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Introduction

The theme of this special issue is *Raising language awareness through analysing discourse in context*, which was also the theme of the Inter-Varietal Applied Corpus Studies (IVACS) conference at Queen’s University Belfast, 2004. Most of the papers in this issue had their first airing at this event.

We are very pleased to be able to use the LA journal as a platform for this theme as we feel that it attends to the journal’s goal to encourage the establishment of bridges between the language and other disciplines within or outside an educational context. All of the papers in this volume draw on corpus linguistics and span contexts from business to education. The papers we bring together take different approaches to the contexts which they investigate, all in an attempt to better understand how we use language. The authors present work from Hong Kong, the United States of America and Europe, which is testimony to the international appeal of corpus linguistics.

For many outside the field of corpus linguistics, it may sometimes appear to be an area absorbed by description, sometimes of a very quantitative nature. Here we hope to show that this is not the case. Corpus linguistics has much to offer as a complementary tool in applied language research. Its strength lies in its ability to not just describe language patterns, but to do so using real language in context.

This volume brings together work from different contexts, where researchers have come to situations with specific questions. In pursuit of these questions, they designed studies involving the collection of real data in real contexts of use. Each study seeks to investigate how language awareness can be raised in a variety of professional contexts. In each case, new understandings enrich awareness in terms of context and in terms of professional development for the researcher(s). It is important to note that in all the studies in this volume no line is drawn between quantitative and qualitative research. Each one provides us with an example of how there needs to be a strong interplay between the researcher, the corpus of data and the context of use.

Camilla Vásquez and Randi Reppen, in a longitudinal study in an American context, look at the spoken interaction that takes place in post-observation meetings on a teacher education programme. They track the participation patterns of these interactions and, as a result of reflection on their findings, they (as the course providers) make strategic changes to how post-observation meetings are conducted thereafter. This is a good example of synergy between a quantitative finding (that the convenors talked much more than participants) and a qualitative outcome: the promotion of more facilitation by the convenors and more reflection by participants.

Elaine Vaughan, reflecting on her own experiences as a language teacher attending departmental meetings, decided to look closely at the context to better understand how language was being used within a Community of Practice framework. By collecting recordings of meetings, she was able to confirm how the characteristics of the Community of Practice are realised in the language used at these teacher meetings. She

shows how these features are a ‘badge of identity’, creating a shared communicative space, with in- and out-groups.

Winnie Cheng and Martin Warren, again working with a research question arising out of their own teaching context in Hong Kong, explore the mismatch between what textbooks tell us about the language of checking understanding (on the part of hearer and speaker) and what actually happens in Hong Kong spoken contexts. Their findings suggest that a much wider range of forms is employed by speakers, and that the Hong Kong Chinese speakers and native speakers of English use some of the forms differently in different genres. Here we see the benefit of using a corpus which has been designed so as to be sensitive to cross-cultural contexts of use.

Alison Sealey and Paul Thompson conducted a phased classroom-based study which investigates the use of corpus-based activities in a primary-school context in the UK (with children aged 8-10 years). Using recordings from the classroom, their paper explores the contribution that can be made by corpus activities in helping young children to learn about their first language. Their paper deals with activities which were devised to raise awareness of word classes, however, the data which comes from the classroom shows us how these word class activities generated metalinguistic discourse at a broader level.

Lancy Fung’s paper looks at self-repetition, a pervasive feature in spoken language. Her study focuses on the context of business interaction, between native speakers and non-native speakers of English in Hong Kong. By examining the form and communicative roles and functions of self-repetitions, she establishes a framework for future studies of self-repetition. She also raises awareness of language use in intercultural communication contexts.

We would like to thank sincerely those who provided reviews for the papers in this special issue. These were invaluable. Most of all we thank the General Editor of *Language Awareness*, Peter Garrett, for his endless support and words of wisdom. We could not have undertaken this without him.

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