COMMENT

Editorial

The movement of people around the world, whether in search of safety or employment, has always been of international interest and concern. And it is of course currently a matter of very great moment in Europe. So now might be a good time briefly to consider some linguistic aspects of the issue, since human migration has always been a productive semantic category. Today it encompasses a range of terms such *as displaced people, immigrants, emigrants, migrants, refugees, boat people, expats, illegal arrivals,* or even, in an instance that has recently excited a good deal of debate and not a little anger, *'swarms' of migrants*. Studies of English show that the choice of term can be very revealing of attitudes to the whole idea of migration. But what actually is *migration*? Or, more importantly, precisely who qualifies as a *migrant*?' The *Oxford English Dictionary Online* defines the noun *migrant* as 'a person who moves temporarily or permanently to a new place'. This is a meaning that has been central to the noun since the eighteenth century. The dictionary meaning also seems to have been quite static, with no significant polysemous senses developing in that time – apart from those referring to migrant plants. Is it really the case that such an evaluatively loaded word has survived the past two hundred and fifty years in the English language without significant change?

In order to gain insight into this question we might trace the use of the noun *migrant* across the past twenty years by studying data from the British National Corpus and the enTenTen2012 corpus (via Sketch Engine). Both of these corpora in fact show similarities in how *migrants* are profiled, and they suggest that while there has been an element of stability in meaning there has in fact been some subtle change too. Thus, *migrants* keep collocating with *illegal*, and the term is frequently used interchangeably with *refugees*. However, there are also noticeable differences in the use of *migrant* across time. The most striking one is that in the early 1990s *migrant* could be used as the head of a possessive construction, so that phrases such as *migrant's experience* or *migrants' decisions* were then relatively frequent. This is no longer evident in the data from 2012. In the early 1990s *migrants* can *accept, avoid,* and *interact*, whereas in 2012 they *flock, cross,* and *outnumber*. These findings suggest that migrants are presently being seen as having far less positive agency than they had just 20 years ago, in a change that could be interpreted as a stage in the process of pejoration: only time, and careful observation, will tell us whether this perceived trend is permanent or only temporary.

One way to take this idea forward would be to ask speakers themselves about how they think they use the word *migrant*. Such a folk-linguistic perspective would surely provide insights into reasons behind changes in language, and allow for the exposing of stereotypes and subjective stances encoded in the name.

Several articles in this issue of *English Today* tackle the subject of world varieties of English interacting with varieties that are frequently regarded as models of 'correct' usage. Barrs approaches this from Japan, Booth from Germany, and Oladipupo from Nigeria. Sung identifies a place for world varieties themselves in Hong Kong universities, while the spelling practices of American and British English models competing in China are evaluated by Liu; the theme of 'correctness' is continued in Kostadinova's contribution from the Leiden project on prescription. Beyond this broad theme of models, Hartse offers a critical celebration of an ELT teacher's work in China, Moody explores African American English, and Wyatt and Hadikin unpack a linguistic gem in a field of worldwide interest—soccer.

One of the reviews in this issue, that by Marks, focuses on a new dictionary of linguistics. The other, by Fletcher, evaluates an online resource for English language teachers.

The editors

The editorial policy of *English Today* is to provide a focus or forum for all sorts of news and opinion from around the world. The points of view of individual writers are as a consequence their own, and do not reflect the opinion of the editorial board. In addition, wherever feasible, *ET* generally leaves unchanged the orthography (normally British or American) and the usage of individual contributors, although the editorial style of the journal itself is that of Cambridge University Press.

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