

From the Editor-in-Chief

What is the purpose of Asia TEFL in publishing a journal? Rather, what are the purposes? In this day of rapid e-mail and internet publication, academic journals are no longer the way to disseminate the latest advances in research. Rather, they provide a repository of such developments, an archive that traces with a time delay the state of a professional or academic field. The Journal of Asia TEFL thus tracks the current state of knowledge of leading researchers in Asian EFL. Because of its policy of strict review by a team of highly qualified and responsible editors, it serves at the same time to acknowledge the research and publication efforts of its members, and is reasonably interpreted by universities as evidence of academic excellence of the authors. At the same time, as a professional journal, it is expected to advise its readers on innovations that they might want to introduce into their teaching, or answers to the professional problems that they are meeting. It does this not by simply providing hints or cookbook recipes, but rather by the care with which it analyses problems, reviews the best of current literature, plans and conducts careful research, and finally suggests reasonable interpretations and proposed solutions. If you read through this and earlier issues, you should find these purposes being fulfilled, for which we must thank our editors and their teams.

In this issue, Fang-yu Chang of Tunghnan University in Taiwan deals with a problem that is common in Asian English classes, the reluctance of students to talk. Four classrooms were observed and partially recorded on video; teachers and pupils were then asked about the videos. The interviews found a multiplicity of causes for not speaking: wishing to maintain group harmony, fear of losing face, fear of showing off, the teachers' intolerance of silence, and not waiting long enough for answers. Some suggestions of how teachers might cope are put forward. In another paper, Xiaoling Ji of Shanghai Jiao Tong University compares students' responses to two writing tasks, finding

that the more specific and focused topic led to better results. In a third, Kazuya Saito of McGill University reports a pilot study comparing the perception of comprehensibility by native and near native speakers of passages read, some with lexicogrammatical and some with phonological errors. The non-native speakers were most affected by phonological changes, but a larger study would be needed to determine which factors were most important.

In another contribution, Soo-Ok Kweon of POSTECH, Korea explores the processing of idioms, finding evidence that figurative expressions like “kicked the bucket” are first processed literally. In addition, a team from Islamic Azad University in Iran (Akbar Azizifar, Mansoor Koosha and Ahmad Reza Lotfi) report on their evaluation of two series of Iranian EFL textbooks; while there is little difference between them, both are weak in their treatment of communicative situations, preferring to concentrate on form rather than function. In another paper, Fan Fang of the English Language Centre, Shantou University, China, interviewed a sample of students of English and concluded that both local and global cultures need to be included in the content. Finally, Yo Hamada of Akita University, Japan reports on a study of shadowing, where students are called on to repeat aloud parts of a text being read to them; in many cases, this led to improved comprehension.

As has been the case in earlier issues of the journal, we have here a fine collection of interesting papers that show that our authors are au fait with current research in the field. Their studies, carefully planned and executed, will provide useful ideas for Asian teachers of English. The studies themselves remain small, as I have noted in earlier editorials, being suggestive rather than conclusive: they show ability to conduct research, and provide small but significant steps in the advance of our understanding.

But there is a problem, as I hinted in my last editorial, The Editor has reported to me that the limitation in the number of papers we can publish in each issue means that we are starting to build up a backlog. Unless we can find a method of financing more pages a year, the most obvious solution will

be to raise our standards. If this happens, we will naturally want to give priority to studies that have a sufficiently large number of subjects or that are so well designed as to produce solid conclusions.

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Bernard Spolsky

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