

EDITOR'S NOTE

One of the things about language that makes it so fascinating is how it organically grows and keeps growing as it interacts with other languages, as more, different people interact using it. Especially in a highly digitized world like ours, where interactions are easily instantaneous, simultaneous, and global, there are plentiful opportunities to newly appreciate language. Of course, this phenomenon of growth is true for all languages although the case of English is exceptional as it continues to be the most widely spoken language in the world with reportedly 1.5 billion speakers as of 2023 (Dyvik, 2024). With the increasing hypercentrality of English (de Swaan, 2001), our Journal, dedicated to studies about this language, is seeing continued growth as well.

This year, the Asia Journal of English Language Studies (AJELS) is releasing not only one, but two issues for Volume 12. This first issue is a regular feature of research articles on English language studies and English language teaching and learning. The second issue is a dedicated space for empirical work on Generative Artificial Intelligence in English language teaching.

To help manage the increasing interest to publish in AJELS, the Editorial Board warmly welcomes a new member of the international advisory board – Dr. Subhan Zein of Universitas Pendidikan Indonesia, Indonesia. I am also happy to formally introduce two new Editorial Board Members – Dr. Josephine B. Alarcon and Dr. Raquel R. Jimenez, both newly minted PhDs of the University of Santo Tomas (UST), Department of English.

Their valuable help is deeply appreciated, as well as the time and expertise generously contributed by our distinguished peer reviewers for this issue: Dr. Evalyn B. Abiog (West Vancouver School District and UST), Dr. Marianne Jennifer M. Gaerlan (De La Salle University), Dr. Rosalyn G. Mirasol (UST), Dr. Willy A. Renandya (National Institute of Education, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore), Dr. Maria Corazon S. Sauz (UST), Dr. Supong Tangkiengsirisin (Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand), Dr. Veronico N. Tarrayo (UST), and Dr. Kie Ross Zuraw (University of California, Los Angeles, USA). My gratitude also goes to colleagues in the University who assisted in screening the accepted articles: Ms. Michelle A. Desierto, Ms. Sheila N. Gabe, Mr. John Paulo Q. Herrera, and Ms. Kristina D. Valerio.

The product of this beautiful teamwork is this compendium of research articles that contribute to our appreciation of the intersections of language, literacy education, and technology. Collectively, the six articles in Volume 12, Issue 1 affirm the important implications of language in the teaching and acquisition of literacies, including speaking, reading, as well as intercultural competence.

The first article focuses on gender as a cultural category. In **“How visible is the rainbow flag? LGBT Representation in Philippine TV Commercials and Online Advertisements,”** *Rialyn L. Dogcol and Virna S. Villanueva* examine how lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgenders (LGBT) are represented in Philippine TV commercials and online advertisements. Their qualitative analysis, anchored on the nature of gender portrayals, provides evidence of mostly heteronormative representations of LGBT. With this finding, they challenge media practitioners and scholars to deconstruct this yet-limited representation of queer identity in Philippine advertisements.

Meanwhile, *Mariyela Mari G. Hugo* explores age as a cultural category potentially influencing the way different generations write laughter and interpret written laughter. In **“Laughing on the Internet: Age-Grading in the Use and Understanding of Written Laughter,”** she examines 5,000 laughter comments on a Facebook group page and interviews participants representing three age cohorts: youth, adults, and seniors. The results show a tendency for online laughter expressions to be age graded.

Focusing on the youth cohort, *Ivan Kenneth Joei A. Balignasay, Kristine Althea F. Morado, and Camille J. Vizconde* investigate whether and how vlogging helps develop the English-speaking competence of Filipino junior and senior high school students. In **“Filipino students’ vlogging experiences: Insights on English-speaking skills development,”** they identified segments in 12 publicly posted vlogs from TikTok and YouTube where the student-vloggers topicalized vlogging as a helpful exercise in enhancing their ability to speak in English. With the identified affordances of vlogging in various aspects of speech competence, the authors recommend that English speech teachers consider capitalizing on vlogs as an assessment tool.

In addition to these Philippine-based studies, where English is a second language, this issue also features studies highlighting the experiences of learners of English as a foreign language (EFL).

“Subphonemic detail and foreign language learning: Word-final sibilants in Korean learners of L2 English and L3 German” reports *Eva Maria Luef’s* investigation of how Korean speakers acoustically express word-final sibilants in English and German, which are their first and second foreign languages, respectively. The findings show that despite the phonetic differences in their first language (Korean) and the foreign languages they are learning, the Korean speakers are able to incorporate subphonemic detail when they articulate words in their target languages. This study has important implications in subphonemic studies in foreign language learning.

Finally, the last two articles focus our attention on reading literacy. In **“Exploring the Impact of Social Media on EFL Reading Preferences and Habits,”** *Bochra Benaicha and Boualem Benghalem* examine the impact of social media on what and how Algerian

EFL students read. Their findings highlight the influence of Facebook and Instagram in the cohort's reading preferences, reporting the identified advantages of increased access to more diverse texts while also recognizing drawbacks of these social media platforms on the EFL learners' habits of reading.

Also situated in Algerian context, the study of *Mahdjouba Chaouche* titled “**Promoting EFL Students' Intercultural Awareness through Reading Literacy Texts**” argues for the use of literary pieces to help grow the intercultural awareness of readers. Using Robert Frost's poem, “The Road Not Taken,” the article demonstrates how Hanauer's framework of Focus-on-Cultural Understanding can develop EFL students' awareness of what their cultural views are and how it shapes their interpretation of a text. The study has implications for cross-cultural reading literacy in EFL contexts.

Besides celebrating the different ways that English can be learned as a second or foreign language, the contributions in this issue also remind us to be grateful for and mindful of the ever-growing intersection of technology and social media and the language(s) that we know.

Happy reading and researching!

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