

Preface to *Per Linguam* 27 (1)

This first number of *Per Linguam* in 2011 sees an extended Editorial Board and we would like to welcome the following esteemed scholars:

- Prof Colin Baker from the University of Wales (Bangor), a specialist in bilingual education;
- Prof Herman Batibo from the University of Botswana, a specialist on African languages, language planning and policy issues in Africa; and
- Prof Petra Engelbrecht from the University of Canterbury, an educational psychologist.

We hope that they will be as pleased to be associated with *Per Linguam* as we are to have them on board! We also say farewell to Prof Bonny Norton whose commitments prevent her from serving on the Board. Her presence on the Board has lent stature to *Per Linguam* and she will be missed. We wish her all the best for the future and hope that we can convince her to return at some point in the future.

Number 27(1) covers a variety of topics and starts off with a critical look at the way in which learners are constructed in the National Senior Certificate examination for English First Additional Language. In the wake of widespread dissatisfaction and much debate about English language curricula in particular, this article looks at the way in which examination papers conceptualise learners as uncritical consumers of undemanding texts that often present gender and race stereotypes. Examination papers do not do justice to the positive elements in the curriculum by not providing learners with the opportunity to reflect on or question such such stereotypes. The authors conclude that the lofty ideals of the curriculum, to use language for critical and creative purposes, are not evident in the examination papers.

Still on the topic of language curricula, Steenkamp and Visser tackle the problem of sequencing tasks in isiXhosa for adult learners who need isiXhosa communication skills in an educational setting. Such a communication course for pre-service teachers in the Western Cape is becoming increasingly important since, on the one hand, universities are struggling to recruit sufficient numbers of home language speakers of isiXhosa to teach in the Foundation Phase and, on the other hand, isiXhosa home language learners increasingly enrol in schools where English or Afrikaans is the language of learning and teaching. There is thus an urgent need to develop a tailor-made course for pre-service (in fact all) teachers. Steenkamp and Visser's suggestion to use cognitive complexity analysis as a curriculum design instrument for a specific purposes isiXhosa course is an important step in making the most of the limited time available for language learning in teacher certification courses.

In the article by Kadenge and Sibanda they contribute to an under-researched field by situating child acquisition of Shona noun prefixes in the context of the Bantu language family and finding remarkable similarities in acquisition studies. They conclude that comparative

studies of this nature are important to give an account of linguistic variation not only across languages but also across dialects.

The last two articles in this number deal with the development of academic literacy and language awareness in higher education. Lamb and Simpson investigate the degree to which higher education students are able to use feedback on their writing to develop academic literacy. Since higher education institutions spend much energy and money on the development of academic literacy, it is important to investigate how students engage with attempts to help them improve their writing. Their conclusion is important for all language teachers and lecturers: students require dialogue and discussion about aspects of their writing – one-on-one consultations seem the only way to develop understanding and expertise in academic writing. Brokensha is similarly concerned with the way in which students develop critical insight into and awareness of language use in a Linguistics course. Critical Discourse Analysis is proposed to develop critical language awareness in higher education students and the important recommendation is made that texts should be chosen judiciously to pre-empt premature interpretations based on personal likes and dislikes of students.

With this number we will be concluding a chapter in the history of *Per Linguam*. From the second number of 2011 onwards the journal will also appear on the Stellenbosch University SUNJournals site as an online and open source journal (<http://perlinguam.journals.ac.za>). This move will have many advantages for our authors, who will get much wider exposure since the SUNJournals site will be linked to a number of well-known academic article indices. Apart from benefiting our contributors, we see this as an excellent opportunity to widen the readership, quality and impact of the journal. We are already in the process of setting up an electronic archive of *Per Linguam* articles published since 2000. This is the first step towards ISI accreditation and we will keep all our authors up to date on progress in this regard.

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