Editorial

I am delighted to bring together in this special issue of Prospect a range of articles on the very important topic of pronunciation. As some of the authors comment, this is an area which is of great importance for learners and yet which can sometimes be overlooked or underplayed in our busy classrooms. It is also an aspect of language learning that has received less research attention than it warrants, given its crucial role in communication. So it is with especially great pleasure that I introduce contributions from Canada, New Zealand and around Australia in this collection that covers a wide variety of issues related to the what, the why and the how of pronunciation teaching and learning.

The first article, by Felicity Cox, tackles the very important issue of exactly what it is that we and our students might be moving towards as we work with Australian models of English. In her article, Cox highlights the inadequacies of the traditional view of a single form of Australian English pronunciation, achieved by all native-born Australians, and suggests a long-overdue renovation to traditional definitions based on Received Pronunciation. Her review of segmental aspects of Australian English and discussion of current theoretical issues is both accessible and illuminating, and the new model she proposes for conceptualising Australian English in the 21st century at last provides teachers with a workable description of what learners hear around them as they grapple with the task of communicating in a new language.

While the pronunciation goals of our learners and the journey that they must travel to achieve those goals vary enormously, intelligibility is oft cited as a reasonable aim for most learners. Acknowledging the important place of both speaker and hearer in achieving intelligibility, Beth Zielinski explores the role of both in a case study of a Vietnamese speaker and three listeners who are native speakers of Australian English. On the basis of her analysis of what went wrong at sites where the listeners had difficulty understanding what was said, she proposes that reduced intelligibility was the result of the interaction between listeners’ processing strategies and a complex mix of non-standard features in the speech signal. Her findings suggest some important implications for teachers who want to help their learners become more intelligible.

Graeme Couper addresses the crucial issue of whether instruction in pronunciation works. As he argues, there has actually been relatively little research done in this area, and yet we need to find out more about what works and why. In the classroom-based study reported in his article, Couper investigates the immediate effect of instruction on a particular area of second language pronunciation and the extent to which students retained and integrated into their phonological competence any gains made. The instruction was explicit and focused on epenthesis (the addition of an extra sound, usually a schwa, after a
consonant) and absence (the inappropriate dropping of a consonant sound). His results are heartening for teachers: the students made considerable gains after instruction, and these were largely integrated into their phonological competence. The study is encouraging for teachers, as it illustrates how appropriately focused instruction can lead to changes in learners’ pronunciation, even where this may appear to have fossilised.

Murray Munro, Tracey Derwing and Kyoko Sato look beyond concerns of intelligibility in the fourth article in this issue, reminding us that, although accents are a common, normal aspect of second language acquisition, nevertheless non-native speakers sometimes experience negative social evaluation and even discrimination. They therefore argue that it is important that student teachers, as part of their training, be made consciously aware of the nature of foreign accents and the kinds of reactions they might invoke. Their article makes an important contribution to this aim, with a review of work on accent discrimination and attitudes towards accented speech, and an illustration of a consciousness-raising activity designed to help pre-service teachers explore the nature of such reactions.

Continuing with the theme of teacher preparation, in the final article Helen Fraser proposes a theoretical framework for understanding speech and pronunciation, which she argues can offer significantly and usefully different perspectives from those offered by more familiar mainstream views of phonology. The approach is based on insights from cognitive phonology in which learning pronunciation is seen as a skill. As with any other cognitive skill, practice is seen as essential, but so is having the right concept of what is being practised, so that it is crucial that teachers help students form concepts that are appropriate to the new language and not simply transplanted from another, more familiar, language. Fraser argues that this approach can help teachers understand the causes of learner difficulty more clearly, and therefore help to address them more effectively.

As usual, reviews of two recent publications are also included. In the first, Guy Edwards reviews *New media language*, edited by Jean Aitchison and Diane Lewis (2003) and published by Routledge, and concludes that this collection from academics and media practitioners on relationships between media and the English language provides an excellent introduction to the practice of sociolinguistics and media communication studies. In the second, Marilyn Lewis reviews the second edition of an old favourite, *A history of English language teaching* by A. P. R. Howatt and H. G. Widdowson (2004), published by Oxford University Press, and suggests that this new edition is destined to be every bit as popular as the first.

LYNDA YATES
New media language
Reviewed by Guy Edwards

New media language is a collection of papers and contributions from academics and media practitioners on the broad theme of the relationship(s) between media and the English language. The majority of the articles are drawn from a conference on language, the media and international communication held at the University of Oxford in April 2001. The book is divided into four parts; ‘Modern media discourse’, ‘Modes of the media’, ‘Representations and models’ and ‘The effect of the media on language’.

A clarification of the title of the book is probably in order. The ‘new media language’ that the various contributors discuss is perhaps more accurately ‘contemporary media language’. No important distinction is made between the ‘new’ and ‘old’ media forms; newspapers, radio and television, the traditional strongholds of the ‘old’ mass media, are herein considered alongside email and Internet news sources. This reflects both the increasing penetration into daily life of ‘new media’ and the concomitant merging with traditional mass media structures of new sources of information (particularly the Internet). New media language presents a view of modern media as a continuum, a pervasive social and cultural force that is intimately connected to contemporary life and approaches the media from a theoretically critical but not ideologically judgmental viewpoint. While some authors critique aspects of the media (Robin Lakoff and Deborah Cameron, in particular), the book refrains from either demonising or sanctifying the media. Instead, a keen intellectual insight and a commitment to heterogeneity of input are apparent throughout the text and the resulting diversity of academic and media practitioner analysis is, undoubtedly, chief amongst the merits of the volume.

The first major section of the book, ‘Modern media discourse’, is concerned with the change (or perceived change) in the communication styles and devices employed by the media over time. The contributions from Deborah Cameron, Allan Bell and Martin Conroy are of particular interest to those with an interest in sociolinguistic issues, taking a critical discourse analysis approach to recent and historical media language. Cameron’s article, ‘Globalizing “communication”’, is particularly striking in its critique of modern ideologies of ‘good’ versus ‘bad’ communication practices. By contrast, Robin Lakoff and Raymond Snoddy’s papers take a more practical
approach to the issue of changing media discourse. By this, I do not mean that Cameron, Bell and Conroy lack real-world data (the opposite is, in fact, the case), but that Lakoff and Snoddy are more concerned with a general survey of the issues they consider, which serves, importantly, as a useful means of grounding and contextualising much of the remainder of the book. This contrast is typical of the text, and gives it the capacity to both serve as an introduction to sociolinguistic analysis of media and include new, meaningful contributions to the field.

Part Two, ‘Modes of the media’, explores current media discourse, using examples from email, radio and print media to analyse and explain the ways in which language is used in various media contexts. Developers of contemporary language teaching materials may be interested in the exploration of email expression by Naomi Baron and the comparison of traditional letter-writing and SMS (short message service) by Kesseler and Bergs. These two articles resonate with linguists in particular because they address assumptions held by many non-linguists about the ways in which language is used in technologically mediated communications; to wit, that there is a significant difference in the ways in which users of technology use language. What these articles reveal instead is that, while languages may undergo a change in immediately apparent surface structure, the communicative motivations of language-users remain more or less constant. Indeed, the emphasis in this section (and the sections preceding and following it) is on the realisation of extant sociocultural and linguistic patterns within modern media.

While section two highlights the effect upon media language of wider linguistic patterns, section three reverses the relationship and explores the potential for the media to shape the opinions and behaviours of its audience. The power of the media, hinted at in the preceding sections, is not only made apparent but the complex mechanisms mediating between the message and the audience are sketched out in brief yet insightful articles, which lay a theoretical framework for the reader to further explore media effects.

The final section differs from the rest in that it more directly addresses the quantification of the language use of the media, and explicitly seeks to examine the specific ways in which English is used and thus shaped by the media. This is, of course, linguistic behaviour as distinct from discourse behaviours discussed in earlier chapters. This section is perhaps the most immediately accessible to practitioners of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages. The quantification of media texts on a continuum of complexity and the study of the structure of noun-phrases
will, potentially, be of particular interest to those using media texts as examples of natural language usage.

*New media language* is, overall, an excellent introduction to the practice of sociolinguistics and media communication studies. While particular articles will be more striking than others, a reader’s particular theoretical interest will determine this rather than issues of quality. Indeed, the primary criticism that can be made of *New media language* is that it could easily be twice its 203-page length, if not more. Although accessible and consistently readable, the depth of understanding and evident intellectual understanding that characterise the contributions to the book make this, to quote Simon Jenkins in his foreword to the text, ‘a user’s manual’ to the study of modern media and its complex symbiosis with language, society and culture.
A history of English language teaching


Reviewed by Marilyn Lewis

Twenty years after the first edition, Howatt has produced this updated volume with Henry Widdowson, erstwhile colleague from the University of Edinburgh. The book has four levels of organisation, the first being the chronological divisions of 1400 – 1800, 1800 – 1900 and 1900 to the present day. The title of ‘history’ is well chosen, since the story starts in the 14th century when court proceedings in England were first conducted in English. The seven-page chronology in the appendix has half its items pre-1900. Furthermore, readers now on the brink of retirement looking for references to their early professional years have to wait until page 315: ‘New directions in language teaching in the 1960s’.

Within each section there are thematic subdivisions. Part One starts with ‘Practical language teaching’ and concludes with ‘Aspects of English language teaching since 1900’. The third organisational level is the division of the volume into 21 chapters, with the final chapter by Widdowson, who gives ‘A perspective on recent trends’. Samples from Part Two show the spread of topics covered. One chapter deals with English Language Teaching (ELT) in ‘the Empire’ and four with ELT in Europe, where some of the pioneers in our field are referred to as ‘reformers’. Finally each chapter has its subheadings. The fact that all these categories are clearly laid out in the table of contents makes them more accessible than this summary may indicate.

The topics include insights into the work of individual practitioners, governments and commercial institutions. These include the contribution to ELT of the British Council through its classes, its materials and its staff, and of publishers such as Cambridge University Press, Longman and, of course, Oxford University Press, which produced texts for learners and teachers. All these can be found via the 12-page index.

However, the tracing of fashions and trends in teaching methods will probably be the main attraction for readers. Although the term ‘progression’ is sometimes used to describe the development of methods, now and then there is a sense of déjà vu in a description of teaching or in a textbook extract from long ago. The following attempt at dialogue, rather than a chunk of explanation, appeared in a 1761 book (p 11):

Q What is Grammar?
A Grammar is the art of using words properly.
Q Of how many parts doth Grammar consist?
A Of four: Orthography, Etymology, Syntax, and Prosody.

I found exactly this format for teaching grammar in a recent book for students of Spanish.

It is interesting to look at some long-ago textbook extracts in the light of current emphases. In the following 1797 text, the Bengali version appears as well, making it, perhaps, an early attempt at self-access and even at English for Specific Purposes (p 74).

M How does the rice of Bardwan and Raur come to Calcutta?
S In the rainy season they bring it in boatloads, and in dry weather on bullocks.

Community language themes were made clear in the following details of life in England from a 1685 book for Huguenot refugees (p 62).

If you will take Tobacco, you find not only Pipes and Candle, but in some places the Tobacco, gratis. So that the Coffee, or the tee, pays for all.

At a distance it is more difficult to judge authenticity. Was the 1838 question, ‘Has the tailor been willing to mend my coat?’, a way of asking if the coat was ready or was it a genuine yes/no question in days of full employment when only certain coats could be accepted for mending?

The book is well illustrated, including photographs of key figures, starting with Henry Sweet, who published *The practical study of languages* in 1899 after 30 years of work. The final photograph shows N S Prabhu of Bangalore, whose work lives on in the current focus on tasks in language classrooms. From pre-camera days the graphics include photocopies of textbook pages. One of the more obscure examples, ‘The Labyrinth’, is from 1864 and is well named. At the top are two sentences with each of their 20 words numbered. The rest of the page is taken up with various combinations of these numbers, all of which turn out to be acceptable sentences. Would these have been an early version of ‘writing lines’ as a punishment? One hundred years later the idea of presenting a framework for the production of endless numbers of sentences was revisited in *101 substitution tables for students of English* by H V George (1967), although his work is not mentioned in this book.

Would it be frivolous to suggest that this history could be the basis of a quiz night at a conference for Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages? Here are a couple of starters, with page references for those who need them. Which British officer in the Indian education service pioneered
the *New method reader scheme* in the 1920s (p 282)? Which European countries were slowest to produce textbooks for teaching English (p 67)?

More seriously, the book will be a fascinating reference point for courses on the history of English language teaching. Its geographic spread is wide, though not universal, and the emphasis is on countries where English is not the official language. Thus we read about ELT in India and Iran, Lesotho and Lund, Malaysia and Mauritius. Perhaps if another edition is brought out in 20 years time, the story of other parts of the world such as China will also have a place.

Finally, the book is recommended as more than a quiz accessory or a course text or even as a piece of nostalgia for retired English language teachers. It is possible to imagine lending it also to people who have nothing to do with ELT but who enjoy social history. Not surprisingly, the book is well written and very carefully researched.
Notes on contributors

Graeme Couper has been a lecturer in the School of Languages at Auckland University of Technology since 1997. Prior to that he worked as an English language teacher and teacher educator in Uruguay. He has also taught in Germany, Japan, Turkey and Mexico. He has a BCA, RSA Dip., Master of Applied Linguistics from Macquarie University, and is currently working on a PhD with Dr Helen Fraser at the University of New England. His research interests are oriented to the practicalities of the ESL classroom, with a current focus on the teaching and learning of pronunciation.

Felicity Cox is a lecturer and researcher from the Speech Hearing and Language Research Centre in the Department of Linguistics at Macquarie University. She is regarded as one of the leading experts in the analysis of the Australian English accent. Her work on sound change provides insights into phonetic aspects of Australian English and the nature of linguistic evolution. She is currently involved in a major project to trace the development of the Australian accent from inception to the present day and is also researching new varieties of Australian English that have developed in recent times such as the Lebanese Australian variety. She is committed to developing a new model for the description of Australian English in the 21st century.

Guy Edwards Master of Arts candidate at the University of Melbourne, Dept. of Linguistics and Applied Linguistics. Research interests include discourse analysis, language and identity issues and membership categorisation analysis.

Helen Fraser is Senior Lecturer at the University of New England. She studied phonetics, phonology and psycholinguistics at Macquarie University and the University of Edinburgh, before coming to UNE in 1990. She has always taken a strong interest in the differences between human cognition and computer ‘processing’, and for about ten years has applied this interest to the theory and practice of second language pronunciation.

Marilyn Lewis is a research fellow in the Department of Applied Language Studies and Linguistics at the University of Auckland, where she taught before retirement. She continues to write materials for teachers and language learners and to run workshops in New Zealand and South East Asia.

Murray Munro is a Professor of Linguistics at Simon Fraser University in Vancouver. His work on foreign-accented speech has explored aspects of
phonetic learning, the perception of foreign-accented speech, and accent discrimination.

**Tracey Derwing** is a Professor in the TESL program in the Department of Educational Psychology at the University of Alberta, and a Co-Director of the Prairie Centre of Excellence for Research on Immigration and Integration. Her research interests include issues related to L2 accent as well as refugee settlement.

**Kyoko Sato** is a doctoral candidate at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (University of Toronto). She has carried out work on the sociolinguistic aspects of accented speech and on the Japan Foundation.

**Beth Zielinski** is a speech pathologist currently completing her PhD in the School of Educational studies at La Trobe University, Melbourne. The focus of her PhD research is intelligibility in speakers of English as a second language. She teaches pronunciation classes (ESL) for the Language and Learning Skills Unit at The University of Melbourne, and Analysing Spoken English for TESOL in the School of Educational Studies at La Trobe University.