

Editorial

This final issue of *Prospect* for 2003 embraces a wide range of issues relevant to language professionals, from issues of teacher education, language testing, and the teaching of pronunciation in TESOL, to the evaluation of argumentative essays and the nature and role of literacy programs more generally.

As Barbara Mullock points out in the first article in this issue, despite the interest there has been in general education in the issue of what makes a good teacher, applied linguistics and TESOL have been slower to address this question in empirical studies. Her study addresses this gap in the literature through an exploration of the perceptions of novice and experienced teachers from different language and cultural backgrounds about what constitutes a good teacher, and the results have implications for language teacher education, language teaching methodology and cross-cultural communication more generally.

Iwashita and Grove examine the way in which the Occupational English Test is rated. The Occupational English Test (OET) is the language test used to evaluate the language skills of overseas trained health professionals. The test has been running for several years in Australia, and the data examined in this paper come from eight years of ratings. The analysis investigates the ways in which the raters assess the different criteria that are used on the test and look at variations in rating across criteria.

The third article by Eileen Honan challenges taken-for-granted assumptions made by educational policy makers, academics and literacy researchers about literacy, empowerment, and the literate/illiterate dichotomy. Drawing on her work with primary school teachers in Papua New Guinea (PNG), Honan explores the connections between these assumptions and the implementation of vernacular education, providing illustrations and examples of the practical implications of the unquestioned acceptance of these assumptions.

For those who need convincing that adults can benefit from the explicit teaching of pronunciation, Graeme Couper's article should provide some encouragement. Reporting on an action research project on the teaching and learning of pronunciation by adults, Couper reports that his intermediate level students not only made gains in their pronunciation on post-tests, but were also positive in the comments they made on the program in a survey of their reactions to the syllabus and their beliefs regarding the teaching and learning of pronunciation.

The paper by Siew Mei and Allison investigates a topic of great relevance to those working in the tertiary sector – the evaluation of undergraduate argumentative essays. The authors use appraisal theory to analyse essays at

different levels and examine the ways in which the writers of the essays are able to negotiate and evaluate the meanings in the claims that they are making in their essays. All essays show a range of appraisal resources being used by writers in both groups, but also find differences when a fine-grained analysis is undertaken.

This issue also includes two reviews. The review by Harding evaluates a book on teaching grammar which he finds a useful resource for the classroom. The review by Woodward-Kron, of an edited volume on research and literacy practice, picks up on some of the themes discussed in the article by Honan.

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Book reviews

Teaching grammar

Scrivener, J. (2003). Oxford: Oxford University Press

Reviewed by Luke Harding

As a newly qualified teacher in Japan, I worked at a language school which provided neither photocopying facilities nor overhead projectors. Along with my colleagues, I was reliant on whiteboard alone, and quickly honed my talents as an artist, a mime and a storyteller to supplement the set texts. A book such as Jim Scrivener's *Teaching grammar* would have been a useful resource for those times when I ran out of ideas, or tired of repeating activities across classes.

Scrivener's name will be familiar to the generation of Cambridge/RSA CELTA graduates for whom *Learning teaching* (Scrivener 1994) was the standard text. Like its predecessor, *Teaching grammar* aims to develop the teaching skills of its readers through simple, step-by-step lesson plans. *Teaching grammar* is part of Oxford Universities Press's 'Oxford Basics' range, which, at present, includes nine other titles. This range is pitched at newly qualified or experienced teachers who 'may be unfamiliar with communicative methodology'. In this sense *Teaching grammar* could be particularly useful as a supplementary text in EFL situations where traditional, rule-based grammar teaching prevails.

Teaching grammar is a slim volume of just 65 pages, divided into four sections: an introduction, a collection of 25 classroom activities, an appendix of techniques and lesson ideas, and a glossary of key terms. The introduction places Scrivener's methodological preoccupations firmly in the communicative tradition which sanctions the explicit teaching of itemised grammatical structures: 'So why do we use a grammar? We use it to communicate more effectively, more precisely with others' (2003: 1). He rejects traditional approaches to grammar teaching, suggesting that we can not associate the rote learning of grammar rules with the acquisition of grammar, as 'grammar only makes any sense if you can use it' (2003: 1). Scrivener's recommended pedagogical aims are to enable learners to notice, understand, try and then finally use grammar. In this respect, his methodology is based on the ideas of 'noticing' and 'consciousness raising' which have been discussed in the work of Schmidt (1990; 1993) and Ellis (1996).

The 25 lesson plans are designed to illustrate particular grammar teaching techniques, such as: using flashcards, miming, doing role-plays, setting up information gap activities, dictation, sentence auctioning and several other

well-known activities of the communicative classroom. Each lesson plan states which technique is being used; the language in focus; the appropriate level; and resources and preparation required, as well as a time guide. The sample lesson is then systematically described in stages, which are numbered. Readers can check why particular techniques are used by turning to the appended 'techniques and lesson ideas' where the communicative qualities of each technique are explained. For teachers who are not well acquainted with communicative language teaching (CLT) terminology, the glossary provides further information by defining 'monitoring', 'feedback', 'pair work' and other key terms.

The strength of Scrivener's book is its simplicity. It is well designed, easy to follow and portable. Furthermore, by providing both lesson plans and a description of CLT techniques, it collapses what might have been two books into one. *Teaching grammar* also employs a variety of what Ellis (2002) has termed 'methodological options' including the 'explicit description' of grammar points, the provision of 'data' through written and oral texts, and the 'operations' of producing, receiving and judging target structures. Of the productive techniques, Scrivener advocates both controlled practices and freer, student-initiated activities. While eclectic, *Teaching grammar* is quite progressive in its methodological concerns. However, it stops short of addressing sociocultural learning issues or the ideas of collaborative dialogue which have been discussed in the work of Swain (2000) and Lantolf (2000) recently, and are gaining prominence in the field of second language acquisition.

Indeed, *Teaching grammar* has a number of limitations both in scope and content. First, the lesson plans range in level from elementary to intermediate. Are we to assume that the targeted readership do not teach classes who are upper-intermediate or advanced? While Scrivener may argue that the same techniques are adaptable, teachers of advanced classes with little CLT experience may find it difficult to apply these techniques to more complex grammar points without examples. Some explicit, higher-level lesson plans would no doubt have aided many teachers. Second, the simplicity of the layout is sometimes at odds with the simplicity of instructions. In one elementary-level lesson plan, teachers are advised to use pictures to elicit comparative adjectives. After the class have produced the target language, teachers are instructed to write the rule on the board:

'big big one syllable -er'.

(2003: 41)

Teaching the word 'syllable' and the concept behind it requires some attention in elementary classes; we cannot expect an elementary student to

be *au fait* with that term. Finally, Scrivener addresses pronunciation issues twice in the book, and each time they are equally problematic. For example, he urges the teacher to read instructions with the following stress pattern:

• • •
 Contestant three can't pick up an elephant
(2003: 15)

There is no explanation as to why these particular words are marked as stressed in the sentence; indeed in different circumstances it might be different words which are stressed. For EFL teachers who are not familiar with CLT, the teaching of pronunciation may not be second nature – indeed many teachers using this book might not be native speakers. Further explanation of sentence stress would have been a useful addition in these instances.

Teachers who are familiar with CLT methodology will find little that is new in *Teaching grammar*. Many of the activities Scrivener describes have been well documented in the 'Grammar Games and Activities' series (Watcyn-Jones and Howard-Williams 2001a; 2001b), or even in prominent CLT oriented textbooks such as *New headway* (Soars and Soars 2000) and *Cutting edge* (Cunningham, Moore and Eales 2001). Nevertheless, for teachers unfamiliar with CLT, who have to teach grammar-heavy syllabi, and want their students to talk more in the classroom, *Teaching grammar* is a useful book. Despite its limitations of scope, the techniques can be adapted to illustrate several grammar points, and the lesson plans can provide a quick source of inspiration for struggling teachers.

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Practice and research in literacy

Mukherjee, A., & Vasanta D. (Eds.). (2002). New Delhi: Sage Publications India Pvt Ltd.

Reviewed by Robyn Woodward-Kron

The development and implementation of literacy programs is rarely an ideologically neutral activity. Literacy provision can assist individuals to gain greater access to education and to participate more fully in society, while large-scale literacy projects have the potential to effect fundamental social change. Less idealistically, the more sobering reality may be that literacy provision can also be one means of reproducing the dominant social order and assisting poor people 'to serve their masters better'. *Practice and research in literacy* is a volume of collected papers which presents different perspectives on the role of literacy in society, the issues related to literacy and mass literacy projects in developing countries. The book is organised into two sections. The first section contains five papers addressing questions of the socially transforming role of literacy and literacy education, while the second, Literacy practice: Pedagogy and evaluation, reports on mass literacy projects and campaigns recently undertaken in India.

The editors' introductory chapter is an informative and thought-provoking paper. Mukherjee and Vasanta contextualise their discussion by pointing out that wherever mass literacy drives have been undertaken in the world, the motivation has been to bring about major social transformation. In some cases, this transformation may have been to improve the lives of the poor, while in other cases, such as in pre-independence India, literacy movements have been part of the struggle to free the nation from oppressive regimes or foreign rule.

The editors see the recent literacy drives in India from a critical perspective. That is, they argue that recent campaigns have not been initiated by governments concerned to bring about radical social change, rather that they should be seen as part of India's modernisation process. Furthermore, the literacy campaigns of the last two decades have been largely unsuccessful, as adult literacy rates remain around 60 per cent of the population. This rate, as Mukherjee and Vasanta argue, is far below the average of economically developed countries. The remainder of the chapter provides an overview of recent mass literacy campaigns in India and their design and theoretical framework, and offers some discussion as to why the authors consider these campaigns to have been largely unsuccessful.

The focus of discussion is the government-sponsored National Literacy Mission, commonly called the Total Literacy Campaign (TLC), which commenced in 1988 and aimed to impart 'functional literacy' to about 80 million

adults in the age group of 15–35 years by 1995. Most of the following chapters refer to the TLC, and to two campaign districts in particular which, unlike other districts, were successful in terms of raising literacy rates as well as in effecting some social transformation. These districts are the Ernakulam district of Kerala and Nellore in Andhra Pradesh.

In Nellore, the literacy campaign was embedded in a women's movement to change governmental policies on liquor which had contributed to a cycle of alcoholism, domestic abuse and poverty. Indeed, the movement was so successful that it threatened government monies from liquor taxes and licensing fees. This resulted in intervention by the government to contain the movement, and remove the contentious literacy primers, and the partial dismantling of the literacy campaign. Mukherjee and Vasanta comment on this reversal in governmental attitudes to the literacy campaign as follows:

It makes one wonder whether the logic of governance can permit the State to implement a radical agenda for literacy which would make the masses question the very basis of the exploitative structures on which it rests. (p 16)

Mukherjee and Vasanta point to the existence of dominant and weaker discourses on literacy in India. The dominant mode views literacy as a neutral, skill-based decoding activity, and assumes that once the skills have been learnt individuals will be able to access education and improve their economic status. On the other hand, the alternative discourses argue that mass literacy campaigns must take into account local literacies and the specific social context of the learners, and that the curriculum needs to be negotiated with the participants in order for the campaigns to have any significant, meaningful impact. This volume, the editors suggest, presents perspectives from the dominant and alternative discourses on literacy and education in India, and aims to bring about greater exchange between literacy theorists and practitioners.

The first paper in the theoretical section on literacy, society, language and education by Rama Kant Agnihotri is provocatively titled 'A farce called literacy'. According to Agnihotri, the assumptions surrounding the concept of literacy need to be examined as literacy is implicitly tied to poverty and disadvantage. 'The implicit understanding seems to be that the poor need literacy and the rich and the middle class need education' (p 32). Instead, he argues, education should be the long-term goal, and minimalist and short-term literacy campaigns are not the means of achieving this goal.

Brian Street's chapter, 'Literacy and development: Challenges to the dominant paradigm' continues Agnihotri's theme of challenging the dominant and simplistic perceptions of literacy that exist in developing countries. Sadhna Saxena's paper locates the Total Literacy Campaign in Nellore in its

historical context, analysing the impact of the TLC on the women's anti-liquor agitation and the government's subsequent intervention in the campaign.

Aditi Mukherjee's paper, 'Language, dialect, and literacy', considers the question of which variety of language should be adopted in literacy primers. She argues that there are considerable benefits to be gained from negotiating between the minority and mainstream language varieties instead of one substituting and dominating the other. The final theoretical paper, Lachman Khubchandani's 'Universal literacy and oral cultures', continues the discussion of language variation in literacy education, arguing that spoken languages need to be taken into account as they have always played an important role in less formal education settings.

The second section of *Practice and research in literacy* contains ten papers concerned with issues of literacy pedagogy and evaluation. The first paper by Lakshmidhar Mishra, the former Director-General of the National Literacy Mission, provides the official perspective of the total literacy program and its achievements. Other papers, such as Ilina Sen's 'Culture-specific literacy work', report on specific cases of issues raised in the first section of the book. In Sen's paper it is the use of a dialect in literacy primers instead of standard Hindi.

A paper by Vasanta, Gupta and Devi evaluates the social and political impact of literacy by focusing on the campaign experience in Nellore. This paper includes a useful appendix of referenced descriptions of different conceptions of literacy such as Hasan's action literacy, critical literacy, emancipatory literacy, lay literacy, local or vernacular literacy, and so on.

Many of the literacy and education issues raised in this volume will resonate with literacy theorists and practitioners. This should compensate for any initial difficulties readers unfamiliar with the Indian social and educational context may have.

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Elisabeth Grove joined the Language Testing Research Centre as a Research Fellow in 1993 after many years' teaching English, ESL and French. She has worked on a variety of research, program evaluation and test development projects and has also taught English for Academic Purposes and courses on language assessment. Her research interests include the assessment of communication skills, particularly in the healthcare context, and the teaching and assessment of writing.

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