Editor's Note

The Complexity and Challenge of Language Education in Asia

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The role of language in today's increasingly globalized world is complex. As many suggest, English continues to gain prominence through economic, diplomatic, and media activities (Graddol, 2006). Yet at the same time, while the number of native English speakers by some accounts is decreasing slightly, non-native English speakers are dramatically increasing in number (Liu, 1999), and decreasing in age (Graddol, 2006). At the same time, increased focus in some regions is being placed on preserving local languages, while in other areas, local languages are being neglected or actively discouraged. In addition to English, other dominant languages are growing in influence and number of speakers, namely Chinese (Mandarin), Hindi-Urdu, Arabic, and Spanish (Graddol, 2006). As a result, national governments are implementing language policies in an effort to promote one language or another to prepare their citizenry for the challenges that lie ahead, with resulting dramatic effects on educational systems (Kirkpatrick, 2010).

While not unchallenged, the influence of English on the global stage remains significant. In the past, this significance could have been attributed to western influences. More recently, it is the increasing number of non-native English speakers who will determine the future of English (Graddol, 2006). A number of authors have pointed to World Englishes (Crystal, 1997; Higgins, 2003; Kachru, 1985; Kachru & Nelson, 1996) as an explanation of the influence of English on a global scale, using Kachru's (1985) inner, outer, and expanding concentric circles. With increasing globalization, it has been suggested that these linguistic divisions are becoming less distinct and are merging between a high proficiency inner circle through to a low proficiency outer circle (Graddol, 2006). No longer are individual countries seen as the "owners" of English, as increasingly the language is the lingua franca not between native speakers and others, but multiple non-native speakers. These changes in the perception of ownership and who uses English for what purposes are characterized by multidimensional cultural flows and economic interests (Graddol, 2006; Kachru, 1996; Warschauer, 2000). Rather than asking in what country the language originated, the question has more recently and more often become how intelligible the variety of English spoken is. This increase in the variety of Englishes spoken and the emphasis on intelligibility rather than dominant dialect and form (American English, British English) have given rise to a number of World Englishes, used by diverse speakers to communicate within a global community. It is with this in mind that the CamTESOL Conference organizers selected the theme of "One World: World Englishes" for the 2010 conference.

It has fallen to educational systems to provide the linguistic skills necessary to adapt to the resulting linguistically complex world, in some cases with devastating consequences (Kirkpatrick, 2010). Nevertheless, English remains an often selected foreign language in educational systems worldwide, and increasingly, English language proficiency is not seen as an optional, exceptional skill, but rather as a basic skill expected of the educated, the middle class, or the social elite (Graddol, 2006). In order to cope with these new demands and attempt to meet the needs of student populations, educational systems have adapted methodologies, changed or focused emphasis on one language or another, and provided professional development to teachers, while at the same time striving to maintain quality and preserve global linguistic variety (Graddol, 2006; Healy, 2008; Suarez, 2005; Teichler, 1997; Warschauer, 2000). As educators and educational leaders, we continue to face these challenges, some with more success than others. The papers presented at the 6th CamTESOL Conference on 27-28 February 2010 discuss issues related to and report research results on professional development, quality assurance, or innovative methodologies related to these challenges.

The CamTESOL Conference Opening Plenary Speaker, Professor Andy Kirkpatrick, questions beliefs regarding language learning. Kirkpatrick contends that linguistic diversity within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is being threatened by educational policies that implement English at increasingly lower levels. He recommends that an emphasis on local languages should be revisited in the region, and a more diverse form of English education be considered.

Two CamTESOL Conference Featured Speakers, Pamela Humphreys and Sou Boramy, turn their focus to the support of students: international students and students within the English language education system in Cambodia, respectively. Humphreys and co-author Abbas Mousavi introduce the Griffith English Language Enhancement Strategy (GELES) as a means through which to support international students during their study abroad experience. Sou presents findings on research investigating the effectiveness of differing forms of feedback on writing, namely directive and facilitative, in the Cambodian context.

The current volume of the *Language Education in Asia* online journal marks the inauguration of this publication, arising from the CamTESOL Conference Series and expanding to include language issues throughout the Asian region. The journal is comprised of three sections: Research, with a practical emphasis; Teaching Practice, highlighting innovative and best practices throughout the region; and Commentary, a discussion of current trends and issues in the region and beyond as they relate to language learning and language learners.

Regarding research in the field that is highlighted in this volume, Ton Nu Nhu Huong and Pham Hoa Hiep investigated the views, of both teachers and students, of different varieties of English in Vietnam. Their findings indicate a complex relationship between preferred varieties of English and the practical usage of the language beyond the classroom. Also in Vietnam, Nguyen Van Loi and Margaret Franken focused their research on the language input component of second language acquisition (SLA). The study is based on teachers' conceptions and how these are affected by multiple variables. Roger Barnard and Nguyen Gia Viet also considered teachers' perceptions and beliefs about Task-Based Language Teaching (TBLT) in Vietnam. In their study, "narrative frames" were used to investigate teacher attitudes and experiences with TBLT.

Language-related episodes (LREs) are the focus of Lilliat Ismail and Arshad Abd Samad's research in a Malaysian secondary school. Ismail and Samad's results indicate an increased

level of training is necessary for learners to be able to address linguistic errors. In Japan, Alex Chirnside investigated the linguistic and grammatical features necessary to successfully engage in the speaking tasks on the TOEFL iBT. In his analysis of native and non-native learners' approach to the test tasks, he finds that not only knowledge of grammar, but also an understanding of what is required of the task itself are necessary.

Teaching practice remains a primary focus of the CamTESOL Conference Series as well as the new *Language Education in Asia* online journal. Suksiri Bounchan and Stephen H. Moore discuss the Khmer variety of English found in Cambodia. Their paper provides insight into the difficulties faced by Khmer learners of English which teachers can use to further support the learning of their students.

Richmond Stroupe and Le Thi Thanh Truc consider program level questions of quality and student performance. Stroupe suggests ways in which standards can be used to objectively evaluate the quality of programs, institutions, and professionals. He suggests that while accreditation is often the purpose for the use of standards, internal use for quality assurance purposes is also important. Le investigated the challenges faced by students at universities in Vietnam that are changing from an academic year training system to a credit-based system. Her research focused on activities that increase the students' ability to become independent learners.

At the classroom level, Andrew Nowlan focused on intercultural competence in Japan. After discussing the concept of "culture" in general, Nowlan goes on to discuss specific tasks and activities that can be used with different levels of language learners. Also from Japan, Katherine Thornton focused on self-directed learning and offers a number of recommendations to help teachers encourage students to successfully take responsibility for their own learning.

Teaching writing is a challenging task in the same way as writing is a challenging learning goal for students. A number of papers focused on methods and strategies to better help students improve this productive skill. Genre-based writing is the focus of the paper by Brian R. Morrison. Using the writing requirements of the IELTS exam as an example, Morrison focused on methods through which to assist students as they improve their understanding of how to write in a more genre-appropriate way. Tawatchai Chaisiri also investigated methods of addressing genre in his paper on teachers' perceptions and teaching practices. Emphasis was placed on a combination of approaches by the teachers included in his study; based on these findings, the author provides practical recommendations for teaching writing in similar contexts. Lastly, focusing on grammar instruction, Kathryn Oghigian and Kiyomi Chujo present computer and paper based data-driven exercises. The researchers present the methodology associated with these exercises in addition to positive learning outcomes and evaluations by students.

A more specialized focus is the basis for papers examining streamed and mixed ability classes, extensive reading programs, and ESP curriculum development. Paul Joyce and Brian McMillan compared perceptions of being placed in both streamed and mixed ability L2 classes in Japan. The results of their research indicate that advantages for both lower and higher level students may be best realized through streaming students into leveled courses. Evan Jones considers the use of style of reading material in an extensive reading program in an effort to increase the motivation of the students involved. Jones investigated what effect the inclusion of the popular

comic book style of material would have on the students at a Japanese women's university. English for Specific Purposes (ESP) was the focus of the paper by Samia Naqvi and Priya Mathew from the Sultanate of Oman. Naqvi and Mathew present their experience of developing a specific content-based language course for information technology students at their institution. Their paper includes a discussion on the development of the curriculum, collaboration with faculty in the content department, and student performance in the program.

Numerous issues regularly emerge in the region as language policy is debated, formed, and implemented; as teachers are trained and interact with students; and as methodologies are introduced, administered, and evaluated. It is these issues that will be discussed and considered in the Commentary section of the *Language Education in Asia* publication. Students are always at the center of these concerns. International students, during their time aboard, bridge the divide between the cultural, political, and educational landscapes of their home countries and their host countries. Such was the experience of Chea Kagnarith, during his involvement in the Fulbright International Educational Exchange Program, when he experienced firsthand the effects of political initiatives undertaken by a host country and their influence on the local international student population. Chea describes the debate surrounding the impact of the enactment of the strict new immigration policies by the state of Arizona in the United States while he was completing his graduate studies at a local university.

The papers presented here reflect the complex nature of English language education in the region, including English language varieties, students and teacher's perceptions, learning / teaching styles, and expectations, adaption, and innovations of methodology, professional development and quality assurance, curriculum development, and national policies. What seems to be consistent throughout is the notion of continual change, adaptation, and challenge faced by national education systems, individual institutions, educators and students. It is these points that the *Language Education in Asia* publication will continue to present, discuss, and debate in future volumes. Through this process, the goal of achieving greater understanding of the multifaceted nature of language education in the Asian region can be met. As educators and learners in the region, the sharing of our experiences can potentially benefit all involved.

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