

Editorial

The value of nostalgia

The Oxford English Dictionary (OED) records the first use of the word *nostalgia* in 1756. The word is derived from the Greek word *nostos*, meaning ‘journey home’. Although positive emotions are usually associated with the Greek word, in English the term is first used to describe a type of pathology that the OED calls ‘acute longing for familiar surroundings’, or homesickness.

But *nostalgia* has gone through a process of semantic amelioration over time. By 1900 the OED records the word first being used to refer to a more neutral emotion of sentimentality, and by 1976 the term had been extended to refer to an object that can inspire the positive memories of the past.

One cannot help but wonder if modern society has also changed in the way that it regards the past; no longer as a feeling of mortal sickness, but as a fond remembrance. There’s no evidence to suggest that actual emotions are different today than they were in the mid-18th century when the term *nostalgia* was first used in English, and it would be extremely surprising to find any evidence that would suggest that such a change is even possible. Nevertheless, *nostalgia* in the 21st century is not what it was in the 18th or 19th centuries, and I can’t help but wonder if *nostalgia*’s semantic amelioration might parallel an increasing need for modern society to regard change positively.

I would like to ask *English Today* readers to engage with this issue – volume 39, number 4 – with a measure of nostalgia. For nearly four decades *English Today* has sought to publish the best research and thinking about all aspects of the English language. In 2005, Founding Editor Tom MacArthur wrote that the journal’s content had evolved from *articles* into *papers* (2005: 2). The journal had started as a 44-page magazine that published dozens of short (often one-to-two-page) articles. In 2023, an issue of *English Today* averages 85 pages with eight to 12 academic papers in each issue.

But there have been unintended changes in the way that readers interact with *English Today*.

Only a small handful of readers will be reading this editorial within the covers of the journal; most will read it online. In 2022 more than 7,800 institutions (most of higher learning) had online access to *English Today* and there were more than 123,000 full-text downloads. However, fewer than 150 print copies of the journal were sold in 2022. As *English Today* has grown to become a leading journal devoted to the study of all aspects of the English language, it has accomplished this primarily through electronic distribution.

In response to the way that our readers interact with *English Today*, Cambridge University Press will introduce a new format to the journal’s print edition in 2024’s volume 40. This will come with a slight change in the way articles are formatted (and readers who have recently viewed content published in FirstView may have already noticed this change). The new print version of the journal will look larger than previous print editions. I must confess a certain amount of nostalgia (that is, the OED’s second definition ‘a sentimental longing for . . . the past’) about the old format, but I also remind myself that these changes are in response to the journal’s *success*.

And let me also assure readers of something that will not change in volume 40, namely, *English Today*’s commitment to the best scholarship related to investigation of the English language.

To that end, in this issue we are pleased to bring readers five research papers and three shorter articles. Wilkinson Daniel Wong Gonzales, Mie Hiramoto, Jakob R. E. Leimgruber and Jun Jie Lim discuss the variable use of the question tag *is it* in Colloquial Singapore English. In a shorter article, Constantina Fotiou surveys the use of English within the former British colony of Cyprus. As we turn our attention to English in Asia, two articles discuss English in Korea. In a research paper Hyeon–Seok Kang examines the English names adopted by South Korean pop acts and in a shorter article Dylan G. Williams describes the state of English-medium instruction policy in South Korea. The next two research papers in the

issue both look at the inclusion of English within online communication in other languages. Zoi Tatsioka examines English loanwords in Greek online women's magazines, and Fang Qi and Junlong Li examine language play in Chinese WeChat messages. Baya Maraf and Ulker Vanci Osam's shorter article examines the linguistic landscape of Algeria and recent influx of English found in bottom-up signage. Finally, in a research article, Mian Jia and Yi An examine the use of

interpersonal features within the acknowledgement sections of dissertations from various disciplines.

Andrew Moody
The editors

Reference

- McArthur, T. 2005. 'Squaring the circle: Academic and entertaining.' *English Today*, 21(2), 2. doi:10.1017/S0266078405002014
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