

Editorial

As 2018 comes to an end we are reminded of the diversity of the topics and issues that have been addressed in the articles of *English Today*. We, the current editors, also recall the words of the journal's founding editor, Tom McArthur, who likened the task of editing the journal to 'tightrope walkers and chefs', who must keep one's balance and get all the ingredients right.

From the very first issue of *English Today* in 1985 to the current issue, the world of English has witnessed an ongoing paradigm shift. In that first issue of *English Today* Richard W. Bailey's 'The Idea of World English' took a historical and geographical look at the spread of English – and of ideas about English – as a world language. The same issue also explored 'The Statistics of English Today' with *David Crystal* questioning whether the figure of 700 million users of English around the world in the middle of the 1980s was an *understatement*.

Some scholars today estimate (or guesstimate) that there may be as many as two billion users of English around the world regardless of whether English is their first, second or *n*th language, and there has been a wide acceptance of a pluricentric view of 'Englishes' and the multicultural nature of English today. While the traditional 'standard' English, whatever it may be, is still preferred in many parts of the world, there is an increasing awareness of the existence and robust development of new 'Englishes'. Indian English, Malaysian English, Singapore English, Nigerian English and Chinese English are some of the well-known varieties, but the expansion of varieties may also include some varieties of English that may not be as well known, such as those spoken in Shetland and Orkney, the Canadian Maritimes, the Bahamas, the Falkland Islands, Malta, Bermuda or the Cook Islands, to name just a few.

The paradigm shift from English to 'Englishes' has taken place over the last decades alongside unprecedented globalisation, human mobility, ubi-

quitous Internet and social media, and the *de facto* lingua franca status of English. The world of English has begun to revisit fundamental questions in relation to the uses and users of English: 'Is there still a "standard" English?' 'Does an ideal "native" speaker of English exist?'

Decades of research worldwide on the sociolinguistics of English has shown that the paradigm shift not only embodies variations in lexis, syntax, discourse, pragmatics and cultural conceptualisations of English varieties in local contexts, but the shift has come to challenge the uneven ground underlying the traditional categorisation of EFL, ESL and ENL. The paradigm shift also brings about the inclusivity of 'WE-ness' in world Englishes (WE) and the repositioning of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) communication as a multilingual phenomenon. In addition, where languages other than English and their associated cultural conceptualisations may have once been perceived as 'interference' or 'baggage' that restricts or constrains bilingual and multilingual learners and users of English, other languages can now function increasingly as a 'badge' of English users' unique linguistic and cultural heritage and identity.

The paradigm shift from English to Englishes, as far as we understand it, is not exclusively about the varying forms and functions of English in a global context, but it is also directly related to the actual users of English. A group of international and domestic students in a university in Australia were asked what 'English today' means to them. Although the most common response was that 'English today is a tool for communication', the students described English today with a wide range of metaphors: a bridge, a garden with various flowers (representing cultures and Englishes), the future, a food bazaar, a space rocket, a rainforest with biodiversity, a seed, a method, a middleman, a useful instrument, a toolkit, a salad, a shelter, a vessel, a key, a treasure, an elephant, a mixed

The editorial policy of *English Today* is to provide a focus or forum for all sorts of news and opinion from around the world. The points of view of individual writers are as a consequence their own, and do not reflect the opinion of the editorial board. In addition, wherever feasible, *ET* generally leaves unchanged the orthography (normally British or American) and the usage of individual contributors, although the editorial style of the journal itself is that of Cambridge University Press.

bag of candy, a great book, a love story, and the world itself. It is interesting to note that one of the metaphors put forward by an international multilingual student, a 'multi-coloured living creature', also resonates with one of the articles in the very first issue of *English Today*, 'The Most Chameleon of Languages: Perceptions of English Abroad', in which *Alan Maley* foresaw the paradigm shift when he pointed out that 'English in different parts of the world begins to take on some of the colour of the local languages and to reflect local social realities' (Maley, 1985, p. 31).

English today has become a multilingual and multicultural enterprise. Some thirty-three years since its first issue *English Today* continues to 'cast our net widely enough and well enough – to bring in history, geography, statistics, social issues, literature, lexicography, etymology, usage, linguistics, institutions, technological change, and other languages besides English' (McArthur, 1985, p. 2).

The current issue continues the tradition of examining the pluricentricity of English, but from a point of view that is frequently overlooked in our discipline: prescriptivism. The essays collected in this special issue represent some of the most recent scholarship in both current and historical debates on prescriptivism in English. Our heartfelt thanks and appreciation go to Professor Ingrid Tieken-Boon van Ostade of Leiden University for the initiative and effort to collect, edit and deliver to *English Today* for review and eventual inclusion the essays of this special issue.

References

- Maley, A. 1985. 'The Most Chameleon of Languages: Perceptions of English Abroad.' *English Today*, 1(1), 30-33. doi:10.1017/S0266078400013122
- McArthur, T. 1985. 'High Wires and Haute Cuisine.' *English Today*, 1(1), 2. doi:10.1017/S0266078400013006

The editors