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Albert Einstein allegedly said that science comprises a process of finding out what questions to ask and looking for ways to answer those inquiries in order to establish general truths. Authorship aside, Research in Language, as an international academic journal publishing the latest studies in linguistics and related disciplines with a focus on interpersonal communication, encourages and promotes its contributors to do exactly this. This quarterly is prepared by the Faculty of Philology, University of Lodz and since its deployment in 2003 at the Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics; it has published numerous articles in the area of linguistics and related disciplines focused on human communication in such diverse areas of language study as phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax, semantics, and pragmatics, with a multidimensional perspective and interdisciplinary approach, bringing together the cognitive, the psychological, and the institutional aspect of language alongside the social shaping of linguistic convention, representation and creativity.

The four articles by researchers at the Department of English, though different in their scope and content, relate all to a general area of discourse, sociolinguistic and sociopragmatic aspects of research conducted in the Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics. Similar avenues of interest have been explored in previous years and have found their way into different volumes of RiL (cf. Witczak-Plisiecka 2020, Szymańska 2020, Grabarczyk 2019, Waniek-Klimczak 2009) and elsewhere (Sardegna & Jarosz 2022, Fetzer & Witczak-Plisiecka 2021). In earlier issues (RiL 20, issue 1 and 2) this year several articles explored the role of prosody in general intelligibility in learner language and some looked at pedagogical implications in the classroom, while the self and language use in multilingual settings were investigated communicative-pragmatic analysis and a corpus-based approach in the context of European identity discourse in the media. Parallel to this, issues in translation and equivalence were investigated in the light of various perspectives including, discourse, pragmatics, and cognition.

In general, scientific performance of researchers rooted in the Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics in the University of Lodz reflects the

present approach in sociopragmatics known as “Social Meaning” (cf., e.g., Eckert 2019, Eckert & Labov 2017, Salmon 2022), whose aim, with the active support of William Labov himself, is to reintegrate different strands of sociolinguistic research paths, including sociophonetics on the one hand and sociolinguistic studies focused on lexical innovation and convention, syntactic patterns, discourse patterns on the other. It is stressed that social meaning may be indexed on different levels of linguistic expression, but the linking thread through all relevant research is the researchers’ interest in the pairing of form and function within the variation that they find, and their attempt to elucidate the impact of a specific linguistic feature on the image that the performer produces, as well as in the origin of such correspondence. This takes place in the much research area of phonetics, phonology and syntax, with focus on native language, but also in contexts related to teaching English as a foreign language and beyond.

The articles found in the present volume point to a number of interests represented by our researchers. The first of the articles by Anna Gralińska-Brawata, explores the areas where language and music intersect, and though it clearly starts from a common belief about the relationship between being musically gifted, where it is not difficult to recognise that tempo, pitch and intonation as musical features can be attributed to individuals with a variety of range and ability perspective, and therefore must bear some relationship with prosodic features in pronunciation, it quickly seeks a more tangible and empirical provisions for such claims. According to (O’Connell and Kowal 2008:113), Nietzsche, in a manuscript of his, claimed something that is inaccessible to the present editor owing to the fact that German is not one of the languages he reads, and has to be asserted through a citation, that: *[w]hat is most comprehensible in speech is not the word itself, but rather the tone, intensity, modulation, tempo, with which a sequence of words is spoken – in short, the music behind the words, the passion behind this music, the person behind this passion: in other words, everything that cannot be written.* The course Language and Music, that is a subject of scrutiny in the article, was, according to the author, designed primarily to raise the participants’ awareness of the interplay between language and music, especially regarding language learning, and as such to allow the learners to appreciate what they were already, and prior to the course, bringing into the classroom, their competence, expectations, and the outcome. Anna, through personal interactions with all of us in the Department of English Language and Applied Linguistics, is acknowledged an accomplished lecturer and is known to have been blessed with all the social graces that make her an acute listener to students’ needs, preferences, and inclinations, and additionally has solid background in music education, as well as pure talent for musical expression. All this has allowed for a very interesting study of the interplay between musical aptitude and learner language perceptions relating to developing control of prosody in language learners.

Robin Lakoff, as early as in 1973, made a radical, and somewhat groundbreaking claim about differences in how language was used by the two genders to assert control of discourse. What followed was a cascade reaction of evidence that indeed male and female language undeniably differ, and not only that but also, that perception of language performance is biased by a number of factors, including gender roles, gender perception, and expectations. Mansplaining, a term created to explain certain language performative actions, and as a lexeme is a blend, or if we wish to use Lewis Carroll's Alice in Wonderland and Through the Looking Glass metaphor, a portmanteau, where two different words are merged in order to convey a new, fresh and novel meaning. Mansplain and mansplaining, explored in an article by Maria Szymańska, cover the situations in which unwanted male language behaviour is considered patronizing and belittling someone's intelligence, often, but now more commonly not necessarily, due to gender differences. The use and circumstances in which the term is used analysed in the article in a sociopragmatic framework may be illuminating even for some who consider themselves gender neutral and politically correct.

This paper concerned with rater perceptions in spoken exams, by Przemysław Krakowian, looks at the use of a large batch of pre-tested and in some cases standardised samples of oral expression with different assessment schemas and raters, whose experience, exposure, and involvement in assessing spoken production varies considerably, owing to duration of employment, involvement in the programme, and amount of experience gathered over different examinations assessing proficiency in speaking. The data for the claims staked in the study comes from samples recorded during mock exams for students of the English Programme at the Institute of English Studies of the Philological Faculty at Lodz University, where the benchmark assessments are derived from an educational communication ecology that may be defined as an arrangement characterised by the fact that the interaction of individual participants of different experience, background knowledge and familiarity with the subject at hand, sharing, for the purpose of work, pursuit of knowledge, collaboration or leisure activities, one or more languages for their communication, creates a situation where worldview, self-identification, behavioural paradigms, value orientations, ideosphere and memetic diversity are augmented to a larger or lesser extent and result in the emergence of fairly unique and individual cognitive and communication strategies, verbal and non-verbal means of information encoding, as well as the perception of reality in each of the cultures and languages involved. In some respects, this leads to a greater efficiency of collaboration, but at the same time, may lead to misunderstandings and ineffective communication. The data, empirical in nature, allows to identify the bias of assessment of spoken performance. What ensues is an applicational model that may be implemented if powers at be find the need, necessity, or obligation to do so.

Needs Analysis (NA), as a concept to shape general, public imaginations of efficiency and successful outcomes in education, became a very attractive notion in the late 70's and early 80's of the previous century, as what was considered at that time to be modern technology in the form of language labs, computerised repositories of constituent elements of language systems and the applicational connection between the two offered simple, effective and on-demand solutions. At the press of a button, after all the requirements and propositions were fed into a system of sorts, a resolution in the form of a bespoke, yet astonishingly, fit-all needs programme of study would be churned out, and would willingly, without a second thought and collectively embraced as the solution to all problems. And while this enjoyed continued recognition and popularity for a decade or nearly two, what followed in the years to come was a stark departure from such premises, where solutions were sought through individual learning histories, actual proficiencies, and competencies to be reached, and what was diagnosed through various means as deficiencies, shortcomings and needs has led to an assertion that the process of language teaching can no longer be based on an intuitive analysis of students' expectations, and that primarily and above all their learning needs should be carefully examined and attended to. The article by Olga Tendak-Suślik posits, that if implemented accurately, and following all state-of-the-art underpinnings, needs assessment may, and should significantly reduce student drop-out and failure rates, improve motivation, build institutional rapport, and lead to improved achievement, success, and perception of accomplishment.

Coda

All four articles, although seemingly somewhat superficially diverse in their scope, all focus on interpersonal communication, and sociopragmatics of language use, whether in determinants of performance, perceptions of roles and gender appropriacy, gender determinants of perception, competence and competence needs as well as general discourse studies.

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