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This issue of Prospect brings us to the final set of contributions for 2008, and the end of our first year as co-editors of the journal. The year has seen several changes to the journal, including a new design and format and its publication wholly online, thus making Prospect and TESOL-related work in Australia available to a much wider readership than previously. Editing the journal has been enormously productive and satisfying for us as co-editors, and we very much welcome comments and suggestions from readers about the changes. We would also like to thank all the contributors and reviewers who have supported the journal throughout the year.

This issue brings together a range of perspectives on different areas of interest in the field of language teaching. The articles demonstrate the strong research orientation in language education that continues to explore and improve aspects of practice, both within Australia and internationally. Three of the articles focus, in one way or another, on spoken language and communication, while two examine critical issues in academic written language.

The first article, by Avdi, Barson and Rischin, picks up themes and topics that were highlighted in the previous issue of Prospect 23(2), a special issue that looked at workplace communication. These authors, working with culturally and linguistically diverse students in an Australian medical training program, were interested in using the theoretically based Model of Empathic Communication to examine the development of empathy in doctor–patient interviews. Using a qualitative approach, they evaluated the ability of 21 medical students to respond to patient emotions empathically in a role play assessment task. Their findings show how, in cases where empathic communication on the part of the medical student was not forthcoming, the patients escalated their attempts to gain empathy. The authors argue that the model provides a valuable basis, not only for mapping successful and missed opportunities to express empathy, but also for informing the teaching of the behavioural and verbal skills required in patient–clinician empathic interactions.

While also set in the context of a tertiary undergraduate program, Romova, Smith and Neville-Barton’s article focuses on a different aspect of spoken language development. They provide a case study of the changes that occurred in the pronunciation and fluency of four non-English-speaking background students during the three years that they spent studying in a Bachelor of Arts degree in English as an Additional Language in New Zealand. They employed pre-program and post-program speaking tests to identify the changes, and found that, while there were limited improvements in grammatical accuracy, numerous changes in aspects of pronunciation and fluency were identified. Interestingly, also, the students were themselves able to make accurate assessments of their progress in these areas, and provide insights on the motivational factors contributing to the changes.

Gan, the author of the third article, takes yet another perspective on oral communication. The focus here is on the personality-related dimension of extroversion in relation to oral performance. The study draws on audio-recorded data collected from 40 Grade 10 students in Hong Kong who were undertaking a practice School-Based Assessment group interaction task. The correlation between assessment scores and degree of extroversion is analysed and, in addition, discourse features reflecting extroversion are identified. To illustrate further, the article analyses the interaction of two participants, one categorised on the Eysenck Personality Questionnaire as an introvert and the other as an extrovert. Factors such as hesitation, active participation, and greater accuracy and fluency are shown to have a high correlation with extroversion.

The next two articles in this issue turn to aspects of written communication and discourse and are complementary in the focus they take on undergraduate essay writing. Lee raises the main issue that informs both articles and which is frequently of concern in academic writing at this level, that of developing critical voice, stance and identity. She notes that the ability to achieve these components is related linguistically to skills in manipulating evaluative language. Her study, conducted at an Australian university, examines how evaluative language was expressed in high-graded and low-graded essays, in particular with reference to attitude, one of the three main components in the appraisal system used in
systemic functional linguistics. The high-graded students in the study were able to deploy multiple attitude-invoking judgment strategies. The author argues that, as these strategies contribute to success in academic writing, they should be highlighted more extensively in programs that prepare undergraduates for the demands of critical academic literacy.

The final article, by Wu, extends the discussion of critical voice and evaluative expression in tertiary writing assignments, this time in the context of Singapore. The research study reported here uses a theoretical framework developed for the evaluation of status, and identifies relevant statement types used in essays extracted from a data set of 225 essays. The research identified and categorised the expression types used by more-effective and higher-graded students to position and persuade their readers and to develop successful arguments that provided evidence to support their positions. Like Lee, Wu recommends that understanding of the kind of rhetorical expressions identified in the research could be used to inform tertiary preparation programs.

This issue concludes with reviews of two books. The first, by Stephanie Claire, overviews Silverman’s *A critical introduction to phonology.* The second review, written by Denise Gassner, extensively describes and evaluates the research studies reported in *Languages and cultures in contrast and comparison*, edited by de los Ángeles Gómez González, Lachlan Mackenzie and González Álvarez.

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Notes on contributors

**Elma Avdi** was a lecturer in the Medical Faculty’s International Student Support Program at The University of Melbourne from 2001 – 2004 and has worked as the language coordinator and assistant coordinator of the Victorian Medical Postgraduate Foundation’s clinical bridging course for overseas-trained doctors. Currently, she teaches Communication Skills at Holmesglen Institute, is an examiner for the Occupational English Test for Health Professionals, and a reviewer for the journal *Medical Education*. Her research interests include clinical communication skills and language testing for specific purposes.

**Dr Petrina Barson**, MBBS FRACPG BA (Hons) DRANZCOG Grad Dip MHS (Clin Hypnosis), has five years’ experience teaching communication skills to medical students in the first year of their course at The University of Melbourne. She has been the coordinator of Introduction to Clinical Medicine 1 and Introduction to Clinical Medicine 2, a continuation of the clinical communication skills.

**Stephanie Claire** has worked in ESL for more than 30 years in a range of roles including classroom teacher, materials designer, teacher trainer and researcher. She has lectured in phonology at several Australian universities and is co-author with Anne Burns of *Clearly speaking: Pronunciation in action for teachers*, a video resource kit on teaching pronunciation that was published by the AMEP Research Centre.

**Dr Zhengdong Gan** is currently Assistant Professor in the Department of English at The Hong Kong Institute of Education. He did postdoctoral research on school-based assessment in the Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong, from 2006 to 2007. He has published recently in the *Modern Language Journal* and the *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*.

**Denise Gassner** is a PhD student at Macquarie University in Australia and The University of Fribourg in Switzerland. Her Master’s thesis explored politeness in Aboriginal English and she has also been involved in a project on the bilingual baccalaureate in Switzerland. Currently, she is working on vague language in immigrant English.

**Dr Sook Hee Lee** recently completed her PhD at The University of Sydney. Her main research interests are in the areas of functional grammar, interpersonal meaning in essay writing, interaction in writing, assessment, and contrastive rhetoric.

**Pip Neville-Barton** was a Senior Lecturer and Programme Leader for the BA (EAL) at Unitec New Zealand in Auckland at the time of this study. Her areas of research are the effects of English-language tuition on the lives of immigrants, assessment of speaking skills, and how the language of mathematics affects the learning of EAL mathematics students.

**Ilana Rischin** (1961 – 2007) was a lecturer in The University of Melbourne’s Faculty of Medicine, Dentistry and Health Sciences in the International Student Support Program. She lectured overseas-born students in the Faculty of Medicine from 1999 – 2007. She supported students in their first three years of study, specialising in the area of medical interviewing skills.

**Zina Romova** is a lecturer in the BA (EAL) and coordinator for the GCert EAL at Unitec New Zealand in Auckland. She has a background in applied linguistics, ESOL teaching, training ESOL teachers, and language research at universities and polytechnics in New Zealand and overseas. Her areas of interest are discourse analysis, methodology of teaching writing and speaking, grammar and language acquisition.

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**Dr Siew Mei Wu** is a Senior Lecturer at the Centre for English Language Communication, National University of Singapore. She has taught English language and communication courses both in Melbourne and Singapore. Her research interests and publications mainly involve the areas of academic discourse, the assessment of writing and evaluative expressions in academic writing.