

## **FOREWORD ELIA 6**

The present issue of ELIA (*Estudios de Lingüística Inglesa Aplicada / Studies in Applied English Linguistics*) is number 6 in this now consolidated series on applied linguistics. In the last seven years ELIA has found a place among the most prominent publications in Spain devoted to the diffusion of research in the field of applied linguistics, especially in the area of second and foreign language teaching and learning, and use. If there is something that characterizes this issue of ELIA, it is its international character, since it includes seven articles written by researchers from seven different countries, all addressing issues of concern to applied linguists. Achieving this international character has been one of the chief concerns and interests of the team that edits ELIA, as we believe that in the globalised world in which we live, openness to works and points of view forged in different academic contexts should take priority. We hope therefore that this volume will provide opportunities for reflection on certain issues in applied linguistics and trigger new research in the field. Exceptionally, this sixth issue of ELIA contains materials for two years (2005 and 2006); until now the journal had appeared annually. This does not reflect a new tendency in the publication of ELIA but a transitory circumstance that, we anticipate, will return to normal in the coming year.

We begin the volume with a paper by Norbert Schmitt who approaches one of the most topical areas in applied linguistics at the moment, as it is the case of formulaic language. In his paper he summarises the importance of this key element in language use and focuses upon two key characteristics of formulaic language, that is, fixedness and variability.

He analyses some of the purposes that formulaic language serves in language use such as performing functions, facilitating social interaction, organising discourse and the transfer of precise information, among others. Within a corpus-based study the author analyses various types of formulaic language in terms of frequency, fixedness and variability. Another important aspect that is examined in this article is the way formulaic language is stored and processed by proficient speakers: native speakers and non-native speakers. Common use of formulaic language in speech production facilitates the fluency characteristic of proficient speakers with important implications for the field of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning, which are also discussed in this article.

Joy Logan depicts a project carried out in the Yucatan, Mexico, at the School of Experimental Language Training (SELT) which sought to teach English to the local community and to train U.S. university students both in EFL (English as a Foreign Language) methods and in the practice of cultural ethnography. The study portrayed here analyses the use of the three languages in contact in the SELT, that is, Spanish, English and Yucatec Maya, in terms of the dynamics of power and authority in the EFL classroom. The main task of this school was to look for complementary second language methods that would support the creation of a “transculturative” space that would favour multidirectional communication and learning in the second language classroom. This goal seems to have been attained since the student ethnographies of this study indicated a shared learning and communicative success to the community and Field School participants alike. In this respect, the SELT, eventually, offered an example of how the second language classroom can work to acknowledge cultural differences and support the maintenance of indigenous languages.

Sara Mercer presents a paper with the preliminary results of a study on the use of journals as a tool for investigating learner beliefs and emotions in the language classroom. In the first part of the article she analyses previous research using journals as a data-gathering tool and pinpoints the advantages and shortcomings of this type of research. One of the most prominent practical problems she had to face was the considerable amount of

commitment required of the participants; such a long-term project took a lot of their time and effort over an extended period. Apart from assessing the suitability of journals as a research tool, the author tried to find out which emotions play a significant role in the language learning classroom from the perspective of the learner and what factors appear to affect the learners' emotional experience of the language classroom. The study was carried out amongst 73 advanced, tertiary level students of English at the University of Graz who kept a weekly diary through a period of 15 weeks. Mercer does a thorough analysis of these journals and provides specific examples to exemplify her points. She also presents some preliminary results of her study, seen from the perspective of the learner, the teacher and the researcher, providing a complete picture of the prospects of this learning, teaching and researching tool to examine something as opaque as students' emotions and attitudes.

Noëlle Groult Bois introduces the results of two studies carried out at the Foreign Language Center of the National Autonomous University of México, about beliefs held by Mexican university level students of French and English as foreign languages. These students learned foreign languages in a self-access center and they had to take decisions on their syllabus, their teaching materials, the activities they were going to do and the assessment procedures. These considerations explain the need to analyse students' activities towards foreign language learning. Using some qualitative and quantitative data gathering procedures the researcher built up a comprehensive picture of students' perception of their learning context, their teaching materials, their teachers and many other important factors for language learning. The results provide valuable information for language teachers and course designers in order to improve learning. Among others, the researchers put forward shortcomings on the part of the students such as lack of planning, uncertain objectives and difficulties in self-assessment, which are in fact not far removed from the problems students in other parts of the world may find in a similar learning context.

Anna Franca Plastina explores students' situational anxiety in a second language instruction in virtual learning environments. Many studies

have dealt with anxiety in the traditional classroom but not so many on virtual learning contexts where the learning environment caters differently for factors such as personality trait, acceptance, orientation, communication, performance and evaluation. This paper questions whether situational anxiety can be overridden in virtual learning environments, as might be expected since students do not lose face in front of the teacher or other learners when they make a mistake. The researcher analyses second language situational anxiety both in traditional classrooms and virtual learning environments and then carries out a small-scale case study to investigate second language situational anxiety in two virtual learning environments. The research project was conducted with 25 volunteer participants divided into two separate groups and stages. The study was based on quantitative and qualitative research and comparative findings between two distinct groups of learners show how forms of second language situational anxiety are manifested differently through behaviour in two different virtual learning environments. It seems that learners' age and technological skills strongly influence virtual behaviour and that anxiety is generally reduced in these learning contexts.

Sonia Casal considers that stereotypes and prejudices have a cultural component as a result of the socialising process that begins when we are born and we function in any sort of social structure, as members of a family, of a neighbourhood or as students in a classroom. The author also acknowledges that stereotypes and prejudices have an institutional, cultural and collective base and that the teaching-learning process, specifically in the second language classroom, may provide the required tools to encourage positive attitudes towards other groups of students, when group-work activities are implemented in the EFL classroom. In this article, positive interdependence is present as a tool to create a social situation where EFL students need one another to succeed in their language learning task. Therefore, the author suggests that modifying students' attitudes towards other groups and promoting the positive side of working in groups may enhance the complex process of foreign language learning in a classroom setting.

This issue concludes with a paper by Méndez García, Castro Prieto and Sercu who investigated to what extent Spanish EFL teachers in secondary education favour autonomous cultural learning from a constructivist point of view. That is, if teachers take their learners' previous knowledge and familiarity with the target culture to scaffold their learning and promote learner autonomy. This study is part of a larger project carried out in seven different countries where English is taught as a secondary education. Researchers were part of CULTNET, a network devoted to the study of intercultural aspects in the teaching of foreign languages. The outcomes of the research project show that English teachers are well aware of students' perceptions of the target culture which seems largely superficial and stereotyped. A further implication of this study is that English teachers need a training that meets the needs of a society characterised by mobility and intercultural contact.

We would like to thank the reviewers of this volume who went to great lengths to give fast and thoughtful comments to the papers that appear here.