Editorial

The final volume of the year brings together authors from Hong Kong, New Zealand, Japan and Australia writing on a diverse range of issues in both teaching and research issues in language learning. In the first article, Xuesong Gao looks at the use of questionnaires in learner strategy research, and argues that we need to move away from the current over-dependence on survey methodology as a means to find out what learners actually do, and move towards exploration of alternative approaches to data gathering, in particular the use of multi-method and qualitative approaches.

The next article, by Helen Anderson, Hayo Reinders and John Jones-Parry, explores the burgeoning but often overlooked phenomenon of self-access centres (SACs) in Australia and New Zealand. On the basis of their investigation of various aspects of SACs in terms of their structure, the pedagogical approaches they embrace, their resourcing, as well as perceptions of their effectiveness, the authors suggest that they play a very useful role. However, they also argue that it is important to set standards for them and support their development as they become established as an academic service for adult learners in a variety of settings.

The next two articles report on studies which have investigated the writing of two different types of second language writers from the migrant community in Australia: adult learners who have largely acquired English outside the language classroom and a high school student. Anna Phillips examines the writing of low proficiency migrant learners using both tools from Systemic Functional Grammar and from a cross-linguistic European Science Foundation project on language development. She found that the Basic Variety patterns which had been found in the naturally acquired spoken language of learners in Europe also occurred in the written texts of migrant writers in Australia, suggesting that these patterns may occur in naturally acquired writing as well as in naturally acquired speech. In the third article, Ross Forman also draws on Systemic Functional analysis as he investigates the writing development in English over two texts produced approximately one year apart by a Chinese–Vietnamese background high school student. Forman charts progress in the way the student represents his experience and in the way he approaches the task itself, although he also identifies some areas where the student’s writing had not progressed, or where it was apparent that problematic grammatical forms were being avoided.

The final article in this volume by Kazuhito Yamato reports on a study of the use of intonation patterns to signal different meanings by learners of
English in Japan. The study investigates the features of intonation used by Japanese English as a Foreign Language Learners to signal illocutionary force, and compares these with ‘standard’ native-speaking models. Although there was some evidence that the higher-proficiency learners in the study used a wider variety of tones, overall, the results showed that the Japanese learners tended to use a falling tone, irrespective of the intention they were trying to convey. These results show that even higher proficiency learners are unable to reliably use intonation to signal their intended meaning, and suggest that more attention should be paid to this relationship in language programs.

As usual, two book reviews complete this volume. The first, by Susy Macqueen, is of Second language writing (2003) by Ken Hyland. As suggested by its title, this book offers an overview of different theoretical approaches as well as practical guidance to those involved in the teaching of writing in a broad range of classroom contexts. The second review, by Marilyn Lewis, is of the collection English language teaching in East Asia today (2003) edited by Ho Wa Kam and Ruth Y L Wong, which explores the teaching of English in 20 different countries through the writing of authors from the region.

As another year draws to a close, I would like to pass on my sincere thanks to Gillian Wigglesworth and Stephen Moore for their invaluable editing work on Prospect over the year, and also to the editing team at NCELTR for all their help and support. I would also like to take this opportunity to wish all our readers a very Happy New Year.

LYNDA YATES
Book Reviews

Second language writing


Reviewed by Susy Macqueen

Teachers are often ill-prepared for the task of teaching writing, despite the fact that second language writing is getting more and more attention from language school administrators, researchers, exam providers and publishers. Limits on time and resources dictate that current research and theory have little chance of filtering into classroom practice, so most teachers cope as best they can by intuitively mixing the coursebook with personal experience. Second language writing, by Ken Hyland, bridges this gap by providing informed practical guidance, which can be applied to a broad range of classroom contexts.

Hyland starts with different theoretical approaches to the teaching of writing and the phenomenon of second language writers, and then deals separately with aspects of the curriculum cycle: syllabus design, lesson planning, materials, tasks, technology, feedback and assessing writing. He finishes with a final chapter about undertaking research. Each chapter begins with an aim, has reflection tasks interspersed throughout, and ends with a bullet point summary and comprehensive discussion activities. These make it especially useful for professional development seminars. Although many of the ‘reflections’ are genuinely thought-provoking, some are less so and seem to be included just to maintain the symmetry of the format. All topics are discussed with reference to examples from coursebooks and classroom practice.

As with most discussion on the teaching of writing, Hyland describes a somewhat historical pedagogical dichotomy: process (emphasis on multi-drafting and evaluating individual learner’s writing) or product (analysing and emulating model genres). In the last decade, teacher texts have tended not to put all the pedagogical eggs in one basket, recommending that teachers combine these two perspectives by encompassing both the individually-oriented cognitivist and the socially-grounded genre-based perspectives (eg Tribble 1996). It seems to me that what we are really talking about in the actual classroom application is a matter of degree, not a qualitative difference, however polarised the theoretical discussion may be. Hyland, too, advocates a synthetic middle way, advising ‘that learners have an adequate understanding of the processes of text creation; the purposes of writing and how to express these in effective ways through formal and
rhetorical text choices; and the contexts through which texts are composed and read and which give them meaning’ (p 24). Initially, he briefly defines a range of pedagogical orientations, which are vaguely chronological in the history of second language teaching: language structures, language function, creativity, the writing process, content and genre. Although each approach is dealt with separately, he is at pains to point out that teachers usually combine them, displaying a refreshing understanding that teachers aren’t prone to sticking doggedly to single methodologies. Hyland’s recommended syllabus is a combination of process, genre, context, system and content, using one as the ‘core element’ on which to base a developmental sequence (p 71). This nicely balanced recipe could have done with a bit more fleshing out initially, but is elaborated on throughout the book.

Although they are presented in different chapters, needs analysis, syllabus design, lesson/task planning and assessment are conceptualised as ‘phases that overlap and influence each other’ (p 212). Teachers have varying degrees of control over these phases and Hyland is sensitive to this classroom reality. Needs analysis, for instance, is treated as the starting point for syllabus design. While this is not a new suggestion, it remains a difficult one to follow through in institutional contexts, where syllabuses are often predetermined. Other contextual constraints that may affect syllabus customisation are listed, although they are not accompanied by explicit problem-solving strategies. Frequently, textbook selection is not up to the individual teacher either, and Hyland proposes ways in which textbooks might be adapted to suit particular group needs. Similarly, many teachers have little control over assessment, but most teachers are affected in some way by the evaluation of their students’ language skills, whether through in-house placement tests or international language exams. Hyland includes a substantial introduction to assessment issues, covering the development of assessment instruments in some detail, as well as the heavier but essential topics of reliability and validity. Thus, there is food for thought for educators at various levels of school administration.

A noticeable feature of teaching writing is its time consumption. Two obvious culprits are materials/task development, particularly given the limited range of good writing coursebooks on the market, and the provision of feedback on student work. There is plenty of guidance for both these areas. For the first, materials/task development, using relevant, authentic materials (ie that were ‘created to be used in real-world contexts’, p 88) is obviously motivating, engaging and essential for addressing individual student needs, but authenticity is an ideal fraught with difficulty. Hyland outlines the advantages and disadvantages of using authentic materials and
provides detailed guidelines for the selection and use of coursebook and supplementary texts. The chapter devoted to the development of tasks for the writing classroom is based largely on Nunan’s (1989) components of a language task: input, goal, setting, roles and activity, and ‘scaffolding’ or providing developmentally appropriate support to the learner. The ‘activity’ component of tasks is described as being either ‘real-world’ (simulating target writing purposes) or ‘pedagogic’ (developmental) and can be placed along a continuum, with tasks requiring a great deal of teacher support at one end and relative learner independence at the other. Although Hyland locates ‘scaffolding’ in the middle of this continuum, it underpins his conceptualisation of the teaching cycle as a process with different interactional stages.

The second major time consumer for writing teachers is marking. The chapter dealing with feedback focuses on who gives it, what form it takes and what it should focus on. Teachers have long been torn between the desire to give their students comprehensive and detailed feedback, the time required to do so, and the nagging suspicion that it may be pointless. There is a summary of various approaches to giving feedback and, under the general categories of ‘praise, criticism and suggestions’ (p 187), examples of teacher feedback and learner reactions to feedback. Hyland is wisely cautious about separating form and content in giving feedback. As he points out, language and ideas are not distinct. ‘Language is a resource for making meanings, not something we turn to when we have worked out what we are going to say’ (p 185). Teacher–student conferencing and peer feedback are covered in some detail. However, even with relatively small classes, teacher–student conferences are tricky in terms of time management, whether they happen in class time or out of it. Although it is a more difficult feedback method to implement effectively, peer feedback does create more participation and Hyland makes a number of suggestions as to how to make it work.

The chapter titled ‘Second language writers’ raises important considerations about culture and the individual learner. Besides the differing effects of learners’ first languages, Hyland also addresses cultural differences that exist in genre and classroom expectations (the role of the learner and the teacher). His discussion is informed by recent thinking in the area of contrastive rhetoric, highlighting some of the implicit values of the western classroom, such as the emphasis on creativity and critical thinking (extension of knowledge) over reproduction (conservation of knowledge) (Ballard and Clanchy 1991). English is described as a ‘writer-responsible’ language because the onus is on the writer to communicate as clearly as possible, rather than requiring readers to assemble the argument for
themselves. These perspectives will provide insight for the staffroom in which plagiarism and ‘lack of logical thought’ are regular complaints about learner essays. Moreover, in the minute-to-minute of lesson planning, it is easy to lose sight of the globalising role of the English language, and Hyland stresses that students learning to write in English need to ‘understand the discourses they have to write, without viewing them as superior’ (p 26). Equally important is the caveat that culture is not homogenous or static, and that students have ‘individual identities beyond the language and culture they were born into’ (p 37).

A chapter is devoted to technology, which tells us something of the state of the art. While computers are not yet the norm, they are sufficiently ubiquitous in writing courses that a teacher text must explicitly deal with technology. Hyland points out that the effects of new technologies on writing (eg nonlinearity) have implications for what and how we teach. The chapter includes commentary on the nature of word processing and the pedagogical possibilities for both synchronous (eg chat) and asynchronous (eg email) computer writing. The Internet is described as a potential source for ready-made teaching resources, authentic texts for materials development, publishing student work and information-gathering, and there is a list of relevant websites. Wider and more fundamental effects of the Internet, such as the role of interaction and collaboration via computers, the growing essay trade and plagiarism, are also discussed. Hyland is somewhat more enthusiastic about concordancing and its potential as a tool for research and reference than about CALL (Computer Assisted Language Learning), which he feels is rarely informed by language learning principles. He stresses that computer technology is a resource, not a method, being only as effective as the teaching it supports.

The chapter on research will appeal to teachers embarking on further study. It is true that many teachers reflect on their practices and experiment with new ideas, but formalising these processes as research is only for the academically motivated. Key concepts and steps in classroom research are covered, including topic identification, data collection methods, ethical considerations, qualitative and quantitative research, and elicited and naturalistic data. The section on analysing data deals broadly with structured and unstructured data and touches on methodological aspects such as coding data, discourse analytic techniques and statistical procedures. The advantages and drawbacks of the various approaches are discussed and the list of references at the back of the book provides a balanced sample of current and historical perspectives for readers wanting to investigate chapter topics further.
In Second language writing Hyland draws together a wide range of research and a balance of theoretical perspectives in a way that is relevant for the classroom practitioner. Writing and writers emerge as complex constructions, thankfully freed of simplistic metaphors. For teachers starting out, it is a comprehensive and supportive resource that assumes no prior knowledge and deals with all aspects of teaching practice. For those with experience and management responsibility, there is also plenty to mull over.

REFERENCES
English language teaching in East Asia today
Reviewed by Marilyn Lewis

*English language teaching in East Asia today* is a book for teachers who have connections with East Asia through their own teaching or through working with students from these countries. It is also a book for academics interested in the wider sociocultural issues of second or foreign language teaching. As the title suggests, the content deals with the teaching of language, rather than the more traditional teaching of literature, which was often a part of foreign language courses in this region.

The 25 chapters include five general ones on the region, followed by 20 on different countries arranged, diplomatically, in alphabetical order; thus, Brunei Darussalam is first and Vietnam is last. A few countries have a couple of chapters each (China PR, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia and the Philippines), while most have one. Singapore, perhaps by virtue of being the book’s source, has three. There is also a prologue and an epilogue. To judge by their names, most authors come from the country they write about. With such a range of information in the 500 or so pages, readers will probably start with chapters on the countries they are most interested in. With only mild apologies, therefore, this review starts in the same way.

Because of my on-and-off attendance at RELC (Regional English Language Centre) seminars almost since they started, I turned first to a chapter written by one of the editors, ‘RELC’s role in ELT in Southeast Asia (1968–2002): Mediating between the centre and the periphery’. In the format adopted by all the writers, Kam draws on extensive literature as well as on official RELC documents. Among other questions addressed is to what extent has RELC fulfilled its original SEAMEO (Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization) intention of training ‘key personnel’ (p 51) through its seminars and its longer courses for regional teachers? In answering the question, Kam provides factual information and published opinions, and his own evaluation of the two. His experience as former dean of the School of Education at Singapore’s National Institute of Education has given him background knowledge to draw on. With reference to the debates on where the heart of ELT stands, the article concludes with the view that ‘RELC has managed to initiate a gradual (paradigm) shift in moving the *periphery* to the *centre*’ (p 75).

My eye took me next to the chapter about Cambodia by Chamnan Pit and Hok Roth, rector and lecturer respectively at the Royal University of...
Phnom Penh, where I taught in the Faculty of Pedagogy in the early 1970s. As the world knows, the word ‘unique’ (p 111), used to describe changes in the education system and, in fact, the whole country, is no exaggeration. For those who need a quick historic catch-up, it is here, starting with 1863, the beginning of the French Protectorate, and continuing to 1986, when an English language course was started at the Institute of Foreign Languages. The rest of the account could be called the present time. The authors contrast ‘policies’ with ‘practices’, in the spirit of the title. For example, why train ‘teachers of English for government schools when … only a very small number choose teaching as a career’ (p 119)? Readers who recall earlier regimes will be relieved that students now have a choice.

My third selection was ‘English language teaching in Vietnam today: Policy, practice and constraints’, written by Nguyen Vang Xuan, Rector of Hanoi University of Foreign Studies. This short (8-page) chapter includes some interesting statistics. In 2000, English accounted for 98% of the foreign language choices at schools, followed by 1.69% for French. That does not tell the whole story, though. As with the Cambodian situation, another table highlights the gap between the government’s intended policy for teaching English and the availability of teachers. It seems that the goals of students to learn English as the way to a good career, ‘particularly in multinational organisations’ (p 461), is not matched by the goals of their peers to become teachers of English. To address the problem, Vietnam is accepting support from aid agencies such as the Asian Development Bank, the British Council and the World Bank, but, as with the Cambodian students, freedom is the key. How do countries bring together a perceived need and the means to achieve it?

The chapter about Vietnam is a reminder that writers have a tension between taking background knowledge for granted and assuming too little knowledge by the readers. Reference to ‘the Prime Minister of Vietnam’ in 1968 raises the question of whether this was in the north or south. Then there is reference to a 1972 prime ministerial decision for English to be a ‘compulsory basis subject in the school curriculum from the lower secondary level up to university’ (p 456) and so on. Again, in which half of the then divided country?

The book has cohesion in a number of ways. All chapters follow the academic format of including literature reviews, and reading these is sometimes a reminder that some of what is written is not necessarily available to monolingual readers. As the reference lists at the end of each chapter show, a great deal has been written about education in each one of these countries but, collectively, not much has been published. The most
recent parallel to this book is Lo Bianco’s book (2002) which, despite its title reference to Phnom Penh, actually draws more generally on South-East Asia. This review has dealt in detail with only three of the chapters. There are so many more: Myanmar, Taiwan and South Korea, to name just three. Australian and New Zealand readers will welcome an up-to-date book that puts the microscope on the teaching of English language in East Asia, the source of so many of our students.

REFERENCES
Notes on contributors

**Helen Anderson** is currently the national manager for the New Zealand Curriculum Alignment Project, a lecturer in Education for The University of Auckland at Manukau Programme, a researcher and a senior manager at Manukau Institute of Technology.

The recurring theme in Helen’s work has been in developing strategies for quality participation for all students in the New Zealand tertiary education system. This has included work in Bridging and Foundation Education, the establishment of curriculum pathways for local schools and PTEs into MIT, the development and evaluation of MIT’s Special Supplementary Grant (Maori and Pasifika), managing The University of Auckland at Manukau programme’s support and pathways and work on the development of self access centres.

**Ross Forman** is a senior lecturer in the English Language and Study Skills Centre at the University of Technology, Sydney. He has worked as a TESOL teacher and trainer in Australia and a number of South East Asian countries. His interests are second language teaching and learning, with particular reference to writing, pronunciation, and appropriate methodology.

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Catalina flies, about her parents and her own migrant experiences as New Australians in Papua New Guinea in the 1950s. Anna has an MA (in writing) from the University of Technology, Sydney and an MA App. Ling. from Macquarie University.

**Hayo Reinders** is Director of the English Language Self-Access Centre at The University of Auckland. He is managing editor of the PacCALL journal. Hayo’s latest book (with Sara Cotterall) was published by Jack Richards and Willy Renandya for RELC in Singapore.

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