

EDITORIAL

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16 academic papers on theoretical and empirical issues have been put together in GEMA Online® Journal of Language Studies's final volume for this year; Volume 13 (3), 2013. The papers are on autonomous learning, teaching and learning of English as a foreign language, teaching and learning of Arabic language and Bahasa Melayu, teaching of writing, listening and reading, applied linguistics (speech act, politeness and linguistics features in sms), linguistics issues (analysis of Arabic loanword and innovation, and retention features of a dialect in Pahang) and topics in literature (theatre of the absurd technique and African feminism).

The concept of autonomous learning which views the learner as being solely responsible for his actions in the learning process has always intrigued researchers, teachers and possibly learners themselves. Naginder Kaur in her paper entitled *The Need for Autonomous Vocabulary Learners in the Malaysian ESL Classroom* argues that one of the most problematic challenges that English as a second language learners have is lack of lexical competence. This is further strengthened by studies which cited lexical errors as the most common type of errors among second language learners. In view of this, the writer opines that it is imperative to train second language learners in Malaysia to be more autonomous, with regard to learning vocabulary. She asserts that several benefits of learning vocabulary autonomously can be derived, namely, improvement in both receptive and productive language skills. Consequently, improvement can be attained in language proficiency. In addition, the writer argues that good language proficiency ensures the ability to respond appropriately to the pervading era of knowledge economy and globalisation, which in turn will enable Malaysian learners of employability. The paper ends with a strong justification as to why it is essential to train second language learners to be autonomous learners in learning vocabulary.

There is a dearth of literature on approaches and methods that can be employed by teachers to help students learn the target language. A study on *Do Scaffolding Interactions Exist in the Thai Classroom?* by Patcharee - Scheb-Buener reports on how teachers in a private university in Thailand employ scaffolding approach in their English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms, with students who have low proficiency in English. Data was based on classrooms observation involving five Thai teachers and five classrooms, in addition to field notes and interview data. Data analysis on scaffolding features and attributes based on frameworks adopted from Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) and van Lier (1996) illustrate that the verbal interaction of Thai teachers with their students reflects scaffolding features and scaffolding attributes, proposed by Wood et al. (1976) and van Lier (1996). The writer argues that scaffolding in the form-focused activities displays long sequentiality, less contingency, and less contextual support, while scaffolding in the meaning-focused activities consists of short sequentiality, more contingency, and contextual support. The writer also asserts that teachers who adopt the scaffolding technique should be aware of the concepts in both frameworks. The study offers the EFL teachers teaching at the university level and those who deal with low proficiency learners and teacher-fronted instruction, an approach to teach and earn their learners' engagement.

Listening comprehension is of great importance since it provides language input, for without proper listening skills, communication may not be achieved. However, language learners, especially those who learn English as a foreign language in a non-native setting, find it difficult to acquire good listening skill. A study that explores the listening skills of Iranian learners is reported in *EFL Learners' Perceptions towards Meta-Cognitive Strategy Use in English Language Listening* by Farinaz Shirani Bidabadi and Hamidah Yamat. The study explores how Iranian female freshman learners, who are learning English as a foreign language (EFL) at tertiary level, listen to English texts in classrooms and their perceptions towards the use of meta-cognitive processes and strategies, while listening to English texts. 84 Iranian EFL female freshman university's learners who are majoring in Teaching English as a Foreign Language (TEFL), participated in this study. The descriptive analysis of the four factors of Meta-cognitive Awareness Listening Strategies (planning and evaluation, problem-solving, personal knowledge, and directed knowledge) reveals that the learners employ directed knowledge strategies more frequently, followed by planning and evaluating, problem-solving, and personal knowledge strategies respectively. Furthermore, the interview data also support the use of the four key factors in the meta-cognitive strategies, which contribute to how EFL learners understand and listen to English texts. The writers conclude that the use of meta-cognitive strategies should be explicitly infused in the teaching and learning of listening activities in the classrooms to facilitate Iranian EFL's listening and comprehension skill.

Cohesion is regarded as an essential textual component, not only to create organized texts but also to ensure that the content is comprehensible to the reader. Despite a dearth of studies on the connection between the use of cohesive devices and the quality of writing, the process of writing cohesively still remains a challenging task for many ESL and EFL learners, even at advanced levels. *The Use of Referential Cohesion in Academic Texts by Persian EFL Learners* by Sahar Naderi, Yuen Chee Keong and Hafizah Latif investigates the use of referential ties based on the Systemic Functional Grammar model by Halliday (1994) and Halliday and Matthiessen (2004). The corpus comprised papers written and presented by 23 Persian scholars (from Malaysia and Iran) from engineering field at a Nanotechnology conference in Malaysia. In addition, the reference usage by Persians who performed research in Malaysian and Iranian universities were also compared. The descriptive and inferential statistics analysis show that Persian students studying in Malaysian universities produce and repeat some components of referential ties more frequently in their academic writing compared to their peers studying in Iranian universities. The writers suggest that English language teachers, particularly academic English teachers should give more emphasis in the teaching of cohesive markers.

New ways of reading brought about by multimodal texts of information in the 21st century demands new understandings in multiliteracies and multimodal information processing. Consequently, readers in the 21st century need to develop the ability to read and comprehend complex texts and multimedia texts, and to use a variety of media forms to make meaning. However, many non-native speakers of English, especially in the Arab speaking world, are still struggling to learn the target language in non-native environments. Hazita Azman, Abdullah Mohammad Booth and Kemboja Ismail in *Reading Practices Of EFL Yemeni Students: Recommendations For The 21st Century* report on a study which investigates the reading practices of 45 EFL second year students studying English at a university in Yemen, using the Four Resources Model of multiliteracy practices: code breaking, text participating, text uses and text analysing levels. The findings reveal that Yemeni students are medium users of the code breaker and text user practice, whereas the employment of meaning making and text analysis practices is low. Overall, these preliminary findings suggest that the reading practices and reading abilities of the Yemeni

students are still limited even at the tertiary level and have not been fully developed yet, with regard to reading in English. Pedagogically, the writers suggest that the Four Resources model can be used in identifying the students' readiness and needs to read in English in the 21st century. Subsequently, this will assist in developing a range of reading skills in context and through texts and strategies.

Technology advancement has touched every facet of life including education. Nevertheless, the place of technology in pedagogy is based on various factors and questions of effectiveness, time, increased outcomes and many more. Two papers in this volume explore how technology is employed in teaching and learning at tertiary level. Amreet Kaur Jageer Singh, Raja Nor Safinas Raja Harun and Wan Fareed in *Affordances of Wikispaces for Collaborative Learning and Knowledge Management* examine how Wikispaces is utilised as a peer editing platform for students in correcting errors they made in their descriptive essays. The writers describe how Wikispaces is used throughout the peer editing context and its affordances based on three perspectives: pedagogical, social and technological. The writers conclude that Wikispaces supports teaching and learning and promotes a variety of interactions (peer-peer and students-teacher interactions). Since Wikispaces is free, user-friendly, and easily accessible web-based tool, this study implicates the needs to consider the three mentioned affordances of wikis (pedagogical, social and technological) as a platform for teaching and learning.

Serge Gabarre, Cécile Gabarre, Rosseni Din, Parilah Mohd Shah and Aida Abdul Karim in *Using Mobile Facebook As An LMS: Exploring Impeding Factors* conduct an exploratory study in two French language courses to identify the impeding factors of using a social networking site (SNS) on smartphones. The replacement of the faculty's learning management system (LMS) had forced the writers to find alternative means to enable students to conduct discussions in online forums and used their mobile devices to access and share resources directly from the classroom. The results reveal several impeding factors with the use of Smartphones and SNS. The SNS posed inhibiting issues such as the lack of privacy, the dichotomy in the notion of friendship, and paradoxically the lack of stimulus to communicate, while the constraints from the mobile phones stemmed from their intrusive nature and their inability to perform the same tasks as laptops. The paper ends with a suggestion on the potentials offered by various alternative SNS such as Twitter in foreign language learning.

The next two papers present studies in the teaching of Arabic language and Bahasa Melayu. In *Integration of an interactive program in learning Arabic language for non-native speakers via Virtual Tutor*, Ahmed Ragheb Ahmed Mahmoud, Muhammad Sabri Sahrir and Rahmah Ahmad H. Osman report on the integration process of an interactive program, which is designed based on phonological, morphological, syntactical and semantic aspects. This program is specifically designed to teach Arabic language to the non-native speakers. The writers claim that this study is prompted by the lack of computer-assisted technology in Arabic language teaching and learning. The present study is established on textual and phonological database involving vocabulary comprehension and its manners of pronunciation and inferring, to the most highly expected errors from the non-native speakers of Arabic. With more than 120 users participating in the process, the writers claim that the tentative results statistically reflect the program's efficiency and its distinctive role in prompting the academic process and increase in the cognitive outcome among students from the experimental group, compared with the results of the realizable control group. The writers assert that this program garners practical and academic features compared to other e-learning programs.

Keberkesanan Strategi Metakognisi dalam Pengajaran Bacaan dan Kefahaman Menggunakan Teks Ekspositori by Yahya Othman and Dayang Raini Pakar examine the

effects of metacognition strategies and identify metacognition strategies employed by 60 Bruneian primary school students aged 10, in the teaching of reading expository texts in Bahasa Melayu. The sample was divided into two groups, the experimental group and the control group; with 30 students in each group. The data was analysed using t-test of independent samples to assess whether there are significant differences in the mean performance of reading comprehension between the control and experimental groups in pre and post test. The one way ANCOVA analysis was also used to determine the effect of metacognition strategies for teaching reading comprehension. The T-test analysis shows a significant difference in the means of reading comprehension performance scores between the experimental group and the control group. One Way ANCOVA data analysis demonstrates significant effect of metacognition strategies in teaching comprehension. The results confirm that teachers should employ metacognition strategies in teaching reading in order to enhance students' reading comprehension, particularly to students who demonstrate average performance in reading.

The ways in which people express their thoughts and feelings are different in different languages and cultures as reported in speech act studies. Yasser Al-Shboul and Marlyna Maros in *Condolences Strategies by Jordanians to an Obituary Status Update On Facebook* look into how Jordanians express condolences. The study investigates the speech act of condolences which were posted in Facebook to a deceased contemporary Jordanian actor who passed away in 2011. A total of 678 posts were analysed and seven major strategies were identified: praying for God's mercy and forgiveness for the deceased, reciting Quranic verses, enumerating the virtues of the deceased, expressing shock and grief, offering condolences, realizing death is a natural part of life and offering proverbs and sayings. The writers suggest that the respondents' faith and religious orientation (i.e. Islam) influence the strategies employed in expressing the speech act of condolence. The writers further assert that the understanding of how various types of speech act is expressed in different languages and cultures provide information which is of value to cross-cultural comparison studies.

Politeness is one of the central features of human communication, which can be expressed verbally or non-verbally. Rohaidah Mashudi, Ahmad Mahmood, Musanif, Adi Yasran Abdul Aziz and Hasnah Mohamad explore the relationship between politeness and communication strategies in their paper entitled *Faktor Kesopanan dan Strategi Komunikasi dalam Genre Perbincangan di Televisyen*. The corpus comprised three television program which discussed religious issues in Islam (Forum Hal Ehwal Islam), aired on channel 1 by the Malaysian Radio and Television broadcasting (RTM). Each program lasted for almost an hour. A thorough examination on the use of politeness factors and communication strategies which occur in this speech event was analysed based on the approach proposed by Asmah Hj Omar (2000). The findings show that continuous communication strategies marked with politeness strategies create effective communication in achieving the actual purpose of the discussion. The writers conclude that if the participants ignore indicators of politeness such as role, social status, power, face saving act, adherence to topic and discussion in their employment of communication strategies, the discussion would not be successful and could not achieve its aim.

The emergence of communication channels such as the Short Message Service (SMS) has given rise to a different variety of language use. Ernisa Marzuki in *Linguistic Features in SMS Apologies by Malay Native Speakers* reports on the use of textism, a hybrid form of communication, among Malay native speakers. This study investigates the pragmalinguistic conventions reflected in apologies conducted via SMS or text messages. 26 Malay native speakers participated in the study. They were required to respond to a written discourse completion tasks (WDCT) via SMS. Data were categorised and coded based on adapted versions of the coding schemes by Supyan (2006) and Crystal (2008). The results show that

there are significant variations in the SMS linguistic features used by the participants when apologising via SMS in their first language, Malay, and their second language, English. Apologies via SMS sent in Malay varied from apologies via SMS sent in English by the same participants, with regard to the *omission of vowel and/or consonant, colloquial and/or system deviation, and use of rebus abbreviation*. SMS sent in Malay were found to contain higher frequencies of all three features. The writer opines that there is influence of the participants' first language when they select textual features in their sms. The writer also states that these linguistic features indicate that when Malay NS send text messages in their L1, they are less formal compared to when they send text messages in their L2.

A paper by Zaharani Ahmad, Nor Hashimah Jalaluddin and Maizura Osman describes and explains the phonology of vowel harmony and degemination of Arabic loanwords which are incorporated into the Malay language. The study; *Harmoni Vokal Dan Degeminasi Dalam Kata Pinjaman Arab: Analisis Tatatingkat Kekangan* report on the phonological changes in Arabic loanwords in order to conform to Malay phonological system syllable structure. The data consisted of five million words based on secondary data gathered from a computerized data-based corpus of Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia-Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka (UKM-DBP). The changes in the phonological phenomena are analyzed by employing a constrain-based approach of Optimality theory. The writers argue that the phonological motivation that triggers the processes of vowel harmony and degemination is attributed to the obligation to comply with the basic syllable structure and minimal word requirement of the Malay language. The finding also shows that the nativisation of Arabic loanwords is the outcome of grammatical differences between the source and the target languages. In addition, it is also observed that the native ranking of constraints operates actively on the loanwords. The writers conclude that the findings in the study can contribute to studies on analysis of Arabic loanwords.

Inovasi dan Retensi dalam Dialek Hulu Tembeling by Mohd Tarmizi Hasrah, Shahidi A.H and Rahim Aman describes an attempt to discuss the innovation and retention features which exist in the Hulu Tembeling's dialect (DHT). The focus of the study is on one of the innovation and retention features of DHT, that is, the change of nasal consonant in final position and the retention of the high vowel in prepenultimate position. Analysis based on common comparative linguistic approach was employed in order to determine whether the sound is categorized as innovation or retention. Thus, the data of the Hulu Tembeling dialect is compared to the Proto-Malayic (MP) as reconstructed by Adelaar (1992) because of the closed relationship between the two different levels of languages. The comparative approach which is used in this study is based on the research hypotheses that the different realisation of MP's sound in Hulu Tembeling is innovation, whereas the same realisation of MP's sound in that dialect is retention. The innovation and retention features were then related to a few factors such as tentative classifications between Hulu Terengganu dan Hulu Tembeling dialect, change in progress and the existence of dialect continuum in Pahang River Basin.

Two literature papers in this volume discuss topics on absurd theatre technics and African feminism. Mas Rynna Wati Ahmad in *Finding God In Dinsman's It Is Not A Suicide: An Islamic Metaphysical Approach* examines Dinsman's use of the absurd theatre techniques in his play entitled *It Is Not A Suicide*. The writer claims that the play reflects strong philosophical underpinnings which highlight the deep emotional setbacks experienced by an individual who is caught in the tumult of finding the right path. Even though Dinsman's experimentation of this absurd theatre technique had successfully transformed the play, his experimentations on absurd theatre are not clearly understood by many. As a result, the concept of Malay absurd in Modern Malay theatre is still not fully received. Although the intellectual and religious maturity of the audience and the theatre scholars have grown over the years, the view of absurd works as pessimistic remains. The writer argues that that the

study offers a more optimistic perspective to Dinsman's work; that the play still functions within the Islamic parameters, thus, eliminating the atheistic label which has clouded Dinsman's work for more than three decades.

Dwelling or Duelling in Possibilities: How (Ir) relevant are African Feminisms? by Muhammad Alkali, Rosli Talif, Wan Roselezam Wan Yahya and Jariah Mohd Jan examines the crucial question of the relevance of Womanism, Stiwanism, Motherism, and Nego-feminism models to the global practice of woman as human. More specifically, how (ir)relevant are African feminisms? In trying to answer these questions, the paper presents a critical review of the afore-mentioned theories of African feminisms with the goal of providing readers an understanding of what is new in each model, and what is similar or different between the various strands of African feminisms. The paper concludes with the author's analysis of the model that holds the best promise or possibilities for African feminism to achieve its seemingly elusive goal of gender equality.

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