Editorial

In the final issue for the year we bring together articles and activities that focus on adult learners in different learning contexts – Thailand, New Zealand, China and Australia. In the first article, Saengchan Hemchua and Norbert Schmitt investigate lexical errors in the English writing of Thai university students using an error taxonomy that they suggest will be useful for teachers and learners in other contexts. They found that, perhaps contrary to what might be supposed, most problems did not arise from first language transfer but from intrinsic difficulty in English. Their findings have implications for vocabulary teaching and learning for a range of ESL/EFL contexts.

In the second paper, Nicky Riddiford also tackles the issue of student writing and reports on a study that explored the use of collaborative error correction in the classroom. Teachers have long been concerned about how to encourage their students to pay attention to and learn from the feedback that they receive on their writing in ways that foster greater awareness of grammatical structures. The paper concludes that the peer collaboration technique adopted in the study is useful in increasing student engagement in attention to accuracy in their writing and is seen as valuable by students.

Huang Jing also explores a university context, in this case in China. The investigation focuses on both teacher and learner autonomy within the constraints of the context, which include examinations, teacher–student role relationships and interaction, and the general working atmosphere and environment of the institution. He recounts the importance of the teacher being flexible and able to meet the changing demands of students who are unfamiliar with this new way of learning. In order for meaning to be negotiated, he argues, mutual trust and collaborative effort are essential ingredients.

In the fourth article in this issue, Carol Griffiths investigates the relationship between strategy development and learner progress in language learning in a language school in New Zealand. Using a pre- and post-survey methodology, she found that learners who reported the greatest increase in frequency of language learning strategy use over the three-month period of the study made the greatest progress in language learning. The strategies of most relevance were those related to the use of resources, to the management of learning, to vocabulary and to writing in English.

In this issue we also include a teaching activity by Robyn Woodward-Kron and Roger Hurcombe. The aim of the activity is to help students who have to engage in the conduct and presentation of research to develop their understandings of the design, processes and writing genres involved in research. Students are engaged in investigating their own assumptions and
expectations about the process of honours and higher-degree supervision. While it is designed for international postgraduate students preparing for study in academic English programs, the general idea and conception of the activity can be adapted for use with students preparing for study or employment in a range of contexts.

Two book reviews of recent publications are also included. In the first, Kathryn Hill reviews the second edition of *Testing for language teachers* by Arthur Hughes (2003), published by Cambridge University Press, and suggests this book will appeal to teachers who wish to improve their understanding of tests and testings. In the second, Stephen Moore reviews *The struggle to teach English as an international language*, written by Adrian Holliday (2005) and published by Oxford University Press. He concludes that it is an effective critique of English-speaking Western TESOL without simplification of the complex nature of teaching a language that has multiple purposes and contexts.

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Book reviews

Testing for language teachers (2nd ed.)
Reviewed by Kathryn Hill

With increasing demands for accountability to parents and educational authorities, language testing is possibly of even greater interest to teachers today than it was when the first edition of Testing for language teachers was published over 15 years ago. For example, in the Victorian Certificate of Education, 50 per cent of the assessment for each final-year subject is now school-based. This means that classroom teachers need to be able to design their own high-quality assessment tasks. As these assessments are often ‘high stakes’, many teachers feel the need to be better equipped to meet these challenges.

The book comprises 16 chapters and three appendices. While retaining the same format and overall approach as the first edition, there is a new chapter on the testing of young learners, a more detailed section on writing specifications, and guidelines for conducting training programs for interviewers and raters. Other additions include a new appendix on item banking and a website, which contains links to a number of web-based resources. The section on statistical analyses has been completely rewritten.

The first two chapters, ‘Teaching and testing’ and ‘Testing as problem solving’, are essentially introductory. Chapter 3, ‘Kinds of tests and testing’, introduces some basic concepts such as proficiency versus achievement testing.

Chapters 4 and 5 present an introduction to the central theoretical concerns of validity and reliability. Chapter 5 makes a helpful distinction between consistency or reliability of scores and ‘decision consistency’, that is, whether candidates have been classified as either reaching or failing to reach a criterial level of performance (that is, as passing or failing) in a consistent manner (p 42). There is also a section on how to avoid some of the more common sources of measurement error.

Chapter 6, ‘Achieving beneficial backwash’, is of relevance where the test will be used by other teachers and is likely to impact on the way they prepare their students.

Chapters 7 and 8 cover ‘Stages of test development’ and ‘Common test techniques’. The section on writing specifications includes exemplars for an achievement test and a placement test respectively.

Chapter 8 discusses some common item (or question) types. A consider-
able amount of space is devoted to a critique of the ubiquitous multiple-choice question, which, Hughes concludes, is ‘best suited to relatively infrequent testing of large numbers of candidates’ (p 78).

Chapters 9 to 12 deal with assessment of each of the ‘macro skills’, including useful guidelines for the recruitment and training of raters and interviewers.

Chapter 13 covers the testing of grammar and vocabulary, while Chapter 14 discusses cloze procedures and dictation.

In Chapter 15, which relates to the testing of young learners, the author makes a number of recommendations regarding how this can be done appropriately, including some sample item types. The final chapter comprises a set of instructions for test administration.

Appendix 1, ‘The statistical analysis of test data’, gives an overview of descriptive statistics (frequency and distribution) and how to interpret test reliability statistics. There is a section on ‘classical’ item analysis, and a brief description of a test analysis program, ETA, based on item response theory (IRT). Appendix 2 briefly outlines a non-technical approach to item banking, and Appendix 3 presents a set of reading comprehension questions relating to Chapter 11.

Testing for language teachers has a number of strengths. It covers the key concepts and concerns of language testing in a highly accessible manner and contains an abundance of practical advice on how teachers can improve their testing practices. Each chapter is clearly structured and the annotated references in the further reading section at the end of each chapter appear to be reasonably comprehensive and up to date.

However, I feel it does not always manage to strike an appropriate balance between theory and practice. For example, in contrast to the first edition, there is no information on estimating test and item reliability. Instead, the new edition introduces an IRT-based test-analysis program, ETA, which readers are invited to purchase from the book’s website. As a result, these sections are likely to fall somewhat wide of the mark for most language teachers.

The book also appears to lack a coherent picture of its audience and in many respects seems to be more relevant to examining bodies or professional development providers than teachers-as-testers. For example, there are instructions on writing handbooks for test takers, test users and staff, and training of interviewers, raters, invigilators and scorers. Yet, in my experience, testing is typically for a single use by a single language teacher who is also the test writer.

Teachers often feel that they do not have the time or resources for
principled language testing. Yet the author appears somewhat dismissive of the widely accepted view that testing need to be practical, as well as valid and reliable. This view is made explicit in Chapter 6, where he puts a premium on beneficial backwash over practicality (p 56), but is also evident elsewhere, for example, when he presents guidelines for a three-day rater-training workshop (pp 106–7).

The author adopts a number of surprising and somewhat controversial stances. For example, in Chapter 3, and elsewhere, he argues that test content should be based on course objectives rather than actual course content, even if these differ significantly, concluding that, ‘Initially some students may suffer, but future students will benefit from the pressure for change’ (p 14).

Elsewhere, in the section on Rasch measurement techniques, the suggestion that test writers should remove any misfitting persons (rather than items) from the analysis seems irregular, to say the least (p 231).

In summary, this book will appeal to teachers who want to improve their understanding of tests and testing. It will have particular appeal to personnel responsible for large-scale testing programs and for teacher professional development. However, in my view, it stops short of providing all the tools classroom teachers need to develop and evaluate their own tests. To this extent, readers like myself who were hoping the book would provide a one-stop resource for language teachers may be disappointed.
The struggle to teach English as an international language

Reviewed by Stephen Moore

The title of this book is eye-catching and intriguing as one anticipates the who/where/why/how of ‘the struggle’. It is emphatically not about jaded expatriate English teachers and their daily grind of teaching in foreign lands. Rather, it is a serious contemplation on the impact of ‘native-speakerism’ in the field of Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and the myriad implications that flow from its dominance. The term ‘struggle’ comes up repeatedly in this book, leaving the reader in no doubt that the issue is serious, ongoing and, to a large extent, untreated. Holliday’s treatment will unsettle those comfortable with the status quo, but offers hope to those who disapprove of the notion that native-speakerism is best. The remedy lies in perceiving and overcoming native-speakerist ideology and its pervasive and divisive ‘us versus them’ mentality, which is deeply embedded in the TESOL profession.

The book is part of the Oxford Applied Linguistics series, edited by Henry Widdowson. It is no coincidence, therefore, that the volume fits comfortably with, and complements, two other well-known volumes in this series, namely Philippson’s Linguistic imperialism and Canagarajah’s Resisting linguistic imperialism in language teaching. Holliday’s book consists of eight chapters: Chapter 1 sets out an alternative position to native speakerism (rather lamely named ‘Position 2’); Chapter 2 is largely concerned with the issue of culturism in TESOL and how it mediates between essentialism and speakerhood; Chapters 3, 4 and 5 examine how students of English have been ‘othered, misunderstood, and treated as culturally problematic’ (p 111); Chapters 6 and 7 explore the same issue as it relates to non-native speaker teachers; and Chapter 8 proposes a way forward, namely the concept of ‘cultural continuity’, which Holliday defines as ‘an appreciation of how cultural realities and practices connect and mingle to allow collaborative inclusivity’ (p 157).

Holliday uses notions of power, control and ideology drawn extensively from the work of Foucault and Fairclough to shine a light on what lies below the surface of ‘Western English TESOL’ in terms of ideological positions reifying institutional structures and teaching practices. He traces the roots of teacher-controlled learning to the tenets of audiolingualism, the technique in vogue when he began his English-teaching career, and argues that what passes for communicative teaching today is still largely teacher controlled. Holliday also takes aim at the corporatisation of TESOL and its
management and accountability-driven directives, which marginalise language learning and teaching issues. And many of the criticisms he levels at typical ‘language in development’ aid projects will resonate with anyone familiar with how Australia has channelled much of its ELT-focused overseas aid funding.

One of the book’s strengths lies in its ‘critical qualitative research’ design and the ‘thick description’ derived from multiple voices from a diverse range of social and cultural settings. The treatment of a complex subject has thus been methodologically uncomplicated without resorting to oversimplification. The book also synthesises Holliday’s earlier work on ‘small cultures’ (for example, of family, age, occupation, social background) and ‘appropriate methodology’ (that is, the ‘instrumental process of how to do curriculum innovation in diverse settings’ (p 140)), with which some readers may be unfamiliar. The first-hand accounts of the email respondents are illuminating and sometimes confronting to a native-speaker reader, as one sees how ideologically nourished barriers unfairly impact on the personal and professional lives of non-native speakers through limiting them as ‘deficient’ when, in fact, such people have as much to offer the profession as native speakers. To his credit, Holliday does not spare himself from criticism as he recounts experiences in which he, too, has been an instrument of culturist policies. Perhaps as a form of redemption, he draws heavily at times from a range of qualitative doctoral research recently completed (presumably under his supervision) at his home institution in England; each piece of research challenges native-speakerist assumptions of one type or another.

Holliday’s suggested way forward from the dominance of native-speakerism, the cultural continuity approach, is an orientation that sets out what has to be achieved: (1) ‘teachers outside the English-speaking West dealing with the “non-native speaker” label and asserting identity, professional status and employability’ (p 158); (2) ‘English-speaking Western ESOL educators fighting their prejudices, avoiding reducing the foreign Other, learning to appreciate the meanings their students bring to the classroom and dealing with changing, global ownership of English’ (p 158); and (3) ‘language students and teachers dealing with the cultural dilemmas implicit in language learning’ (p 158). Convincing the TESOL profession of the wisdom of this approach is something Holliday’s book will contribute to; changing the profession, on the other hand, will be a long, hard struggle.

*The struggle to teach English as an international language* is an effective critique of English-speaking Western TESOL, achieved without attempting to simplify the complexities inherent in the teaching of a language that is so widely used for so many purposes in so many different social and (multi-)
cultural contexts. As a white, male native-speaker who has considerable experience teaching English overseas, this reviewer found the book to be confronting, enlightening and accurate in its interpretations, and ultimately an important contribution to the literature. Indeed, it forces the reader to accept that all is not well with a native-speaker paradigm in TESOL, and to acknowledge that the power to change it resides in our unwillingness to tolerate the short-sightedness of the status quo. This book deserves a place on reading lists in any serious TESOL teacher-education program.
Notes on contributors

Carol Griffiths has considerable experience as a teacher and has specialised as a teacher and manager of ESOL for more than ten years. She graduated with a PhD after completing a thesis reporting research into language learning strategy use by ESOL students. She has presented papers at a number of conferences both in New Zealand and overseas, and has had a number of publications. She is currently working to publish a book entitled Lessons from good language learners to commemorate Joan Rubin’s landmark article in TESOL Quarterly (1975). Carol is currently working at Beijing Sports University in China. The question of how students learn language continues to be her main research interest.

Saengchan Hemchua is a lecturer in Applied Linguistics/TEFL in the Department of Western Languages at Srinakharinwirot University, Bangkok, Thailand. Her research interest is in second language vocabulary use. She is presently serving as Bangkok Coordinator for the Asian Studies Outreach Program of the University of Vermont, USA.

Kathryn Hill is a research fellow at the Language Testing Research Centre, University of Melbourne where she has worked since 1992. For several years she also worked on a number of assessment projects at the Australian Council of Educational Research. Kathryn has a BA (Indonesian, Arabic, Politics), a Diploma in Education (Indonesian, TESL), and an MA (Applied Linguistics) from the University of Melbourne. She is currently completing a PhD investigating continuity in constructions of competence in school languages (FL) learning.

Huang Jing is a PhD student at the English Centre, the University of Hong Kong. His research interests are primarily in the areas of learner and teacher autonomy in language learning, and second language teacher education. His papers have been published in Language Teaching Research, System, Educational Action Research and English Teaching Forum.

Roger Hurcombe has taught English as a second language in higher education institutions in Australia, Dubai and Japan. He has recently joined the International Student Support Program at the University of Melbourne, where he provides English language and academic support to international students in the Advanced Medical Science program. Roger’s research interests include student learning, academic vocabulary, and assessment feedback.

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Nicky Riddiford is a teacher at the English Language Institute, Victoria University. She has taught EAL and EAP in many contexts over the last 23 years. She is currently teaching an English proficiency program for international students and a workplace communication course for skilled migrants.

Norbert Schmitt is Reader in Applied Linguistics at the University of Nottingham. He is interested in all aspects of vocabulary studies and has published widely in the area. His current research focuses on formulaic sequences, and the interface between vocabulary and reading.

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