

From the Editor-in-Chief

This issue opens with a useful investigation of the relationship between metacognitive knowledge, vocabulary size, and reading comprehension proficiency. Using a reasonably sized sample and standardized instruments measuring metacognitive knowledge and vocabulary, Jie Li (*Zhongnan University of Economics and Law, China*) and Cecilia Ka Wai Chun (*The Chinese University of Hong Kong, China*) show that reported measures of vocabulary of Chinese students using other instruments are probably inaccurate, and confirmed that metacognitive knowledge becomes important to reading comprehension only above a threshold level of vocabulary knowledge.

In the next study, Rintaro Sato (*Nara University of Education, Japan*) provides a useful summary of research literature on the usefulness of oral and written recasts in providing feedback for foreign language writers. An admittedly small study suggests that written recast can be useful.

The third paper selected for this issue, by three Iranian scholars, Masoud Saeedi (*Payam-e-Noor University*), Shirin Rahimi Kazerooni (*Islamic Azad University of Khorasgan*), and Saeed Ketabi (*University of Isfahan*) studies the effect of information grounding and inherent task structure on complexity, accuracy, and fluency on a language learner's oral performance. Sixty students divided into four groups were presented with different sets of pictures (with the information foregrounded or backgrounded and tightly or loosely organized) and required to narrate orally what occurred. The results suggested that students produced more complex narratives when they received both kinds of information, were more fluent and more accurate when the information was tightly structured, and that the combined effect of more information and tighter structure was to lead to better

performance. There was no indication of the long term effect.

The next paper by Wang Li (*Shanghai Jiaotong University, China*) and Willy A. Renandya (*Nanyang Technological University, Singapore*) studied teachers' opinions on listening comprehension. Ten carefully selected experienced teachers were interviewed for 30 to 60 minutes and asked to identify the main problems they had discovered that the student found with comprehension and to suggest ways in which they cope with those problems. Emphasis was found on assisting students with bottom-up processing. While the numbers were small, the careful selection of people to interview and the opportunity the interview gave for these experienced teachers to report their own opinions rather than select an answer proposed by the researchers justified the design.

In the fifth paper, using a sample of 2000 Japanese learners of English as a foreign language, Shigeo Uematsu (*Kyoto Sangyo University, Japan*) reported on the three-year study of pupils who received some classes in English in the elementary school and shows a tendency for this to improve their later performance but no significant difference except in speaking performance. The results were disappointing, explained in part by the few hours of instruction at the elementary level and in part by problems with the measurement instruments.

In the next study, Dong Wan Cho (*Pohang University of Science and Technology, Korea*) tackled the controversial topic of the immersion English instruction in Korea. Teachers, graduate students and undergraduate students at a technical university (where English medium instruction had been imposed by the administration rather than voluntarily selected by the teachers) were interviewed and the results showed general agreement that insufficient proficiency in English on the part of teachers and students led to unsatisfactory results.

Finally, Lindsay Mack (*Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University*), asked tutors in a writing center in a Japanese university to keep journals of

their tutoring work. On the basis of analyzing the journals, she showed major differences between these overseas writing centers and those in English speaking universities, identified problems and raised questions about how to train tutors.

Reading my comments above, a certain lack of enthusiasm may be apparent. The issue clearly shows a great deal of serious work by these writers, whose contributions, it will be recalled, have been carefully selected from a much larger number of manuscripts submitted to the journal and rejected after careful study by the peer reviewers. There is no doubt that these successful contributors deserve to be recognized by their institutions as excellent researchers and writers who have made important efforts to publish while carrying out a full load of teaching and administration. But in the kind of skeptical mood that occasionally disturbs my work as a journal editor – and I have been doing it for just on 33 years, surely time to be jaded-, I wonder how much of real significance has been contributed to knowledge in the field. How many readers will rush to replicate these studies and then attempt to carry them to the next stage? How many will change their teaching or research practices? How many will rush to the staff room to tell their colleagues, or pass on to their students what they have learned? How many will interrupt breakfast conversation to share what they have learned with their family?

Perhaps I am being over-harsh in my judgment, but the question does arise, how can we raise the standards of the journal and the work published in it? There are, a neuroscientist colleague of mine once told me, two major tests of important research: the first is that it raises a good question, and the second is that it shows how to answer a good question. Generally, our contributors do reasonably well on the first, in that they give thorough accounts of previous research in the field they have selected, although they do not always succeed in focusing their work on the next important question to be tackled. On the second, our contributors are usually overcautious, preferring common

research designs to innovative methods and fairly superficial questionnaires over the challenge of deeper analysis, and they are regularly limited by the time and resources they have available for their work.

Can we help with this? In fact, our reviewers generally do a sterling job in winnowing out less adequate contributions, although there is an understandable tendency for sympathetic judges to allow papers with tiny samples and no statistically significant results to get through the screen. Perhaps we need to reject whenever there are serious doubts, or to work even harder in suggesting revisions and in making sure that revisions are carried out. The difficulty here reflects our constant shortage of reviewers who are willing to respond fully and fast. If you would like to help with this vital but poorly rewarded labor, please volunteer your services.

But how can we deal with the pressure to publish on the one hand and the limited resources and time available to Asian researchers? I only wish we could find some way to offer small research grants to members of the Association. Perhaps our executive committee could find a way to do this.

In the meantime, I offer my continued appreciation of the hard work of our contributors, reviewers, and managing editor for producing another issue of our journal.

Jerusalem, December 2012

Bernard Spolsky

Editor-in-chief and Asia TEFL Publications Executive Director