisms: How Euphemisms are Used in the Political Arena*. Using Jurgen Habermas's public sphere theory, the author demonstrates how politicians hide behind euphemisms in their bid to confuse people, hinder individual thought and conscious decision - making to hold on to power. Discussing the forms and types of unsavory messages lurking in political language through the use of euphemisms, Savo Karam posits that ultimately it is how people view and respond to euphemisms which affect political action and behavior. Perhaps it would be mindful to remember that language is an instrument for expressing and not for concealing thought.

The literature on noticing (Schmidt, 2001; Robinson, 2003; and Swain, 2000) points to noticing as an important consideration in the field of second language acquisition. Collaborative feedback has been proven to be useful in helping students gain awareness of gaps in their linguistic knowledge and ability. The contention here is that this informed awareness will help learners negotiate the gaps and further help them re-notice their new output. Sasan Baleghizadeh and Fatemah Arab investigate how collaborating with a peer to provide written feedback on linguistic problems can also help promote and create awareness of noticing among EFL learners. *The Impact of Pair Work on Promoting Noticing among EFL Learners* is premised on the idea that learners working in pairs can provide appropriate feedback to each other to help resolve problems when carrying out classroom tasks. The researchers used the notes the learners made on problems they identified while listening to a narration of a story as the operationalised form of noticing. The authors found that when learners are made to produce this written form, they were aware of their linguistic problems and were able to identify lexical gaps in their knowledge. At the same time, pair work was not so helpful in filling grammatical gaps in knowledge because these learners did not have the linguistic ability to provide structural feedback of this type.

It is common for second language acquisition researchers to assume that if learners are competent in their L2 they are equally competent in the L1. Research has demonstrated that the language component, while important is not the only factor, as there are non linguistic factors that vary from one individual to another (Nagpal, Nicoladis & Marentette,

2011; Lo Castro, 2001). Jose Cristina Parina's article *Individual Differences in a Proficiency Task as a Function of L2 and Non L2 Specific Dimensions* sets out to show that performance in a second language is not necessarily only a language concern. Jose Cristina posits that there could be non L2 specific language processing factors that can influence performance in a language task. Using a reading aloud method, the researcher shows that subjects, similar in terms of Grade Point Average differ in reading speed, disfluencies and words supplied. These differences were attributed to an individual's available cognitive resources.

Another paper that explores how non-language factors influence language learning is *Attitudes and Motivation of Malaysian Secondary Students towards Learning English as a Second Language: A Case Study* by Thang Siew Ming, Ting Siew Ling and Nurjanah Mohd Jaafar. The authors explore the often debated issue of level of proficiency with 2 non – language variables, motivation and attitude of English language learners. Focusing on secondary school Arts and Science students in East Malaysia, the paper discusses the findings of a survey on attitudes and motivation in relation to level of proficiency. Overall, the study found that students had positive attitudes towards learning English while the Science students and students with higher proficiency were more motivated to improve their English ability. As has been reported in many studies on the learning of English, these students also reveal their lack of interest and enthusiasm towards learning a language which they found not important. It is clear students still do not see the relevance of the language and are not driven to master the language to benefit themselves. The authors propose helping learners to become self - directed and take responsibility for their learning as a move to help learners develop an autonomous mindset by providing them with the appropriate strategy training. In addition, teachers need to plan their instruction to make their classrooms more interesting, relaxing and creative to accommodate individuals with their differing needs.

Corpus linguistics is a fast growing methodology in the field of linguistics today. The term is used to denote both methodologies and approaches to the analysis of language. Corpus linguistics is often used to determine frequency of occurrence in empirical data to reveal aspects of language behavior. Leah Espada-Gustilo's paper *Linguistic Features that Impact Essay Scores: a Corpus Linguistic Analysis of ESL Writing* in three proficiency levels reports on part of a larger study on learner corpora. In this paper, Espada-Gustilo uses a corpus linguistic approach to analyse 150 essays of freshmen college students from private schools in the Phillipines. The essays were rated and placed in three proficiency levels and differences compared according to text characteristics, lexical features, grammatical features, and clause level features. It was found that most of general text characteristics, lexical, grammatical and clause level features increased significantly across proficiency levels with writers in the higher levels of proficiency employing more of these structures. When translated to classroom instruction, this study proposes that curricular adjustments be made in English instruction both at secondary and tertiary education. Teachers should highlight to learners that linguistic features impact the assessment of their writing and as such learners should employ varied sentence structures in their essays.

Speech acts like compliments are closely linked to cultural norms and values because of their functions as judgments or expressions of approval. Biok Benham and Niloufar Amizadeh's cross cultural study of the compliments and compliment responses between American and Persian television interviews highlights the notion of behavior being cross - culturally varied and different in *A Comparative Study of the Compliments and Compliment Responses between English and Persian TV Interviews*. Recognizing the belief that taarof is a hollow system of flattery and false modesty so integral to Iranian social life, the writers analyze the Persian responses against this culturally accepted behavior together with Pomerantz's categorization of compliments. There were some similarities between the two interviews in terms of function and strategic approach, and there were differences in terms of

the number of occurrences. They found that there were naturally more compliments in the Persian data and attributed this to the pervasive place and role of taarof in Iranian culture.

The two articles dealing with literary issues are Dennis Pullido's *Saving the Savior; A Deconstruction of the Novel viajero by F. Sionil Jose* and Samrajya Lakshmi's *Concept of Dharma in Shashi Tharoor's Show Business*. Using a post structuralist approach, Dennis Pullido applies the Derridean theory of deconstruction to analyze literary texts to enhance the critical reading skills of learners. Pullido proposes that for students to become more critical readers and thinkers, they should be taught different methods of analyzing a literary text aside from the usual identification of the characters, plot, setting and theme approach that was used in the basic education level. With this in mind, the researcher demonstrates how critical thinking and analysis can be done using a literary theory. By using this theory, students will be more engaged with the text, and consequently, they will be more empowered in interpreting a literary work.

Samrajya Lakshmi exploits the term *dharma* in a satirical tone to accommodate the world we live in to illustrate how dharma and its connotations need to be reviewed, redefined and even reduced in *Concept of Dharma in Sashi Tharoor's Novel – Show Business*. Set in commercial Delhi, India the novelist, Sashi Tharoor interweaves this world with various aspects of human life and the levels of awareness that coexist and collide with it. By choosing to focus on the life of a film personality as devoid of depth and concreteness, Samrajya illustrates the absence of righteousness in films. The author shows how the novel is symbolic of the degeneration of India itself as she falls from a state of *dharma* (nobility) to that of *adharm*a (brutality).

The first review article by Jesus Garcia Laborda overviews the more recent materials available for teaching languages for specific purposes and explores ideas for developing new materials. In his article *Revisiting Materials for Teaching Languages for Specific Purposes* Garcia Laborda contends that the significant role of the Internet has made available a wide array of resources that can be used to enhance teaching and learning. He cautions that these resources should be selected carefully bearing in mind learner needs and purposes for learning. He states,

*The fact that LSP is highly specialized implies that materials and lessons should be contextualised in fields of which the teacher usually knows little (if at all) especially at the beginning of the teaching career. On the contrary, the students' expectations are not only linguistic but also related to content and the teaching method and also need to resemble the way in which learners operate in their field. When these aspects are met in the course, students may feel both instrumentally motivated and also satisfied with their own progress (p.105).*

Garcia Laborda also provides a list of available resources in his reference section for any educator looking to use the Internet as a teaching resource.

In *Learning-Centered Community College and English as a Second Language Programme*, Krishna Bista examines the features of learning - centered community colleges and their role in shaping higher education. Bista argues that these colleges have a crucial role to play in helping transform teacher - centered classrooms to learner - centered classrooms. He proposes that this transformation should focus on the environment, goals, performance and feedback, and rubric as successful learning tools in teaching ESL in the colleges. Bista further posits these community colleges are exemplary in that they place learning first and provide educational experiences for learners anyway, any place, anytime.

Volume 17 (1) has put together an interesting blend of voices from language practitioners and researchers invested in the fields of language, linguistics and literature. Language has always been an instrument used to move agendas and fulfill specific desires and ambitions. To this end truths can be hidden behind meta-language that is largely

meaningless. We can also hide behind cultural differences and avoid saying what we truly mean. How language is learnt and how learners become proficient and competent with language use still remains an enigma today. The field of language learning and teaching is a nebulous area and researchers are constantly seeking ways to understand cognitive, social and cultural factors that influence the area. The collection of papers in this volume shed light on some of the pertinent issues surrounding English language learning and teaching.

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