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Word from the President



Dear SAAL Members and Friends,

Greetings to all, and welcome to a new issue of SQ!

If you're wondering about this new 'Word from the President' feature, it was the brainchild of our SQ editors, who felt it would be a good idea to give our publication a more personal touch. It'll also allow us to update you periodically on what SAAL has been up to, and what you can expect in the coming months.

For starters, SAAL continues to hold highly successful events, such as the 25th SAAL Lecture on 7 March 2009 by Professor Li Wei, who spoke on 'Discursive creation of multilingual spaces'. This lecture, which attracted 75 participants, was the result of a fruitful collaboration between SAAL and NIE's English Language and Literature Academic Group. You can read Peter Tan's report on this fascinating lecture elsewhere in this issue. Another event we held recently — on 20 May — was our 3rd SAAL Graduate Seminar on Qualitative Data Analysis, with two very interesting talks by Mary Ellis and Denise Edith de Souza. Again, attendance was extremely encouraging, with about 50 people present. Indeed, we are always heartened by the support we get from SAAL members, and grateful for every opportunity to put a face to a name.

In this issue, you can read past SAAL president Chng Huang Hoon's tribute to SAAL Advisor Dr Ho Wah Kam, who turned 75 in February this year. Anitha Devi Pillai has also very kindly contributed an extensive bibliography on research methods for the study of novice academic writing — I'm sure many of you will find this extremely useful.

It leaves me now to wish you all a pleasant read!

Yours sincerely

Ee Ling

Leader, Mentor and Role Model

A Tribute to Dr Ho Wah Kam

on the occasion of his 75th birthday,
February 2009

Beginning with this issue, SAAL Quarterly will be publishing articles on SAAL Advisor Dr Ho Wah Kam, compiled and edited by Assoc. Prof. Chng Huang Hoon and Assoc. Prof. Low Ee Ling, and presented to Dr Ho on his 75th birthday during the SAAL Annual General Meeting on 6 September 2008. We begin the series with the Foreword written by Assoc. Prof. Chng.

FOREWORD

It is with immense pleasure that I sat before my keyboard to ‘pen’ this *Foreword*. The occasion that brought me to reflect on the impact Dr Ho Wah Kam has, not just on my own development, but also that of many others, is a joyous one — to celebrate Dr Ho’s 75th birthday in February 2009. Ee Ling and I thought of working on this tribute as SAAL’s way, and our way, of recording our deep gratitude to Dr Ho. We are therefore greatly encouraged by the very positive response we got from various colleagues who agreed readily to collaborating with us on this modest project.

I first met Dr Ho Wah Kam back in 1996 when I first joined as a member of the Executive Committee of the Singapore Association for Applied Linguistics (SAAL). That was my first real encounter with committee work in a professional association, and I recalled that Dr Ho was among the most committed member within that exco. His mission to put SAAL on the world map of language education was unmistakable even in those early days. He deeply believed that SAAL has a duty to fulfil — not just to enable colleagues in Singapore to engage one another on a professional platform, but also to bring Singapore’s relatively small band of linguists and language practitioners to the region, and later to the global stage. But big dreams require first small steps, and Dr Ho, established as he already was back in the 1990s, did not shy away from the daily grind of committee work, tirelessly organising talks and conferences, planning and strategising publications, and establishing productive links with academics and associations around the world. His leadership, energy and drive, and importantly, his sense of responsibility are all lessons I learnt from him in my early days as a fresh exco member working within SAAL.

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It has been a good 12 years since those days I spoke of above, and I am proud to say those have been among the most productive and enriching 12 years of my professional life. Productivity and enrichment are, for me, not quantified by one's professional advancement in the workplace. Instead, it is the qualitative experience that I crave and pursue. The lessons in leadership and management of a team, the commitment to task, the deep sense of duty, the non-aversion to hard work, and on top of these, the blessings brought on by that crucial sense of humour — these are what I have treasured most deeply in the past 12 years I have worked within SAAL, guided, even when he least knew it, by a quiet and unassuming man, Dr Ho. Dr Ho has been a mentor and a role model to me in more ways than one. I will never ever forget this debt I owe to him, a debt that has accumulated over the years, for which I have little means of paying back except through sheer hard work and positive contributions to our common cause of facilitating a vibrant educational engagement among like-minded scholars and practitioners.

Dr Ho's varied contributions are perhaps best captured in terms of important milestones in his life work, as follows:

2008	Awarded Honorary Membership of the Singapore Association for Applied Linguistics (SAAL)
2007	Served as External Reviewer, English Department, Hong Kong Institute of Education
2005	Published “Applied linguistics in Southeast Asia” in <i>International Encyclopedia of Language and Linguistics</i> (2nd edition)
2004	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Invited to become Patron, Singapore Association for Applied Linguistics (SAAL)• Published <i>English Language Teaching in East Asia Today: Changing Policies and Practices</i> (2nd edition)• Published <i>Language Policies and Language Education: The Impact in East Asian Countries in the Next Decade</i> (2nd edition)
2003	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Devoted time to spreading to school teachers the message of <i>Philosophy for Children</i>• Published in and served as Section Editor in <i>International Handbook of Education Research in the Asia Pacific Region</i>, (John Keeves and Ryo Watanabe, eds)

2002	Organised AILA2002@Singapore
2000	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Edited <i>Language in the Global Context: Implications for the Language Classroom</i>, published by RELC. • Academic Consultant in Singapore Teachers' Union (STU) • Awarded Honorary Membership of the Singapore Teachers' Union (STU)
1997	Published "Bilingual education in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia" in <i>Encyclopedia of Language and Education</i> , Vol. 4.
1995	Appointed: Senior Research Fellow at SEAMEO RELC
1994	Retired from the National Institute of Education (NIE), Singapore
1992	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Dean of the School of Education, NIE • Appointed Associate Professor
1999–2002	Associate Tutor, Doctorate in Education (EdD) Programme, University of Leicester, UK
1999–2000	Visiting Professor, School of International Politics, Economics and Business, Aoyama Gakuin University, Tokyo (2 winter terms)
1988	Honorary Advisor, Singapore Association for Applied Linguistics (SAAL)
1982	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Awarded Public Administration Medal (Silver), Singapore National Day Award • Awarded PhD by the University of Chicago, USA
1978	Awarded MED by the University of Malaya (in Malaysia)
1976	Awarded Public Administration Medal (Bronze), Singapore National Day Award
1971	Awarded Research Scholarship at RELC

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1969	Awarded Certificate in the Teaching of English as a Second Language by RELC
1964	Appointed Assistant Lecturer in the former Teachers' Training College (TTC), Singapore
1959	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Joined the Singapore Teaching Service• Awarded the Diploma in Education, University of Malaya, Singapore

My good friend and colleague Peter Tan once asked me why I consistently addressed Dr Ho as “Dr Ho” and never as “Wah Kam”. I recall telling Peter that I cannot imagine doing otherwise. Peter responded that it is nice that a certain respect for custom is still maintained in today’s world. I think the truth is, “Dr Ho” embodies what the man represents in my mind — the leader, the mentor, the teacher and the guide. This does not mean that “the friend” does not feature in this equation. Rather, it is the implied friendship that has enabled the mentorship and the leadership, and of course, it reflects the deep respect I have for him. I have over the years found myself asking if Dr Ho would approve of my actions whenever I undertook to do something for SAAL. I find myself fully conscious that I have inherited a legacy that cannot be taken lightly. Recently, when I made the decision to step down from SAAL to allow myself more time to work in a new position, I am moved by the encouraging message Dr Ho sent me. In the message, he made me feel as if I have done more than I have actually achieved, and that I have been better at my job than I think. Discrepancies in perception and evaluation aside, what his words did for me is exactly what observing his work all these years have always done for me — they encouraged me to work harder and to give more of myself in everything I do, and they give me courage to assume new roles. I would like him to know I have treasured every bit of support he has given me all these years, and will surely remember all the lessons he has (perhaps unintentionally) taught me.

Thank you, Dr Ho, and Happy 75th!

With gratitude,

Chng Huang Hoon
10 July 2008

REPORT

25th SAAL Lecture
 ‘Discursive creation of multilingual spaces’
 by Professor Li Wei
 Birkbeck College, University of London

Professor Li Wei delivered the 25th SAAL lecture on Saturday, 7 March 2009 at 2.00pm at the National Institute of Education, Singapore. SAAL worked in collaboration with the English Language and Literature Academic Group, National Institute of Education, to whom we are grateful for the provision of the venue for the lecture. Seventy-five participants — mainly scholars, researchers and educators in applied linguistics from the local higher education institutions — attended the lecture.

The talk focused on the use of multilingual space and how this was a space available for the individual speaker’s creative manipulation. In this way, Professor Li’s treatment is different from earlier treatments which emphasised the historical or geographical spaces of multilingualism or the power relations between languages and communities. Instead of the historical or geographical, he underlined the *social*; instead of power, he underscored *practice*. Professor Li’s approach picks up the work on social networks where language choice and code-switching are network-specific practices in multilingual contexts.

As an example of the other approach, Professor Li discussed the work of Blommaert *et al.* (2005).¹ There, the relevant questions were: ‘How does the socio-historical space come into being?’, ‘Could it be an outcome of individuals’ social practices and interactions with each other?’

Professor Li’s question was, instead: ‘How do multilingual individuals intentionally construct their own systems, which will in turn be constructive of the broader systems and structures?’

For his lecture, he examined the speech of three ethnic-Chinese youths in London, attending university at the time of data collection: two are British-born and one China-born. All therefore have within their control written and spoken (British) English and a range of spoken Chinese varieties (particularly Cantonese and Mandarin); only the China-born youth is completely comfortable with

¹ ‘Spaces of multilingualism’, *Language and Communication* 25: 197–216

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written Chinese. The data consist of transcriptions of their naturally occurring speech as well as interviews between Professor Li and the youths.

In examining the data, certain points stand out:

(a) The youths appear extremely comfortable in their linguistic identity as multilinguals, as evidenced from their playful and creative mix of codes. For instance, ‘Cake seller!’ is used as a general-purpose exclamation. (This is derived from 卖糕的 [*mai gao de*], a transliteration of ‘My God!’ The characters mean ‘cake seller’.)

(b) The confidence of the lads’ own multilingualism is remarkable in the context of the predominant monolingual and uncultural ideologies of today’s Britain. One of them comments: ‘not mixed people, but mixed, y’know, not Chinese not English. We are here in England, but we are Chinese, but we are not in China. You know I mean?’ Another says: ‘[We are] not mixed people, but mixed, y’know, not Chinese not English. We are here in England, but we are Chinese, but we are not in China. You know I mean?’

(c) Multilingual spaces are interactionally created by the individual through strategic use of the social (including linguistic) resources available to them. As one of the lads put it: ‘I can communicate with whoever I want to communicate with. Very convenient. If I want to make friends with someone, I ask what language he speaks and I’ll speak the language with him. We can become friends very quickly. When we go to Chinatown, we speak Cantonese. We speak Putonghua with students from mainland China. But most often we mix. Mixing is the best, most convenient. Everybody understands.’

(d) The construction of social space is an intense social experience and emotional investment.

Following from these, the linguist’s responsibility is to analyse how such multilingual spaces are created and what they mean to the individuals’ social life in terms of identity formation and development. Such an approach emphasizes the capacity of the multilingual individual as active agent in social life, and breaks down the artificial dichotomies between the macro and the micro, the societal and the individual, and the social and the psycho in studies of bilingualism and multilingualism.

Reported by Peter Tan
Department of English Language and Literature
National University of Singapore

RESEARCH METHODS TO STUDY NOVICE ACADEMIC WRITING EXPERIENCE

A bibliography on research methods to study novice academic writing

Anitha Devi Pillai (Editor)

English Language and Literature Academic Group

National Institute of Education

This bibliography provides researchers who are interested in studying novice academic writing and ‘struggling’ novices’ experience with an overview of the tools that they can use in their research. Researchers can study social and cultural context of academic writing by including text’s focus, purpose, intended audience, relationship between writers and audience, expectations, conventions and requirements, background knowledge, values and understanding and its relationship with other texts (Paltridge, 2006). Likewise, Bhatia (2004) too proposes that genre knowledge needs to be investigated from an *ethnographic perspective* and a *textual perspective*.

Hence, this bibliography focuses on both the novice writer/researcher and novice writing/product. Broadly, this can be studied by analysing academic writing task prompts to understand task expectations and the impact of task requirements on novice writers and writing. Novice writing could also be analysed by examining the overall rhetorical organization (including Move & Step analysis). The strategies that novice writers use to achieve different purposes of sub-genres will enable researchers to understand novice writers’ motivations and perceptions of academic writing essays. The novice writer’s voice is another integral part of any text analysis and this is addressed by combining text analysis with novice writers’ experience and perceptions as shown by the studies listed in the academic discourse socialization list.

The tools described in the bibliography are used by researchers working in three different but complementary traditions (Systemic Functional Linguistics, English for Academic Purposes/English for Specific Purposes & New Rhetoric Studies). As the tools in genre studies are mutually interchangeable, a variety of methods were adopted from genre studies research to develop the framework of analysis.

Writing Task Prompts

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**SAAL Executive Committee
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