

Editorial: English as a lingua franca in institutions of higher education in Asia

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Welcome to this inaugural issue of the Asian Journal of Applied Linguistics. Building on the strengths of its predecessor, the Hong Kong Journal of Applied Linguistics which ran a total of 31 issues from October 1996 to August 2013, this new journal has set itself the goal of fostering discussion and scholarship about the learning and use of English in Asian contexts. Those contexts include all parts of Asia but also Asians overseas. This broad scope is intended to attract writers and readers from all parts of the world who have an interest in or involvement with teaching, learning or use of English in Asia or by Asians. In addition to contributions with a pedagogical angle, the journal solicits papers which look at English in relation to language policy and within Asian social and cultural contexts. The journal is also eager to publish papers representing a range of approaches from tightly-focused studies (for example, interpreting data about an innovation within a course) to broad-sweep reviews (for example, a review of language policies across a region) and everything in-between.

In this first issue of the journal it seems many of the aims set out above have been achieved. Among the six papers in this issue there is discussion about: educational policies, culture, society, language learning and teaching, internationalisation, globalisation and, of course, communication. These papers relate specifically to China, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Singapore, Japan and Taiwan, as well as more generally to Asia and Asians. The papers contain what I have referred to above as tightly-focus studies, broad-sweep reviews, social and cultural contexts, the pedagogical angle, and language policy.

This first issue of the journal has taken a special theme of *English as a Lingua Franca in Institutions of Higher Education in Asia*. This is a particularly important theme given the growing importance of, and attention to, English as a lingua franca (ELF) and to the associated topics of internationalisation and globalisation both in Asia and more widely. Although not all issues of the journal will have a special theme (beyond the general remit laid out above) it seemed important to do it for the first issue to mark it as something special and to illustrate the journal's commitment to breadth and depth. The papers presented here when read together, provide breadth in terms of the geographical spread, the approaches taken to the topic and the expertise of the authors. The papers also provide depth in terms of the level of detail presented, the data analysis and the experience on which the authors are able to draw.

Andy Kirkpatrick looks at the impact of an increasing number of courses and programmes offered in English in universities throughout the Asia-Pacific. He reviews the consequences for staff and students of adopting English as a medium of instruction and argues that institutions need to review their policies. He suggests that the language

policies of Asian institutions are often insufficiently developed and frequently reveal a lack of understanding of the multilingual settings in which the institutions operate, the developing varieties of English in Asia and the nature and potential of ELF. The institutional policies, or, in their absence, the common practice of institutions, tend to make assumptions about the supremacy of native-speaker varieties of English and ignore the potential of bilingual approaches. Kirkpatrick recommends that such institutions should review the language policies by which they operate “to take into account today’s linguistic realities”.

Azirah Hashim and Gerhard Leitner describe the complexities of the role of English within higher education in Malaysia and set it within the broader context both geographically by looking beyond Malaysia to other ASEAN countries; and culturally by looking at the role of English and other languages within society and within the Malaysian educational system. They identify complex multilingual contexts in higher education and the need for participants to function at some level of competence in English if they are to be successful. They also discuss the role of localized forms of English and their complex and overlapping relationships with international English and ELF. The authors conclude that the language situation in Malaysia, and indeed other parts of Asia, is complex, challenging, sensitive, interwoven with cultural and social norms, has political implication and cannot, and should not, be simplified.

In her paper on the role of ELF in Singaporean higher education, Phyllis Chew also sets the discussion within a broader context. She explains how the educational system from primary to tertiary, internationalisation, globalisation, and the development of Singapore and its continuing prosperity are all intertwined. Using Bourdieu’s concept of capital formation and focusing specifically on cultural capital, she argues that the development of ELF in Singapore (and not only within higher education) is economically motivated but has also, itself, been significant in Singapore’s successful development as a nation. She argues that adopting ELF to the extent that it has eclipsed other traditional lingua francas in Singapore (notably Hokien and Malay) within one generation was a bold move at a time when the capital value of English was not as evident as it is now and also when it would have been a convenient political move to distance the country from a language with colonial ties. She suggests that persisting with that move has positioned English firmly as a lingua franca which now acts as a neutral medium in Singapore’s multiracial and multilingual setting, underpins the educational system of Singapore thus providing citizens with cultural capital in the form of educational qualifications that can be used worldwide, and attracts international business and industry to fuel the economy.

Ken Lau and Chia-Yen Lin look at the role of ELF in social integration in a university in Taiwan. This tightly-focused study investigates, through the eyes of a group of international students, the extent to which they were able to integrate socially while enrolled at the university. Using narrative accounts, the authors reflect on the role played by ELF in this context and on the extent to which the university has been able to fulfil its goal of internationalisation. The authors identify evidence of efforts to engage in informal and formal social interaction between international and local students but conclude that attempts at both forms of integration are mostly one-sided on the part of the international students and that their efforts are largely unsuccessful. The authors discuss in some detail, based on evidence from their participants, the multiple causes of failure in informal and formal social interactions. Although this paper is based on the experiences of international students in a single university it points to lessons to be learned on a much wider scale.

Howard Brown looks at the expansion of undergraduate English medium instruction programmes in institutions of higher education in Japan. He reviews moves by the Japanese government to encourage internationalisation in Japanese universities and documents the growth of international student populations. He points out that initially, at least, the presence of international students did not always result in other changes within the university, including the language of instruction. This is because the bulk of international students were from nearby countries with similar writing systems, had previously studied Japanese and usually enrolled in Japanese language courses on arrival. He argues that more recently internationalisation has equated more closely to the increase in English-medium instruction programmes because it is intended to attract students from a much wider geographical area with greater linguistic and cultural diversity. However, he identifies the driving factor for internationalisation in Japanese universities as not being from government policies but being from internal motivations within individual universities. These motivations are fuelled by competition with other universities for prestige and diminishing student numbers, as well as a desire to increase the educational experience of domestic, rather than international, students.

Lindsay Miller looks in-depth at the skill of listening to lectures as a key component of ELF in institutions of higher education in Southeast Asia. He identifies the centrality of this skill by revealing how little the system of transmitting information within universities has changed over the last one hundred years. Lectures have dominated throughout this time. This paper presents a detailed 30-year review of the literature on academic listening within Southeast Asia and provides a summary of the main research approaches used. Miller then goes on to draw out relevant themes from this review to focus the discussion about listening in English as an academic lingua franca.

In addition to the papers briefly described above, this issue of the journal contains reviews of three books which are also related to the special theme of the issue:

- *English as a Lingua Franca in the International University: The politics of academic English language policy*
Jennifer Jenkins. Routledge, 2014. 248 pp. ISBN: 978-0-415-68464-4
- *English as a Lingua Franca in ASEAN: A Multilingual Model*
Andy Kirkpatrick. Hong Kong University Press. 2010. 236 pp. ISBN: 9789888028795
- *English as a Lingua Franca in Higher Education: A longitudinal study of classroom discourse*
Ute Smit. Berlin: Gruyter Mouton, 2010. 464 pp. ISBN 978-3-11-020519-0

In providing these reviews of one new and two already well-known books so closely related to our topic, it is hoped that the reader's experience of immersion in the field of *English as a Lingua Franca in Institutions of Higher Education in Asia* will be further enhanced.