Editorial

For most of us, 2020 has been a year in *iso*.

The word *iso* is not new, but it is becoming a part of the 'coroneologisms' (See Amanda Roig–Marín's article on COVID-19-related vocabulary in *English Today*'s FirstView) that are spreading both within and outside the social media sphere across the English-speaking world.

One of the newly added definitions of *iso* in Urbandictionary.com is 'the need to isolate, particularly self-isolation, after testing positive for the Rona', which was contributed by *2dogz* on March 20, 2020 (https://www.urbandictionary.com/define.php?term=ISO). And the *Rona* in this definition, according to the same online (re-)source, refers to 'a period of time in 2020 where the Corona Virus (CV19) ravaged the world, forcing the planet's inhabitants to self-quarantine', giving *iso* a widespread new meaning of self-quarantine when one is sick with a pathogen or self-isolation when one has been exposed to a pathogen.

One of the high-frequency hashtags on various social media platforms since the beginning of 2020 is *#iso*, e.g., at the time of writing this editorial, there appear to be over 2.8 million *#iso* posts on Instagram, 431.2 million views of *#iso* on TikTok, and 103K posts about *#iso* on Facebook.

Readers of *English Today* may be well aware that the word *iso* has various pre-*iso* meanings, ranging from *iso* as a computer file type used for installing operating systems, to acronyms such as 'InSignificant Other', meaning a partner that you are less than enthusiastic about, 'In Search Of', 'I Seek Out', and inevitably, 'International Standards Organization', to the measure of film speed, i.e. a photographic film's sensitivity to light (ISO system). *Iso* has also been commonly used in English as a prefix, and it comes from the Greek *īsos*, meaning 'equal to' or 'the same as'. This *iso-* prefix is most commonly found in such words as *iso*tope, *iso*form, *iso*gloss, *iso*tropy, *iso*sceles, *iso*enzyme, *iso*magnetic, *iso*agglutinin, and *iso*chromosome.

One such word, *isobar*, may have acquired a unique 2020 meaning in Australia. It originally means a line on a weather map connecting points of equal atmospheric pressure. However, when people are living in lockdown largely due to the *Rona* and working from home (WFH), many of us may be spending our days at our *iso*desk (the workplace we have improvised at home to look good for video-conferencing) or at our *iso*bar, drinking a *quarantini* or any other cocktail mixed to congratulate ourselves on another WFH day. Perhaps we may also be having a Zoom party from our own private *iso*bars to the homes of colleagues or friends on a Friday afternoon during *locktail hour*, cheering one another on for surviving another week of lockdown, believing that staying apart keeps us together in *iso*. Indeed, the irony is that the original meaning of *īsos* in Greek was to bring items together, but this current new meaning separates individuals from one another.

The *Rona* pandemic and isolation may come and go, but coroneologisms may linger around for a while, as will the newly acquired *iso* words and meanings in the English language. Our founding editor of *English Today*, Tom McArthur, predicted some 20 years ago, when he was on the Chinese University of Hong Kong campus writing his 'Responding to needs and pressures – from a distance' for the editorial of *English Today* (16.2), that 'electronic contact is more significant than ever'. We have indeed been responding to new and evolving 'needs and pressures – from a distance' in *iso* throughout this year.

While we survive and thrive, and live that *iso*-life, following our *iso*-tutorial 101, i.e., keep calm, keep *iso*-cooking or baking, and carry on, we may also be well aware that we have quietly shifted into new *iso* norms and standards. We may even cherish some *iso*-blessings such as having some quality *iso*-time with family, which we could only dream of once upon a time, and watching 'One World: Together At Home' right at home, with some of the world's biggest stars joining together to perform an online concert for coronavirus relief, and start looking forward to a post-*iso* world in 2021, with our fingers crossed.

In this issue we take a few moments to remember the life and work of Professor Tom McArthur, the visionary founding editor of *English Today*. Tom's work and influence is found on each page of the journal and his family, members of our editorial

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board and former co-editors Rajend Mesthrie and Kingsley Bolton put that work into perspective in a short special segment of this issue. In addition, co-editors Rajend Mesthrie and Kingsley Bolton remember the work and influence of their co-editor David Graddol.

This issue also includes a debate about the future of the English major in China. Responding to Ningyang Chen's provocative article, Emily Xiaozhou Zhou and Mingjian Zha suggest that the English major can be saved. As is editorial practice at *English Today*, Chen is given the opportunity to respond to those suggestions in this volume. Other topics in the issue include LGBT labelling words (Shi & Lei), language ideology in higher education in Bangladesh (Rahman & Singh), and the recent development of a 'general extender' in present-day English (Overstreet).

The editors