

## CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS BY SAAL MEMBERS

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7th International Teaching and Language Corpora Conference (TALC7),  
Paris, France. July 1-4, 2006.

### A Computer Corpus Approach to Classroom Interactions: The Singapore Experience

Huaqing HONG, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

The development of corpus linguistics has particularly been beneficial to language teaching. Through the use of language corpora, learners can find actually occurring examples of the authentic language to learn and use. Teachers with access to such corpora can find examples of the language to use in teaching grammar, vocabulary, or discourse to their students. Thus, corpus-based language teaching has been extensively discussed in the literature.

Nevertheless, there are only a few studies on the application of corpus linguistics approach to the study of classroom interactions, which has long been a hot topic in educational research. One of the reasons why a corpus-based study of classroom interactions has not been extensively applied is that there is a lack of a large database of classroom lessons. This shortage brings us that we have little and piecemeal knowledge of what actually goes on in classrooms (Brumfit & Mitchell, 1989; Stubbs, 1983; Seedhouse, 1995). Further on this, Hargreaves (1996) made a trenchant criticism of educational research in the UK by saying that “in education there is simply not enough evidence on the effects and effectiveness of what teachers do in classrooms to provide an evidence-based corpus of knowledge.” Similarly, in reviewing the education research in the US, Biber *et al* (2004) pointed out that “to date there have been few large-scale empirical investigations of academic registers, and virtually no such investigations of spoken academic registers.” Given this lack of support of large quantity of data, it has been impossible to generalize the educational research results based on traditional pen-and-paper approach or observation-based approach. Specifically in the context of classroom research, we have lacked the empirically defined classroom interaction models drawn on a large sample of data. Therefore, it is of great importance to build up a corpus database of classroom interactions.

Even though there is a corpus of the large scale of collection of data of

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classroom interactions, there is still a problem in efficiently handling of such data (most of which are audio/video recordings or transcripts). As we all know, the exercise of analysis of classroom interactional data as (maybe primary) speech genres and discourses (utterances) used in classrooms, we need both empiricist approaches to interaction or behaviour (thus linguistic or paralinguistic features) and functional-communicative approaches of classroom language as conversation (Rojo, 2000). In this sense, we should have a comprehensive methodology, which can effectively make use of the computer technology of corpus tools to facilitate the traditional pen-and-paper approach or observation-based approach to the description, analysis and evaluation of classroom discourse.

With the experience of our on-going SCORE project (Hong, 2005), the purpose of this paper is to present a corpus-based computational approach to the study of classroom practice, focusing particularly on language classroom interactions. In doing so, first we discuss the pros and cons of a list of different approaches to classroom discourse in literature. Then, we present the feasibilities of applying a computer corpus approach to classroom interactions, and identify a set of evaluation criteria that suits best for the corpus-based approach. Next, we discuss the process of the compilation of a corpus of such kind. The compilation work itself poses challenges at various stages, including data collection, data handling, corpus structure/scheme design, corpus annotation and pattern modeling, development of query tools, and generation and retrieval of the findings. Therefore, we propose the solutions to a list of problems encountered in the process of speech and text data for building the database infrastructure. Finally, with our initial findings from the corpus database of classroom practices in Singaporean primary and secondary schools, we report the significance and implications of the application of the corpus-based approach to the study of classroom discourse and practice.

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TESOL Convention 2007: Tides of Change, Spanning the Globe, Seattle, Washington, USA. 21-24 March, 2007

### **Teaching Critical Reading to Inservice EFL Teachers in Singapore**

Lawrence Jun Zhang, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

This paper reports on a study of 35 English Language teachers taking a one-year professional development programme leading to the award of a Postgraduate Diploma in ELT. It makes an effort to interpret and frame these teachers' initial resistance to and final acceptance of some of the basic principles of a critical pedagogy. It also examines their nascent awareness of the significance of critically approaching texts both as readers themselves and reading teachers. It analyses the process of their negotiating identities, repositionings and other related issues (Pennycook, 1994, 2000). While focusing on a pedagogy grounded in a sociocultural learning theory (Bourdieu, 1999) and critical discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1992) using "community texts" (Luke et al., 2001) in this study where the step-by-step movements of critical reading lessons are described and discussed, the intent of this paper is to raise awareness among teachers as well as to bring ashore challenges facing critical pedagogy for reading teachers in Asian ESL/EFL classrooms and discuss

possibilities for change in language teaching pedagogy. I argue that, although there is a tendency in to neglect it in many ESL/EFL programmes, teaching critical reading pedagogy to EFL teachers should be an important part of teacher professional development programmes where teachers-in-training should be given chances to exercise agency in the process, as, upon completion of the training, they are to be agents for change in classrooms (Crookes & Lehner, 1998; Norton & Toohey, 2004; Wallace, 1999, 2005). Various reasons are given for such neglect, with the major one being that EFL learners need to develop decoding and vocabulary skills in order to read better. It is most often the case that the pedagogy of reading is reductionist in orientation and a possibility that the teaching of language proficiency can be done simultaneously with teaching critical reading and thinking skills is lacking. With a sociocultural turn in teacher education in recent years (Johnson, 2006; Zhang, 2007), I argue that the time when they are on the training programme is an opportune platform where reflexivity, reciprocity and responsibility are crucial to their making further progress in their professional lives towards becoming critical practitioners in and outside language classrooms (Zhang, 2004). I emphasise the importance of the critical pedagogy advocated in this paper against such a sociocultural context where reverence for knowledge and lack of inclination to challenge printed texts are commonplace (Zhang, 2001). Wider implications of such pedagogy are also discussed.

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Symposium on "Global Perspectives on Evolving Language-Teacher Expertise", Teacher Education Interest Section (TEIS) TESOL International Convention, Seattle, Washington, USA, March 2007

**Language Awareness and Teacher Expertise: Moving from Collaborative Learning to Collaborative Language Learning**  
Rita Elaine Silver, Nanyang Technological University, Singapore

This paper discusses English language teacher perceptions of group work in English classes as 'fun' and 'motivational' but not necessarily as a setting for

language learning. Data are drawn from observations of 11 English language teachers in which peer work was used as well as follow-up interviews with teachers on the problems, advantages and purposes for peer work. While some (but not all) teachers referred to ‘cooperative learning’ as a theoretical foundation for their use of group work, few of the teacher rationales related specifically to language learning. In general, there was little evidence of language awareness among the participating teachers whether novice or senior teacher. These findings are discussed in light of the particular policy setting for English language education in Singapore and the teachers’ ‘expertise’ as determined by their ability to meet their own curricular goals in the lessons.

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The 45<sup>th</sup> MABBIM & 11<sup>th</sup> MASTERA Conference & Session on Malay Language & Literature, Institute of Language and Literature, Brunei Darussalam March 13 – 16, 2006

**Challenges in the New World Order:  
Strengthening the Gallantry of the Malay Language  
in Multilingual World**

Mohamad Ali Hanifiah Bin Abdullah, Innova Junior College, Singapore

This paper attempts to look at the condition and the situation of the Malay language as it moves to meet the challenges of globalisation. Sustaining its importance in usage and to justify its existence in the global platform commands the effort and energy from all agencies, governmental and non-governmental, and stakeholders of the language. The Malay language users, including its community, in its widest spectrum, have to uphold a common mission and vision of the language, so that it can be steered to a common global direction, as it was once glorified.

What makes a language a global one will be touched and elaborated. One of the characteristics of a global language is that it must be an academic language – one that can express various academic fields and discipline effectively. To be able to do this, a proper language planning need to be done, beginning with the language corpus. This corpus planning has been done to the Malay language from 1960s and is on going. The next lap is to keep on building its terminology bank so as to ensure that the language can be used in all discipline. After all that have been done, maintaining the

language must continue at all level, beginning from home and educational institutions.

This paper tries to look at the factors that once contributed immensely to the development of the Malay language from a very simple and basic form before the 14<sup>th</sup> Century, to the present, and how those very same factors are now contributing to its diminishing importance and perhaps, regrettably its possible ‘death’. In other words, the factors’ inverse effects contributing to the Malay language. Some of the factors discussed in this paper include globalisation, government’s role, trade and the community’s attitude towards the language.

This paper will discuss briefly, suggestions that may help the Malay language maintain its relevance in the global world such as taking full advantage of the cyber world. The number of internet users in the Asian region, especially the ASEAN countries, where the number of Malay language users are the majority, is yet to be optimised. Another is perhaps promoting Malay music as world music to gain active interest from non-Malay speaking listeners to learn the language and culture.

Apart from looking at the Malay language in the regional and global points, the paper will also touch on local development of the language.

Recent initiatives taken by the Singapore government, such as the setting up of a committee named the Malay Language Learning and Promotion Committee, the setting up of the Malay Language Curriculum and Pedagogy Review Committee, which looked into the curriculum of the Malay language across the board, opening up another MLEP centre at Innova Junior College and encouraging non-Malay students to take up Malay language as third languages are some of the points elaborated. These initiatives are introduced to boost the language usage and importance in the country.

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## Research Notes

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### Research Topic: Higher Learning & the Construction of Institutional Identities in a Global World

Christine Anita Xavier (PhD Candidate in Language Studies),  
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The main aim of my research is to investigate how institutions of higher learning construct and promote themselves as ‘global’ universities in the present globalizing world through discourse.

The current age of globalization is characterised by an “enterprise culture” (Keat 1991: 1) where the domain of the ‘free market’ is extended to those institutions and organizations in areas such as health, broadcasting, arts and education, that once used to be public bodies, publicly funded. With ‘free market’ forces, comes along competitive forces that propel these institutions and organizations to position themselves differently to gain a higher share of the market. My research specifically looks at the changes manifested in institutions of higher learning (universities) in terms of identity constructions.

I suggest that one response to competition is the need for universities to reposition themselves as ‘global’ universities. Global competition between universities arises as institutions of higher learning around the world are set against each other to attract future local and foreign students and staff, as choices between universities are made more accessible with increased mobility in terms of the ease of travel that comes with globalisation. Thus universities need to be competitively positioned by “adapt[ing] a global perspective” (Panwar 1997: 246) and in “position[ing] themselves as ‘global’” (Thurlow and Jaworski 2003: 579). This is because “[t]he global brand acts as a quality signal” (Holt et al, 2004: 186) that is recognized and credited across different markets. As such, through the use of the label ‘global’, “globali[s]ation can be seen as ... strategic, commercial rebranding” (Thurlow and Jaworski 2003: 579).

I argue that these rebrandings are enabled through language that takes on a greater role of importance in this present globalizing world – where it functions as a commodity that is a “source of competitive advantage”

(Cameron 2000: 324). Just as there is the “blurring of boundaries of space and time” (Enders and Fulton 2002: 5) with globalisation, language (discourse) too takes on new forms as “[w]orking across differences [or boundaries] entails semiotic hybridity – the emergence of new combinations of languages, social dialects, voices, genres and discourses” (Fairclough 2006: 150). Fairclough (1994: 254) argues that this is partly to do with the “colonization of these domains [referring to the domains of public services like education and health] by market discourses...”. He suggests that the ‘advertising genre’ is colonizing these domains in the new economy and giving rise to hybrid discourses that have been described as a form of “language of promotion” (Fairclough 1994: 256).

I propose that institutions of higher learning in modern societies use hybrid discourses (that I argue to be a discourse arising out of globalization and so, a discourse of globalization) to brand and market themselves as ‘global’ universities. I study the features of this discourse of globalization and how it is used by selected universities to justify and validate their positioning as ‘global’ universities through specific discursive strategies. Besides looking at data (websites, brochures and other publicity materials) from the National University of Singapore, I look at data from selected universities around the region and the world positioned as ‘global’ universities, to study how a discourse of globalization is used to brand these institutions as ‘global’. I also study whether (and if so how) such branding (identity constructions) articulate and produce particular globalization ideologies.

Within sociolinguistics, there have been numerous studies on the implications of globalisation on English as a global language (e.g. see House 2003), the discourses in tourism (e.g. Thurlow and Jaworski 2003, and Thurlow and Jaworski 2006), magazines (e.g. Machin and Thornborrow 2003), music (e.g. Pennycook 2003), national identities (e.g. Yamaguchi 2005) and so forth, but the implications of globalisation on the discourses of higher education is under-researched and I hope to contribute to this (see Wernick 1991 and Fairclough 1995 on relevant, related studies).

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## CONFERENCE NOTICES

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### **CoTESOL 31st Annual Fall Convention and Exhibition**

**November 2-3, 2007, Renaissance Denver Hotel and Convention Center, Colorado, USA**

The theme for this year's convention, "Staying Ahead", recognizes CoTESOL's desire to keep abreast of the latest research, materials, and teaching techniques in its field. With several well-known plenary speakers and over 100 presentations to choose from, there will be something for everyone at the convention.

(Website: <http://www.colorado.edu/iec/cotesol>)

### **JALTCALL 2007 Conference, June 1-3, 2007, Waseda University, Tokyo, Japan**

The theme of the JALTCALL 2007 Conference is "CALL: Integration or Disintegration?" Presentations may include the following areas:

- Description of projects including CALL as an integrated course component
- Description of projects implementing multiple modes of technology
- Innovative ways of integrating CALL in and out of the classroom
- Discussion of the future direction of CALL as an encompassing field
- New strands of technology use in language learning environments

(Website: <http://jaltcall.org/conferences/call2007/>)

### **The Second Brussels Conference on Generative Linguistics, June 25-27, 2007, Brussels, Germany**

For this *Alternatives to Cartography* - conference papers are welcomed on any topic related to the theme. In particular, the organiser solicits submissions raising new problems for cartography, suggesting solutions and alternatives, discussing particular flexible theories, etc. A brief description of the theme is as follows:

In the 1980s generative grammar witnessed the birth and rise of the notion of functional projection. Both in the nominal (Brame 1982, Abney 1983, Hellan 1986) and in the clausal (inflectional) domain (Stowell 1981, Safir 1982, Chomsky 1986), it was recognized that functional material is able to project

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syntactic structure in conformity with the X-bar-format. This insight soon led to a considerable increase in the inventory of known projections (cf. for example Pollock 1989 on the split IP). Moreover, the assumption that all languages have the same set of morphosyntactic features, with cross-linguistic variation being mainly due to the overt or covert nature of the morphology spelling out those features, had a further proliferation of functional projections as its result. So much so that by the mid to late 1990s each portion of clausal and phrasal structure was assumed to exhibit a richly articulated functional domain. For example, the domain above NP is argued to contain not only a rigidly ordered set of adjectival projections (Cinque 1994) but also a whole series of projections related to definiteness, number, possessive structures, and so on (cf. Matthewson 1998 and references mentioned there). Similarly, while projections such as CP, IP or PP were traditionally considered unitary, they have now been split up into a whole string of projections (for CP cf. Rizzi 1997, 2001, 2004a; for IP cf. Cinque 1999, and for PP cf. Koopman 2000, Holmberg 2002, Svenonius 2004).

The basic idea behind the abovementioned line of reasoning is that sentence structure can be represented as a template of fixed positions, each of which can be filled by a limited set of syntactico-semantic elements. This template is taken to be a universal ordered set of functional projections, the specifiers of which serve as merger sites or as landing sites for XP-movement. Cross-linguistic word order variation is then reduced to the absence or presence of such Merge or Move operations. Given that the general goal of this enterprise is to draw a detailed map of a particular portion of the clause, it often goes by the name of cartography (cf. in particular Rizzi 2004b, Cinque 2002, Belletti 2004).

(Website: <http://www.kubrusel.ac.be/onderwijs/onderzoekscentra/crissp/bcgl/2007/index.htm>)

**32nd Annual Congress of the Applied Linguistics  
Association of Australia, 1-3 July 2007  
University of Wollongong, Wollongong, NSW, Australia**

The origins of Applied Linguistics were in the application of linguistic understandings to a wide range of contexts and issues. In the past decades, the field has moved beyond relating language to social contexts to a dynamic approach to language addressing issues such as difference, access and disparity. It has become a more open field of interest in language involving

an increasingly interactive approach between social and political contexts, language and research approaches.

The rapid worldwide increase in migration and reactions to it, the expansion of media and technology, political changes at international and local levels are both challenges and opportunities for research in applied linguistics. At the same time, constraints such as market economy-driven research funding and greater central control of research agendas have limited the ability of the field to respond.

The theme of this conference, *Making a Difference*, whilst drawing on earlier characterisations of Applied Linguistics, is intended to link emergent theoretical and research approaches to issues in language education, language in the workplace and other fields, language testing, second language development, language policy and planning, bi-/multilingualism and other traditional areas of concern.

(Website: <http://www.uow.edu.au/conferences/ALAA/home.html>)

**The 5<sup>th</sup> International Literacy Conference LITCON 2007, Literacy and  
Citizenship: Pathways to Sustainable Education  
25.26 & 27 July 2007  
Penang, Malaysia**

The theme of the conference is “Literacy and Citizenship: Pathways to Sustainable Education” and it is scheduled to be held from July 25-27 at the Berjaya Georgetown Hotel, 1-Stop Midlands Park, Penang. The conference will see the participation of about 400 people and the presentation of more than 60 papers on various aspects of the conference theme by participants, both local and international.

The objective of the conference is to focus on the real gems in the garden at our feet and re-examine the contributions and characteristics of teachers engaging in developing literacy. There are pressing challenges facing educators worldwide and these gripping I issues need to be discussed urgently. It is in this context that LITCON 2007 will focus on the key issues of literacy, citizenship and sustainable education to celebrate befittingly Malaysia’s 50th year of independence. It will focus on practitioners who grapple with day-to-day challenges, trials, tribulations and needs of the teachers. It is suggested that there is a need to focus on the core mission for

teachers and reconsider the real contributions and characteristics of teachers engaging in developing literacy.

Among the more important questions will be those that seek to ascertain teachers' knowledge-bases, emotional make-ups, methodological skills, adult learners relationships, bridging practices between school and learning environments, time-management and aspects & their professionalism.

(Website: <http://www.usm.my/ilru/>)

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### **SAAL Annual General Meeting and Book Launch Notice**

Calling SAAL Members to the 22nd Annual General Meeting (AGM) and Book Launch!

*Date:* 1 September 2007 (Saturday)

*Time:* 10.00am to 1.00pm

*Venue:* to be confirmed

Note: SAAL will be launching the latest SAAL publication, "Changing Perspectives on Pedagogical Grammar" (Ruanni Tupas, Yuan Yi, and Chris Nur eds., 2007) on 1 September 2007. Look out for details in August!

### **SAAL EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE MEMBERS 2006-2008**

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