Editorial

The second issue of Volume 12 begins with an article on the potential integration of corpus linguistics in the New Senior Secondary (NSS) English language curriculum in Hong Kong. In the light of the task-based, learner-centred teaching approach as advocated in the new curriculum, May Wong exemplifies with two sample tasks and related activities how language corpora can provide teachers and students with examples of formulaic expressions and workplace English from real language use. She highlights three benefits of students’ use of language corpora in the classroom context, namely, developing a critical attitude towards English textbooks and reference materials, being motivated to interact with other learners, and exploring key language patterns.

Jasmine Luk examines how TESOL professionals in the Hong Kong educational system distinguish pronunciation errors from speech accents. In a survey on 25 common Hong Kong English (HKE) accent features, the majority of the HKE-influenced segmental features were rated as pronunciation errors while the suprasegmental features were considered to be socially stigmatising rather than intelligibility-obstructing. With the follow-up interview data, Luk states that the respondents in the study were pursuing Foucault’s technologies of the self in their perceptions of HKE accents, based on their view of their roles as educators and identities as English users. The responses in the survey and interviews, according to Luk, seem not to lend strong support to HKE as an independent variety, particularly in respect of segmental features.

Bronson Hui then addresses the learning of English among Hong Kong students in terms of the possible influence from a later-acquired language (e.g., a third language or L3) to an earlier-acquired language (e.g., a second language or L2). Through a written picture elicitation task on English relative clauses, Hui examined the extent to which the performance of a group of Cantonese speaking university students displayed ‘backward transfer’ indicating L3 French influence on L2 English. The L2 English and L3 French participants, as compared with the L2 English counterparts, were found to produce more full subject-extracted relative clauses than reduced relative clauses. They were also more likely to place a relative pronoun in an object-extracted relative clause. Hui concludes that backward transfer did occur among the L3 participants, and suggests further research into whether forward transfer (i.e., L1 to L2) and backward transfer are of the same nature. Pedagogical implications for teachers of foreign languages in multilingual settings are also discussed.

Benny Lee and Wei Cai look at how language proficiency affects the processing of unfamiliar words in listening comprehension. A group of 20 tertiary students in China were asked to complete nine listening tests and then interviewed via immediate retrospection without recall support and with stimulated recall. Both qualitative and quantitative data indicated that proficient participants and less proficient ones differed in terms of the use of inference and of various knowledge sources (e.g., semantics and morphology). Proficient participants were found to use the overall textual understanding
in inferring word meaning while less proficient ones were more likely to infer word meanings by local clues like target words or prosodically salient words. In the light of the differences, Lee and Cai suggest that teachers help students, particularly the less proficient ones, to make judicious use of their background knowledge and develop awareness of consistency in their inferencing process.

Sam Cole turns our attention to the experiences of four teachers who learned Putonghua as adults and teach both Pǔtōnghuà and Chinese language studies. The interview data from the teachers cast light on three themes: contact with Pǔtōnghuà, learning of the phonetic transcription system, Hànyǔ Pīnyīn, and attitudes about Pǔtōnghuà in teaching. Regarding the first theme, three out of the four informants emphasised the role of daily interaction with Pǔtōnghuà speakers in their workplaces in Hong Kong, the kind of contact or exposure seldom discussed in the existing literature. The informants also acknowledged the important role of Hànyǔ Pīnyīn in helping them to reach a higher level of spoken proficiency in Pǔtōnghuà. All four reported that they were more confident teaching Pǔtōnghuà as a subject rather than using Pǔtōnghuà as a medium of instruction in Chinese lessons. The experiences of these four teachers in turn raise questions about the adequacy of teacher training programmes and proficiency assessment in the preparation of teachers to teach Chinese language studies in Pǔtōnghuà.

To complete this issue are two book reviews. The first by Ying Zhan is on Motivation, language identity and the L2 self, a collection of papers edited by Zoltán Dörnyei and Ema Ushioda. Zhan highlights the contribution of Dörnyei and Ushioda’s work in enhancing the understanding of different motivational frameworks in this era of globalisation. In the other review on Guofang Li’s Culturally contested pedagogy: Battles of literacy and schooling between mainstream teachers and Asian immigrant parents, Xiaoxiao Du explains how the pedagogy of cultural reciprocity as proposed in the book is of educational value to researchers and educators who are interested in early literacy development among immigrant children in Canada.