Editorial

It is with great pleasure that we take up the roles of guest editors for the two remaining issues of *Prospect* for 2007. The current issue includes articles offering a variety of perspectives on English language teaching and learning, while the next issue is a special issue of invited articles surveying programmes for immigrant and refugee learners in different parts of the world.

On behalf of those connected with *Prospect* — recent editors, Editorial Board members and readers — we would like to acknowledge the contribution of Lynda Yates to the journal. Lynda recently made the decision to withdraw from the role of editor after seven years of involvement, both as joint and sole editor. Her input into the direction and contributions of the journal during that time has furthered the impact and reputation that *Prospect* holds nationally and internationally.

In the first article in this issue, Peter Mickan, Katrina Lucas, Brien Davies, and Mi-ok Lim add to the growing body of ethnographically-based literature that provides important and ‘rich’ insights into the nuanced experiences of students in language classes. Their focus is on the socialisation experiences that confronted adolescent refugee students enrolled in an Australian Foundation Pathway class to prepare them for entry into mainstream schooling. The authors illustrate convincingly that socialisation into school communities is not unconnected to the experiences of the students as refugees and recent arrivals — experiences, which, in fact, serve to explain the tensions, contradictions and conflicts that emerge in interactions with teachers and other students. Accommodation to school practices is an intensely value-laden process involving resistance, adaptation, tension, and transformation.

An article by Stephen Moore is the second contribution to this issue. Moore overviews a two-year project that aimed to investigate appropriate means of assessment for adult immigrant and refugee learners enrolled in the Adult Migrant English Programme (AMEP). The views of AMEP teachers were collected through a national survey, focus groups were conducted with students, and case studies of three individual learners were undertaken. Moore offers an honest and questioning account of the realities of interviewing students at this level, even with bilingual assistance, and weighs up some of the challenges of conducting research with such groups. The main outcome from the project was the development of an assessment technique grid (ATG), which has the potential to assist AMEP teachers to link types of classroom activities typically used in ongoing assessment to the curriculum framework used nationally, the Certificates in Spoken and Written English.

Susan Bridges’s article focuses on an intensive language in-service and training programme conducted in Australia for Chinese-speaking primary
and secondary teachers of English from Hong Kong. For these teachers the programme was a high-stakes professional development experience aligned to the assessment and accreditation process mandated in Hong Kong for teachers of English and Mandarin. The programme was designed to meet the predetermined syllabus components leading to assessment of language proficiency in five components: listening, speaking, reading, writing and classroom language assessment. Bridges was a teacher on the programme and, at the same time, researched the perceptions of the participants about the immersion programme in relation to language skills development, learning about teaching and intercultural learning. She used a range of quantitative and qualitative data-collection instruments, including questionnaires, interviews, observations and journals. From her research she identifies some general frames of reference, which need to be considered in the future design of short-term offshore immersion teacher-development programmes. She proposes a model of course design that connects pedagogy, language and culture in a cycle of critical reflection and learning and incorporates a post-immersion component to build capacity and consolidate learning.

The analysis of academic discourse has mainly focused on written language and most English for Academic Purposes (EAP) textbooks concentrate on the discourse features of written texts. However, recently researchers and corpus analysts have begun to turn their attention to spoken academic discourse. This discourse involves long turns at talk, which often link very complex strings of ideas and information together. Helen Basturkmen examines the devices in spoken academic discourse used to link information and ideas. She presents some categorisations of these devices, which have been identified in corpus-based studies, using examples from academic contexts. She also discusses how teachers can use these categorisations in preparing their EAP programmes and offers some teaching activities to assist students to recognise these devices and start to use them.

The article by Judy Hunter and David Cooke explores autonomy and agency in language learning and shows how language courses and resources designed for language learning can constrain or promote independence in learners. The authors review the literature, relating agency to various definitions and critiques of autonomy in language learning. For Hunter and Cooke, agency involves engagement with social contexts of language use. They provide a socially-informed course design framework, which teachers and curriculum and materials designers can use to promote initiative, social interaction and reflective learning.

Two book reviews conclude the issue. The first, by Rachel Varshney, evaluates volume two in the Open forum series (OUP 2006), which aims to
assist students from non-English speaking backgrounds in their transition from school to university-level academic communication. The second is a review by Darren Curl of Science literacy (NSW AMES 2007), a publication based on research into the literacy demands of science undertaken by the Department of Education and Training Write it right: Literacy in industry project. This publication examines the textual knowledge needed by science teachers and their students to meet the demands of senior and junior school science.

ANNE BURNS
HELEN DE SILVA JOYCE
GUEST EDITORS
The transition from high school to university-level communication has long proven a difficult one for many students, but particularly for students from non-English-speaking backgrounds. The study of English for Academic Purposes (EAP) aims to address this gap and prepare students ‘for the demands … [of] subject-matter classrooms’ (Stoller 2001: 209).

The Open forum series aims to assist learners with this transition, providing exercises to address aspects of academic communication. The series comprises three levels that target both written and spoken language skills for students who aim to improve their academic English in preparation for further study. Open forum 2 presents activities that are targeted at intermediate learners and works with oral components of the language, focusing on skills such as listening and speaking, with reference to both pronunciation and vocabulary. Accompanying the textbook is a three-CD set that provides listening activities for the student and an answer key and test booklet, providing the learner with access to autonomous learning. In addition, a website with free audio downloads offers learners the opportunity to access further resources for practising listening skills.

The textbook is organised into chapters (of which there are 12), which introduce the learner to different topics. Each topic is both presented in the materials used and included in the exercises in order to maintain a unified theme for listening and speaking practice, as well as for vocabulary development. The topics cover subjects such as city planning, visual art, ocean research, condor preservation and cultural differences, and each falls within a specific discipline (environmental studies, visual art, life science, international studies), aiming to give the learner a base of common words and expressions that they might encounter in the study of such disciplines.

While there is an attempt to provide a wide variety of topics for discussion throughout the text, many disciplines where one might expect to find a higher concentration of international students at university level (such as economic and financial studies, journalism and media studies, and linguistics – to name a few) are not included. In addition, the topics included are not covered at the level that one might expect of a university undergraduate course, meaning that students might be surprised, after finishing this series,
to be confronted with material of a much higher level – both in terms of the way content knowledge is introduced and the vocabulary used.

Sections that deal with vocabulary to help build on the unit themes are included in each chapter. The chapters look to improve the students’ oral communication through addressing word-building, collocations and phrasal verbs, which are essential aspects of any English language course but particularly important for building academic English. *Open forum* uses these sections to build on the students’ knowledge of the topic, highlighting a cohesive and communicative approach. While the concept of maintaining unity with the topic is laudable and useful for focusing student learning, the vocabulary presented is slightly limited in that it restricts students’ expression. For example, instructions for learner communicative activities ask the students to refer only to words previously introduced within the chapter. In addition, the level of English presented appears to be much lower than expected for entrance-level university courses, meaning that students using solely this course could be expected to be limited in their expression.

From an EAP standpoint, Coxhead and Nation (2001) separate English vocabulary into four groups: (1) high-frequency words, (2) academic vocabulary, (3) technical vocabulary and (4) low-frequency words. Both high-frequency words and academic vocabulary make up the bulk of words encountered in academic texts, and they indicate that academic vocabulary can improve understanding of an academic text from 80 per cent (with an understanding of high-frequency words) to 90 per cent (p 252). Academic vocabulary, the authors highlight, is ‘common to a wide range of academic texts, and generally not so common in non-academic texts’ (p 254). Words such as those that discriminate and describe, classify, and show inter-relation and explanation (Strevens 1973: 226) can be considered as some of the features of an academic lexis, yet these types of words do not feature heavily in *Open forum 2*, which seems to focus more on what could be considered ‘specialised’ terms. This is unfortunate, since, as Coxhead and Nation (2001: 256) point out, ‘[a]cademic vocabulary is the kind of specialised vocabulary that an English teacher can usefully help learners with … in contrast to technical vocabulary where the teacher can often do little because of [a] … lack of background knowledge …’

The issue of reflection of academic aspects is also present in the listening skills resources. While the textbook claims that the documents are authentic, the speech rate of spoken texts (particularly for those texts that are excerpts of lectures, for example) is slow compared to authentic speech in lectures/radio interviews and so on. Intonation in audio examples is also an issue, as the speakers seem, for the most part, to be reading from a script,
resulting in unnatural intonation and emphasis. While it could be argued that such texts build perception of the type of language used in a particular setting (for example, lecture, radio interview and so on), they do not give students a realistic impression of the rate of speech encountered in these contexts. By presenting these resources as authentic, students do not gain practice in skills such as identifying main points, opinions and supporting arguments – some of the stated aims of Open forum (p vi) – in real-life situations.

However, while the audio texts may not be authentic, their ease of access does allow learners to adhere to the old adage, ‘practice, practice, practice’, to cement their basic language skills. The textbook is accompanied by audio CDs and a test booklet and answer key, and, for the motivated learner, these additional components provide access to further resources to enhance learning. The three-CD set allows the learner to skip easily from one section of the textbook to another or from one set of questions to another, giving learners autonomy to work on those sections that they choose to study in their own time, to revise or further analyse the examples provided. Similarly, the answer key and test booklet allow learners further opportunities to develop and expand their skills. Finally, the provision of a website, which gives the student access to free audio downloads, firmly places the textbook series as one that encourages independent and autonomous learning through access to additional resources. These inclusions make this a very student-oriented resource for developing competent communicators. It would, however, have been good to see some authentic materials here, rather than more artificial examples of communication.

There is no doubt that this publication addresses a domain that is in need of further resource development, although the level at which it is aimed needs to be made clear. As indicated in the introduction, the difference between communication at a high school level and university level is often so great that many students (both native and non-native speakers alike) find themselves with additional workloads as they strive to gain not only content skills, but also appropriate communication skills that are often not addressed within the university community. Unfortunately, there are many aspects of Open forum 2 that fail to draw the learners’ attention to the differences between academic and everyday English, as well as failing to provide the learner with a completely accurate impression of the types of communication they will encounter. While this may be an appropriate text for students who are in their penultimate year of high school, I would not consider it useful for students commencing university study immediately. What Open forum does offer, however, is a focus on communicative English
skills-based practice, which is one of the cornerstones for any student who wants to go on and undertake further study in EAP.

REFERENCES


Science literacy

Reviewed by Darren Curl
Science literacy is the latest publication developed from research conducted in 1992 as part of the Write it right: Literacy in industry project. Write it right was a New South Wales Department of Education and Training-funded programme that sought to establish the needs of literacy within industry, to relate them to the New South Wales secondary schools’ curriculums, and then to develop tools that would give secondary teachers the resources to analyse and teach to these language needs explicitly. Science literacy is a report of these findings and as such is an interesting read, if rather dry, for anyone with an interest in science education, its current needs and future directions.

The study viewed language as a product of its social context. The book is organised into seven chapters, and structured into two related parts. The first four chapters provide a social context for the study and a convincing argument for the need to provide explicit science literacy education within the current high school curriculum environment. The second part, consisting of chapters five and six, deals with language, specifically analysing the language of science and technology with the tools of systemic functional linguistics. This analysis is presented in chapter six and occupies more than half the book. The conclusion in chapter seven sums up the findings of chapter six and ties them to the arguments presented in the first four chapters.

The book was developed as a teaching resource. As the expositions in the first four chapters demonstrate, science literacy is one of the most important areas of literacy that students need to develop if they are to experience equality of opportunity in both the workplace and everyday life. The grammatical complexities identified in chapter six reappear in many texts that may be related to science, often by field (that is, topic) or purpose, such as news stories or instruction manuals for new technology. These complexities are often the very literacy features with which learners struggle. In the current economic and social climate, this resource is thus a timely one and, as the introduction to the book states, will be relevant to teachers of literacy in all sectors.

The social context of science literacy and the demands that industrial and post-industrial societies make of people form important background knowledge, which is presented in chapters one to four. The first chapter introduces the study, the breakdown of employment within industrial society, the differing literacy requirements within each sector of employment, and
the links between these sectors and the school system. The second chapter
introduces science and its prominence in modern society, due to its links
with economic production. Chapter three looks at the place of science in
education and how students are apprenticed into the discipline through the
teaching of science in high school and further education and training.
The fourth chapter expands on these notions/topics by looking at science
literacy and workplace stratification, particularly the breakdown of literacy
needs and skill levels according to the extent of education and training that
workers at different levels have undergone.

Chapter five diverts from these arguments and introduces the concepts
of systemic functional linguistics that are used in the analysis of scientific
texts in chapter six. An important section in chapter five deals with a genre
classification of such texts, which is a key to chapter six.

It took some reading to work out the way that chapter six was organised,
as its structure is flagged very inexplicitly in the first few paragraphs, specifi-
cally with the words:

Scientific literacy is organised in terms of increasing specialisation and techni-
cality. It starts with texts that closely resemble everyday spoken English and
progresses to texts about postgraduate research where the language and subject
matter are remote from everyday experience (p 58).

The authors start with the least complex texts and work up to more
complex texts, analysing the language patterns, introducing and explaining
grammatical terms as they go, and using and building on the concepts intro-
duced in chapter five. By beginning with simpler texts, the authors are able
to introduce features and metalanguage as they arise, which are repeated in
more complex language patterns in later, more difficult, texts. Occasionally,
they refer back to the patterns of previous examples, thus recycling the
concepts and reflecting sound teaching principles. A textual pattern emerges
and is reiterated in the concluding chapter; it shows how scientific language
becomes more complex and remote from everyday use with increasing
specialisation and levels of training. While this may seem like a common-
sense notion, the authors demonstrate systematically how this happens.

Once I got used to the way the analysis was unfolding, this format
worked for me, as it seemed a logical way to organise the chapter. However,
it would be useful to have the organisation made clearer at the beginning of
the chapter.

Additionally, the layout and differentiation of headings and subheadings
in chapter six is confusing, which is unhelpful when readers are dealing with
challenging subject matter. A glossary of grammatical and linguistics terms
that readers could refer to when working through the concepts applied to
the text analyses would provide valuable assistance. A busy science teacher in a suburban high school would be likely to struggle with this book for the reasons just noted.

Although there is a solid reference and further reading list at the back of the book, I would have liked to see more extensive in-text referencing, particularly for the arguments built up in chapters one to four. These chapters summarised a substantial amount of social research very succinctly and clearly, but it would be helpful to have their precedents in academic work referenced.

That said, I found the explanations of the texts clear and plainly worded. The authors seem to anticipate problems in understanding at certain points in the analysis in chapter six. They introduce or recycle concepts and provide very clear examples from the texts, along with precise explanations. Very helpfully, these examples are laid out in the margins and marked with arrows.

Typically, science education has occurred in a vacuum devoid of social context and antithetical to language education. At high school, the traditional choice for students of my generation was between science and humanities, and science educators were unlikely to be very interested in language matters. This point is covered in chapter three of Science literacy in the excellent critique of traditional and progressive pedagogies in teaching science. Chapter three explains why science teachers should be interested in language if they wish to prepare students to face the demands and rigours of both higher education in science and the increasingly science-literate workplace.

It is precisely the patterns of language discussed in Science literacy that provide great difficulties for students. In particular, teachers of science, academic English, and of adult language and literacy to migrants and overseas students will find much useful explanatory material here, which will be of value to them in guiding their students’ learning. In this respect, in spite of the challenges of engaging with it as a reader, Science literacy succeeds admirably. The strength of its analysis and the power of the arguments it presents are its best achievements.
Notes on contributors

Helen Basturkmen is a senior lecturer in the Department of Applied Language Studies and Linguistics at the University of Auckland, New Zealand. She teaches MA courses in discourse analysis and research methodology. She also teaches undergraduate courses in English for Academic Purposes. Her areas of research interests and publications are in spoken discourse analysis, EAP and ESP. Before coming to New Zealand, she worked in UK, Turkey and Kuwait as a teacher of EFL/ESL and as a teacher trainer.

Susan Bridges has taught in mainstream and higher education for the past 25 years. She is currently an assistant professor with the Faculty of Dentistry at The University of Hong Kong working in curriculum design and e-learning. Prior to this, she was a research fellow with the Faculty of Education at Griffith University. Her research focuses on pedagogy, cultural and linguistic diversity, and interaction. In 2007, she was awarded the International Award for Excellence by the International Journal of Diversity for a co-authored paper on multicultural education.

David Cooke has taught ESOL and language teacher education in Victoria University of Wellington, York University (Toronto) and Unitec NZ. He has worked in language education in Britain, Canada, Cuba, Mozambique, New Zealand, Nicaragua and the People’s Republic of China. His research interests include immigration, race relations and language learning beyond the classroom.

Brien Davies is an experienced ESL teacher currently teaching in a secondary level New Arrivals Program in South Australia.

Judy Hunter lectures in ESOL/Applied Linguistics in the School of Social and Cultural Studies at Massey University, Auckland. Her research interests are the social practices and development of language and literacy, particularly among speakers of English as an additional language. Her research includes ethnographic studies in school, university and workplace settings.

Mi-ok Lim is a University of Adelaide PhD candidate. Her research is focused on exploring social practices in classroom talk within Korean secondary schools.

Katrina Lucas is a Linguistics Research Assistant in the University of Adelaide. Her recent Masters thesis looked at narrative and identity in ESL learning of African refugee students.
NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Peter Mickan is Senior Lecturer in Applied Linguistics at the University of Adelaide. His research is focused on socialisation, language use and learning. He is currently heading a long-term study on refugee settlement in South Australia, a project on IELTS preparation, and an Indigenous language teacher education program.

Stephen Moore is a lecturer in Applied Linguistics in the Department of Linguistics at Macquarie University. He is also a researcher at the AMEP Research Centre and former coordinator of the Assessment Task Bank.