

**Review of: *Spoken English, TESOL and Applied Linguistics: Challenges for theory and practice*, ed. Rebecca Hughes. Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan (2006), (pp. 289), ISBN 1403936323. US\$34.95 pbk.**

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In English for Academic Purposes contexts, spoken language has had rather less attention than aspects such as academic writing, vocabulary, listening or grammar. This comment may be a speculation rather than a verified fact, but it is one that can confidently be made if we go by a survey of the contents of this journal. The reasons for this are varied and the place of spoken language in academic assessment might be one justification but it is likely that the slippery nature of speech and the inherent difficulties of lack of ready access to examples of recorded oral text, ethical considerations, and problems of authenticity provide other reasons why researchers may shy away from spoken language research. Fortunately this is changing, due in part to the emergence of relevant corpora, for example, Simpson and Leicher (2006) and the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE) (2007). Readers of this collection of 12 articles, edited by Rebecca Hughes, might come away stimulated to engage in studies of aspects of spoken language, and more convinced of the place of spoken language in the core curriculum of TESOL and applied linguistics. The book is relevant to teachers, testers and researchers as it presents a collection of recent articles which together constitute a survey of the 'state of play' in the field.

The first group of articles focuses on World Englishes and perceptions of native and non-native speaker status. Jasmine Luk and Angel Lin, Hong Kong-based applied linguists, review notions of standard English in order to question the status of different varieties of English within the post-colonial context of Hong Kong. One result is to reveal the political nature of current value judgements about spoken English competence. Stephanie Lindemann looks at some of the same issues from the point of view of listeners to spoken English. The studies she discusses demonstrate the role of the listener in the success of communication, the powerful effect of attitude on listeners' perceptions of clarity and communicative ability, as well as the pervasive nature of language prejudice. Lindemann recommends these aspects be taken into account in planning for research, teaching and assessment and that language prejudice on the part of native speakers be tackled proactively. From the EAP perspective, some of these points challenge notions of academic culture and force us to question whether the expectations of the academy should be modified as staff and students become more ethnically diverse. The writers also point out the implicit and explicit value judgements currently being made about varieties of English and question the relevance of these in a globalised context.

Chapters in the second section, which deals with aspects of prosody, cover reading aloud, intonation, rhythm and turn-taking behaviour. In delivering presentations, for example, EAP students are often challenged by teachers' requests to speak from key point notes or presentation software, without recourse to a written 'script'. When the information being presented is complex, and language forms are new, it can be demanding to give an oral presentation in an improvised way. Hence students resort to memorization of a presentation text which can result in 'robospeak'. Wallace Chafe's chapter deals with reading aloud, and discusses the differences between this form of delivery of text and spontaneous speech. He analyses an example from a conference

presentation which includes both on the spot comments to the audience followed by the introduction to a presentation which was read aloud. Chafe's research study is based on applied linguistics conference settings and, while he unfortunately stops short of suggesting benefits for students in reading aloud, these are nevertheless present by implication.

Also in the prosody section, Wennerstrom sensibly suggests that we focus on what can be learnt from each of the competing descriptions of intonation. Again the implications for the classroom are limited, but she outlines a research agenda which would be helpful to those interested in this field. Ee Ling Low's discussion of rhythm is similarly of relevance to researchers but stresses, among other teaching implications, the value of explicit teaching of vowel reduction. A different research approach is taken by Hughes and Reed in their investigation of turn-taking in interviews, in that they set up 5 hypotheses which draw on sociolinguistic knowledge, cues from intonation, syntax and semantics, genre patterns and speaker knowledge. These are then tested against relevant data from an existing corpus.

While all chapters are relevant to EAP researchers and practitioners, Mauranen's overview chapter titled 'Spoken discourse, academics and global English: a corpus perspective' confronts us with the issue of shifting from the current written language bias to greater attention on descriptions and models of spoken language. She emphasizes the potential for further investigation of existing corpora by teachers and students. In her chapter, Joan Cutting focuses on the ways in which implicitness is conveyed through vague language, showing, through discourse analysis of a casual conversation, how recourse to such language was a significant part of the formation of an academic discourse community. Usefully for EAP teachers, Cutting reviews methodological options for helping students develop awareness of vague language, and briefly describes activities she has trialled with students.

Two chapters address the place of spoken language analysis in language teacher education (LTE) and development. In Farr's contribution, an extensive and insightful survey literature review introduces a discussion of data from an LTE teaching practice corpus. Farr argues convincingly for greater use of such corpora as a means of basing solutions to professional concerns on systematic use of real interaction. She sees both qualitative and quantitative corpus analysis as providing a stimulus to reflection and a catalyst for change. Walsh's focus is on classroom based research, and his concern is to thoroughly review existing methods for analyzing spoken classroom discourse before drawing together the many threads of what he terms a 'variable approach'. Walsh acknowledges that this research approach has not yet been standardised, but argues that it would more satisfactorily address the richness and complexity of interaction in classroom settings.

The final two chapters by John Levis and Marysia Gerson Johnson address issues of assessment of spoken language. Levis discusses the challenges in accounting for pronunciation and intelligibility factors in testing, with particular attention to rater bias and the significance of the sociolinguistic backgrounds of interlocutors and assessors. His attention to the challenges of fluency assessment is also useful. Johnson presents views she has previously published on local and dialogic language ability. The discussion of insights from Vygotsky and Bakhtin as applied to second language acquisition is convincing, but the attempt to cover assessment of a learner's potential

for language development makes for a somewhat disjointed text and the arguments require further development and reinforcement.

This valuable collection could have benefitted from further editorial commentary to summarise some of the challenges for teachers and researchers. However, for readers looking for up-to-date and applied spoken language insights, the collection is a recommended adjunct to Hughes' earlier book (2002). As it is likely that readers will dip into the text, rather than read it cover to cover, the diversity of perspectives more than makes up for any lack of continuity. Most chapters include comprehensive surveys of literature in their area of focus, and this aspect alone would be helpful to those engaged in research into an aspect of spoken language. The overall usefulness of this collection of articles lies in the evidence it provides of the need for work on spoken language to be accorded higher status in driving theories and paradigms in applied linguistics, and the opportunities this presents for teachers and researchers.

## References

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