

From the Editor-in-Chief December 2013

This is my first edition of the Journal of Asia TEFL as Editor-in-Chief and my first duty is to thank the previous Editor-in-Chief, Professor Bernard Spolsky, for all the guidance, advice and wisdom he has imparted during his term. I realise that Professor Spolsky is a very hard act to follow and I shall do my best to repay the faith shown in me by the members of Asia TEFL with their invitation for me to take over the Editor-in-Chief position.

We publish eight articles in this issue and it opens with an interesting and thoughtful study of how Korean speakers of English perceive the pronunciation of East Asian speakers of English. Lee et al. show that that the Korean English speakers (KESs) ‘manifested cognitive ambivalence’, by which they mean that while the KESs valued non-native pronunciation on the one hand, many nevertheless yearned themselves for native-like pronunciation. The authors therefore conclude that ELT practitioners and learners need to come to terms with the different roles English is currently playing, especially within the Asian region, and that their own proficiency needs not be measured by their acquisition of native-like pronunciation.

Takimoto reports on an empirical study which explored the effects of intention-oriented input-based instruction in second language pragmatics, in particular the acquisition of English request hedges of the type ‘I was wondering if...’ and ‘Would it be possible...?’. He concludes that when learners are provided with the opportunity to process pragmalinguistic and

sociopragmatic features of the target structures, intentional learning and incidental learning can take place.

In an innovative study, Maswana et al. invited 51 researchers from across 15 separate disciplines to identify expressions or language features – focussing on single word and 4-word expressions - that they considered useful in writing research papers in their particular disciplines. The Kyoto University Academic Paper Corpus was used to provide the source material. The results showed interesting differences between the expressions identified by the researchers and those identified based on frequency criteria. Using the results from this study, the authors plan to develop a database of these expressions to help students in their disciplinary writing.

Using two established corpora, the Louvain Corpus of Native English Essay (LOCNESS) and the International Corpus of Learner English (ICLE), Oh and Kang investigated the effects of English proficiency of Korean undergraduates' use of epistemic modality in argumentative writing. Perhaps not unexpectedly, they found that the range and type of epistemic items increased with proficiency, as did a preference modal verbs, nouns and adjectives compared with verbs and adverbs. Most interestingly, they found that the more proficient writers used more epistemic devices to indicate probability and fewer to express certainty, in direct contrast to less proficient writers who tended to express their arguments with certainty.

Using another corpus, in this case the British Academic Spoken English corpus (BASE), Kashiha and Heng compare, contrast and analyse the use of four-word lexical bundles in lectures in the hard and soft sciences. They show how frequently these are used and also illustrate different uses between the hard

and soft sciences. Their work, in addition to providing a valuable insight into the discourse of academic lectures, also has direct implications for EAP courses.

Nishida looks at how chunking influences reading comprehension. She undertook two related studies to investigate whether chunking texts enabled learners to improve their reading comprehension and then selected participants who had shown improvement in the first study to try and identify how learners learn about chunks and the process of chunking. The results show just how complex the relationship between chunking and reading comprehension is. Nishida concludes that it is essential to help students acquire chunking skills, especially in seeing how chunks in a sentence relate to each other.

The final two articles in this issue concern testing and the use of drama respectively. In a study which challenges the conventional wisdom that assessment practices determine the way language is taught, Pan compared teaching practices in two groups of Taiwanese colleges, namely those that had introduced English language exit test requirements (ECER schools) and those that had not (non-ECER schools). Using a mixed method study which employed questionnaires, interviews and classroom observations, her main finding was that although ECER schools used more test-related instruction than did non-ECER schools, this was not to a significant degree.

In the issue's final article, Rew and Moon examined the effects of using English drama on the learning of target expressions for primary school students. Forty-nine fourth graders, comprising 26 boys and 23 girls, took part. The results showed, generally speaking, that drama had a positive effect in helping students acquire expressions, regardless of their

proficiency or gender. Among the general findings, however, there were also some very interesting specific findings, including the ability of students to either being able to recall the whole expression or nothing at all, a phenomenon the researchers term the ‘all or nothing principle’.

We hope that readers enjoy these articles and find them stimulating and informative. We naturally encourage readers to submit articles for consideration for publication in the journal.

Australia, December 2013
Andy Kirkpatrick
Editor-in-Chief