

UC Riverside

Issues in Applied Linguistics

Title

Editorial

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/18s619rw>

Journal

Issues in Applied Linguistics, 14(2)

ISSN

1050-4273

Authors

Lowi, Rosamina

Mikesell, Lisa

Publication Date

2004

DOI

10.5070/L4142005074

Peer reviewed

Editorial

In this issue, we highlight the range and diversity of research focusing on discourse in applied linguistics. Three of the articles address a variety of issues surrounding the discourse practices and linguistic features of second language learners. The first article examines representations of identity of native Spanish speaking second language learners of English living in Los Angeles as reported through elicited narratives; the second article focuses on language pedagogy by investigating the use of small talk in an English language classroom in Hong Kong; and the third article explores the use of three linguistic features by near-native Spanish speakers in different types of discourse situations. The last article also focuses on pedagogical issues, but those related to the teaching of freshmen composition, specifically how basic writers can be taught to more justly represent the *other*.

How second language learners maintain their identity in a second language is an ongoing concern. Relaño Pastor investigates this issue by examining the reported speech in 28 elicited narratives, primarily in their native Spanish, from five Latina women living in Los Angeles. The author focuses on three components of Ochs and Capps' (2001) seven-component narrative model: *unexpected events* involving communicative challenges, speakers' emotional *responses* to inequitable and discriminatory language situations, and strategic *attempts* by these women to cope with such communicative challenges and situations. The author argues that, despite these women's levels of English proficiency (ranging from beginner to intermediate), the quotation formulations and prosodic and voice quality features of their reported speech highlight their agency and ability to use their second language to restore the moral order of inequitable interactions. In her analysis of the narratives, Relaño Pastor shows that limited English skills do not prevent these women from portraying themselves as being assertive or able to control a situation in their second language that they believe has threatened or illegitimized their native language or culture.

Although once considered frivolous, non-institutional small talk in second language classrooms is becoming more and more valued as a means for students to incorporate authentic language and negotiate meaning in institutional settings. Luk, using naturally occurring data, demonstrates the usefulness of small talk between a native English speaking teacher and her native Cantonese speaking students in an English-as-a-second-language secondary school classroom in Hong Kong. She shows that in this classroom, traditional classroom discourse, although not without pedagogical value, can constrain interaction leading teachers and students to respond mechanically and focus on form rather than meaning. In contrast, she shows that the use of small talk between lessons allows students to more freely initiate interactions and self-select turns, which she argues is uncommon in Hong Kong English classrooms. Luk discusses the pedagogical implications of classroom small talk.

The nature of what it means to be a near-native speaker is particularly complex. Medina-Rivera addresses this complexity in exploring three linguistic features of four near-native speakers of Spanish – mood (indicative/subjunctive), tense (preterit/imperfect), and copula verbs (*ser/estar*) – as influenced by situational and discourse contexts. He defines near-native speakers as those who can hold complex conversations, can understand any native speaker, and are able to function in their field of work in their second language. The author finds that these near-native speakers produced the focal linguistic features correctly much of the time. His conclusion, although tentative due to the small sample size, is that these speakers tend to use these linguistic features incorrectly more often in narratives and argumentative discourse as well as when discussing two topics: family/friends and religion. In contrast, higher frequencies of correct use occurred in expository and descriptive discourse about topics involving the Hispanic culture and language.

Pandey's article exemplifies the "new phase" that composition teaching has entered, one that not only addresses structure and organization, but also the sophistication of students' critical thinking and analysis. Using critical discourse analysis, Pandey examines freshmen compositions dealing with issues of social justice and morality, more specifically dealing with *otherness*, and the ways in which writers present social dichotomies. She discusses how proficient college writers are able to embed their views within the complexity of the social relationship being discussed while basic writers' *othering* strategies are less successful at portraying the complex relationship between the *us* and *them*. Basic writers, she argues, encode these groups as simple dichotomies, making for less effective writing. Pandey examines *us* and *them* groupings as encoded by a number of linguistic features including lexical choice, distance markers, declaratives, passives, linguistic contrast, and qualification. The author argues that informed audiences react to writers' *othering* strategies and discusses how composition teachers can explicitly teach *othering* strategies to aid students in writing more persuasive arguments without diminishing their views.

During the preparation of the last few issues, IAL has undergone changes within its editorial staff. We welcome Lisa Mikesell, who has served as Assistant Editor since 13.2, and who now moves up to Co-editor for this issue, and Satomi Kuroshima as Production Editor. Two of our members have served and have moved on: Tim Farnsworth as Book Review Editor and Jeffrey Good as Assistant Editor. Emmy Goldknopf, after having served as Co-Editor for several volumes, serves as an Assistant Editor for this issue.

Rosamina Lowi
Lisa Mikesell

REFERENCE

- Ochs, E., & Capps, L. (2001). *Living narrative: Creating lives in everyday storytelling*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.