

Preface

We end this year with a bumper issue! I would like to thank all our reviewers and, of course, the authors for their hard work, particularly in finalizing the articles at this stage.

The first article reports on an area where research is desperately needed, which is the professional development of language teachers, in this case English language teachers in a rural setting. As **Mabila and Msana** point out, the teaching of languages requires not only knowledge of the subject, but also the ability to use it well and fluently, and novice teachers' concern for their language proficiency is seen in their in this research project. Not surprisingly, these novice teachers feel the pressure to do well and it is heartwarming to see their commitment and passion for their learners. **Mabila and Msana** point to the importance of this relationship by concluding that, "[t]he study serves as a reminder of the intricate relationship between teachers and their students in shaping professional identities".

The next three articles all deal with reading and reading instruction, as befits a country with the kind of literacy and reading comprehension problems that we have. What is interesting about these articles is that they deal with reading from different perspectives. The article by **Ngema** looks at the knowledge that Foundation Phase teachers have about reading instruction in isiZulu. She argues that the divide between the phonics approach and the whole language orientation is not a productive one and that teachers who develop literacy in African languages need to find a solution that suits the lexical structure of these languages.

Tshuma and Ntshangase investigate the way in which student teachers are prepared to teach reading by asking how they are trained. The question is, what do teacher educators know about reading instruction? From the article it appears that they do not know enough to train student teachers adequately and the authors see little chance for improvement of the situation. They warn that "pre-service teacher preparation and classroom practice remain at risk of indirectly perpetuating the reading crisis prevailing in mainstream primary schools".

The third article on reading comprehension, by **Mbambo-Marimirofa, Phillips and Condy**, looks at the reading development from a learner's perspective. The authors report on efforts to improve the reading comprehension and critical thinking abilities of a struggling learner, using a variety of strategies. Strategies like code switching, an anticipation guide, the my turn, your turn strategy as well as reader's theatre prove to be effective in improving this learner's comprehension skills. The results on a pre- and post-test indicate that although the learner's ability to think critically did not improve, her ability to infer meaning led to fewer errors, which must surely be the first step towards critical thinking.

The last three articles look specifically at language learning in settings where language use is contested. **Sibanda** looks at the way in which the Malawian community in South Africa maintain their heritage language, Chichewa, by attempting to use it with their children. The

article shows a complex interplay of factors that include resistance by children to use Chichewa, the legal status of immigrants and a South African environment that is perceived as hostile towards them. The author concludes that social development should both “encourage social change and promote tolerance towards migrants”.

Going beyond South Africa’s borders, **Hugo and Mesfin Derash** investigate the use of two minority languages in Ethiopian education. All indigenous languages are to be used as languages of learning and teaching in Ethiopia and the focus in this article is on two of them; Konttathoo and Dawuro. Despite the fact that policies support the use of these languages, the authors find that a lack of teacher training, uncertainty or a lack of knowledge about the orthography of these languages, and lack of awareness among members of the community about the value of mother tongue education all contribute to policies not being implemented satisfactorily. They recommend teacher training and awareness-raising campaigns to address the problems.

In the final article readers encounter a new language: that of emojis. **Nyakana, Smith and Mphahlele** discuss the importance of knowing how to use and interpret these pictographs that many adults above 30 would regard as the domain of young people. The ubiquity of emojis means that people, including lecturers and teachers, may use them without knowing the cultural-specific connotations attached to them. Using a questionnaire, the authors show that students do not always agree on the meaning of some of the most used emojis. In interviews some lecturers express their hesitation towards emoji use in academic WhatsApp communication with students. The authors recommend caution but add that the use of emojis seems to be here to stay and could be used to “save time and serve as add-ons for clarification”.

We hope that you enjoy this issue of *Per Linguam* and wish everybody a joyful holiday season.

The Editors