

# Editorial

Articles in *English Today* relating to English in China are amongst the most frequently downloaded and cited and the editors are pleased to have the opportunity to bring together a number of contributions on this theme in this special issue. Readers seem interested in all aspects of the topic, from research related to the linguistic features of 'China English', to the extent to which English is used and in what domains, to educational policy, issues of culture and identity, linguistic landscapes, code-switching and more.

Not least, there seems to be an appetite for numbers, especially very large ones. Of course, any numbers relating to China seem large compared to their equivalents elsewhere in the world. India is the only other country which can compete with China when it comes to the numbers of English learners and users – indeed a rivalry appears to have developed between India and China as to which of them now has the larger number. Rining Wei and Jinzhi Su in 'The statistics of English in China' respond to a complaint made in an earlier article (from Bolton 2008, *English Today*, 24(2)) about the lack of credible data regarding the numbers of people learning and using English in China today. In their article, they present interesting survey data which is not widely available to scholars outside China. China has been long regarded as an 'Expanding Circle' country (to use Kachru's well-known term), in which English is learned and used as a foreign language. Expanding Circle countries are in part defined by their looking towards native speakers for norms of correctness and use. The increasingly important role that China now seems to be playing

in the development of English as a global language has thus caught many observers by surprise. This issue provides a range of views from inside mainland China of how the uses of English are developing, in ways which challenge the familiar distinctions between first, second and foreign language usage.

Interest in English in China seems to be worldwide, perhaps hinting at how the English language is now helping China reshape globalisation. As Bolton and Graddol (this issue) observe, English has become not just a commodity in itself (profitable to both western and Chinese businesses), but is also a gateway to flows of international students, traders and professional workers (both from and to China). English thus plays an important role in the steady expansion of Chinese influence in the world, whether in Africa, Latin America or elsewhere in Asia.

The articles included here cover a wide range of topics, and help us to see how the research agenda for English in China is widening. The collection is, however, by no means definitive in its reach. There are many topics which are not covered, and we have excluded contributions from Hong Kong, which has long enjoyed a higher visibility in the research literature.

The collection as a whole shows the importance of work by bilingual researchers and of collaboration between western and Chinese scholars. Interest in English in China is unlikely to diminish, and we hope to see many more contributions to ET in the future from scholars in mainland China and the greater China region.

*The editors*

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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.