

EDITORIAL

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GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies's second issue, Volume 13 (2) presents 12 academic papers on oral communication, literacy, autonomy and attributions, teaching of Science in English, teaching and learning of Arabic language, linguistics (phonology, Malay linguistics and critical discourse analysis) and literature (identity conflict, analysis of Ophelia and translation of metaphors from Persian to English). The papers are from Malaysia, Korea, Iran and Netherland.

The subject of how best to teach speaking skills have been examined by many researchers. In fact, there are many variables that can influence an individual's oral communication skills. Duck Geun Yoo and Junkyu Lee in *Using Contextual Information In Learners' Spoken Language Communication: An Eye-Tracking Study*, conducted an eye-tracking experiment to investigate whether EFL learners can utilize visually presented contextual information during spoken language comprehension. They argue that studies on how second language (L2) learners incrementally form a representation by utilizing context information as well as predicting the forthcoming information is lacking. An eye-tracking device was employed to track the comprehension processes of EFL learners when auditory inputs with four two-dimensional figures were presented to them. The findings suggest that the learners utilized real-time contextual information and top-down processing linguistic information, using top-down processing strategy. The writers claim that both strategies is significant in that they can serve as reference material to investigate language understanding and language attainment methods of Asian EFL or ESL learners. The findings have implication for future research in the area of language processing methods of L2 learners who use different Asian languages as L1.

Another important issue in language teaching and learning is literacy. In fact, it is increasingly being reported that many tertiary students in Malaysia find this skill difficult to acquire. A study by Sarjit Kaur which examines *Critical Literacy Practices of English Major in a Tertiary Institution*, identifies the challenges faced by students in trying to comprehend an opinion-based text. The findings report that many students still have difficulty understanding the author's message, distinguishing fact from opinion, understanding main ideas, guessing meaning from context and making inferences. The writer concludes that it is essential to include critical literacy component in undergraduate programme since such instruction can hone students' critical literacy practices in the higher education sector.

The concept of learner autonomy has always intrigued researchers, teachers (and, possibly, learners). The concept puts the learner at the focus of all attention which endows him with responsibility for his actions in the learning process. Nurjanah Mohd Jaafar and Thang in *Revisiting Autonomy And Attributions: A Case In A Malaysian University* report on a study which investigates the relationship between self-critical and teacher-centred tendencies. They also look at whether learners' proficiency levels

influence this relationship. 169 students of a Malaysian public university were involved in the study. The results reveal that the learners' general tendencies tend to be both teacher-centred and self-critical. However, their different proficiency levels did not appear to greatly influence the relationship between autonomy and attributions. The writers argue that results from the study refuted earlier claims on autonomy and attributions by researchers in the West and supported more current studies in this field by Asian researchers.

The command of English language among students in Malaysian schools has always been a concern for educators. Following this, the English for Teaching Mathematics and Science (ETeMS) was introduced. However, the ETeMS policy was reversed in 2012, citing the reason that there is a high percentage of Maths and Science teachers who still use Malay in the ETeMS classroom, hence, affecting the successful implementation of ETeMS. Asiah Mohd Sharif in *Limited Proficiency English Teachers' Language Use In Science Classrooms* sets out to investigate the implementation of ETeMS in classrooms. Three Science teachers in a rural primary school, who are considered as having limited proficiency in English were involved in the study. The results show the teachers' English was frequently riddled with errors which resulted in distortion of content taught. These errors were linked to negative transfers from Bahasa Melayu, teachers' interlanguage influence, unsuccessful guesswork and memorizing words without full understanding of the meaning. The writer concludes that teaching science through English requires the teachers be competent not only in content but also the medium of instruction. In addition, the writer opines that the issues of teacher preparedness and poor English language proficiency among Science and Maths teachers be addressed in order for such ETeMS to succeed.

The next two papers explore issues in the teaching and learning of Arabic language. The large number of students from the Middle East who are pursuing their studies at higher learning institutions in Malaysia has spurred interest in learning Arabic. *Sikap dan Realiti Penguasaan Kemahiran Bahasa Arab Pelajar Program j-QAF* by Ismail Muhamad, Wan Maizatul Akmar Wan Ahmad, Azman Che Mat looks at attitude and Arabic language proficiency of students involved in the j-QAF program, which was introduced by the Ministry of Education. A descriptive analysis of the data shows that the respondents' attitude is generally positive. Results from the language tests show that students are at moderate level in writing and reading component, but obtained low result in the oral component. This implies that although the students have positive self-attitude, it does not reflect satisfactory achievement. The writers suggest that teachers in the j-QAF program be given exposure to the target group who are learning Arabic in order that appropriate methods are used in teaching and learning. This will certainly help to achieve the intended objectives of the program. In addition, more research needs to be done on attitude and achievement of primary students learning Arabic, especially in Malaysia.

Rosni Samah, Mohd Fauzi Abdul Hamid, Shaferul Hafes Sha'ari and Amizan Helmi Mohamad in *Aktiviti Pengajaran Kemahiran Bertutur Bahasa Arab Dalam Kalangan Jurulatih Debat* explores the best method used by Arabic language teachers in preparing students for debates in Arabic. Respondents were 34 debate coaches from three types of Islamic religious schools. The findings show that three approaches, which are gathering relevant vocabulary and word collocation, reinforcement and application, were employed by the coaches. These approaches were found to enhance the debaters' oral

proficiency skill in the language. The writer concludes that these three approaches should to be employed in the teaching and learning of Arabic language in secondary schools in order to improve and enhance the process of learning Arabic.

A study on how geographical distance affects phonological aspects of dialects is reported by Abbas Ali Ahangar, van Oostendorp and Bahareh Soohani in *Relationship between Phonological and Geographical Distance: Persian, Sarawani Balochi and Sistani Dialect*. Using Optimality Theory (OT) and van Oostendorp's (2008) approach, the writers found that geographical variations exist among the phonological systems of Standard Persian (SP) language, Central Sarawani Balochi (CSB), a dialect of Balochi language and the Sistani dialect (SD) of Persian. While SP and SD are linguistically closely related, SP and CSB are very farther apart. While these language varieties share some similarities in their phonological system, they also have some peculiarities and are spoken in different geographical locations in Iran. The writers deduce that the linguistic distance between two languages or dialects is attributed to the geographical distance between them.

Another linguistic issue presented in this volume is on the use of tenses in language. *Aspek Kala Dalam Nahu Melayu Abad ke-17: Perspektif Orang Belanda* by Karim Harun and Maslida Yusof examine how tenses are marked in Malay. The writers point out that tenses or time has not been marked in Malay because the hearer can decide based on contexts and relations in marker. Using Frederick Houtman's conjugation tables, which focuses on tenses from the perspective of history of linguistics and Koerner's Climate of Opinion model, the findings reveal that the conjugation tables were parallel with the climate of opinion in the 17th century. The writers conclude that the findings illustrate that the grammatical aspects of the Malay language is parallel with other languages in the world, especially Latin.

The final paper on linguistics in this volume discusses how advertisers in Japan manipulate and combine various discourses in advertising their beauty products. In *Interdiskursiviti dalam Wacana Iklan Produk Kecantikan Berbahasa Jepun* Maserah Shabudin and Idris Aman report on how interdiscursivity is used in beauty products which promotes mascara. The findings draw attention to the fact that two genres were combined, namely description of ingredients and description of functions to advertise these mascara products. The description for ingredients employs dermatological discourse and scientific solutions, while for mascara and fake eyelashes, the discourse employed in the advertisement is a combination of functional description and mathematical discourse. The writers opine that findings from the study can contribute to an understanding of the complexity of discourse process involved in producing beauty product advertisements.

Three papers on literature in this volume discusses topics on identity and culture, character analysis and translation. The problem of cultural identity involves the question of reflecting on self and the essence of culture. Collin Jerome's in *The Complexity Of Malay Muslim Identity In Dina Zaman's I Am Muslim* tries to understand the complexity of Malay Muslim identity, particularly queer Malay Muslims who are featured in Dina Zaman's novel, *I am Muslim*. The writer analyses the markers and strategies employed by queer Malay Muslims in constructing their identities as well as the tensions and conflicts they experience in formulating a Malay Muslim identity marked by queerness. The results show that although queer Malays in Dina's novel embraces both sexuality and

religious faith in formulating their own ethnic identity, they experience conflict between the former and the latter. In fact, the conflict becomes a major obstacle to some of these queer Malays who wish to assert their self-identities, but are not able to do so because of their strong *iman*, *taqwa* and *ahlaq*. The findings contribute to the research in identity creation among queer Malay Muslims.

The analysis of Ophelia in *Ophelia Transformed: Revisioning Shakespeare's Hamlet* by Mohammad Safaei and Ruzy Suliza Hashim reports on a new dimension of Ophelia. Instead of her usual portrayal as an object of pleasure for Hamlet, Ophelia is endowed with agency, voice, and a skeptical cast of mind as revealed in three twenty-first century novels, namely *Ophelia*, *The Prince of Denmark*, and *The Dead Fathers Club*. The writers argue that these new dimensions of Ophelia's characterization should be seen not only as a response to the Shakespearean text, but as a reaction to the bulk of literature which has yielded to the predominantly male-oriented readings of Ophelia.

Fatemeh Safarnejad, Imran-Ho-Abdullah and Norsimah Mat Awal examine translation of metaphorical expressions in *Rendering Happiness Metaphors: A Cognitive Analysis From Persian Into English*. The writers maintain that the process of translating metaphorical expressions is a major challenge in literary translation. The study investigates the translation of emotive metaphorical expressions, 'happiness' from Persian to English in the Persian novel "Savushun". Emotive metaphorical expressions relating to happiness from the source text and two target texts were collected. The metaphor identification procedures (MIP), proposed by the Pragglejaz group and the conceptual metaphor theory (CMT) form the framework of analysis. The results reveal that both similarities and differences in the conceptual metaphors of the source text, to the target texts. The similarities are mostly attributed to the universality metaphor, whereas the differences are related to two different concepts and different culture in the translation of metaphors.

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