

# INTRODUCTION

The Research Symposium and the ensuing refereed proceedings of contributions to the symposium have become an integral part of the annual TESL Ontario conference. The symposium during the 2015 TESL Ontario conference brought together researchers and language professionals who addressed one of the two topics that had been selected for inclusion. While some of the contributions included present data from individual researchers' recent studies, others summarize areas of activity in areas that have become topical in ESL learning and teaching. The contributors link theoretical insights with practical issues in pedagogy and consider the implications to classroom practice. Both themes addressed at the 2015 Research Symposium are represented in these proceedings. They are grouped according to theme and, within each theme, presented in alphabetical order of the presenters.

## Theme 1: English in the Workplace

The theme of English in the Workplace explored three different workplace-related settings that ESL learners may encounter. The first paper, Tracey Dewing's *The Three P's Of ESL In The Workplace: Proficiency, Pronunciation, & Pragmatics*, discusses two studies that explored aspects of receptive and productive oral communication between immigrant and native English speaking employees. The material presented highlights challenges and successes of workplace programs and offers recommendations for future research. In *Who Recommends the Higher Language Test Score for Workplace Readiness: Language Specialists or Employers?* Andrea Strachan investigates the question of cut score standard setting for professionals' language requirements. In particular, the study explored whether cut-score recommendations differed between health professionals and language specialists, groups that acted as expert panellists in the standard-setting study. A key finding of the study is that while language specialists' participation clarified aspects of the language testing process for panellists, health professionals contributed workplace examples that helped the panel understand the language demands of the workplace. The third paper, Julia Williams and Maggie Heeney's *Developing a Culturally Mindful Curriculum and Occupation-Specific Assessment for an Optometric Bridging Program*, describes the development of an ESL curriculum and occupation-specific assessment for a specific optometric bridging program. The Optometric English Language Proficiency Assessment (OELPA), which assesses reading, writing, listening, and speaking skills in optometric contexts served to inform the curriculum developers on the impact of the curriculum on learning outcomes. The paper has relevance for curriculum development and workplace assessments in other professional contexts.

## Theme 2: Formulaic language: a promising way to think about vocabulary building

This theme focused on research on formulaic language, multiword units with unitary meanings or functions. Examples of types of formulaic language include collocations, idioms, formulaic expressions, lexical bundles, and phrasal verbs. The three papers here report on pedagogically relevant research studies which address the acquisition and use of formulaic language.

Lina AlHassan's contribution, *Learning all the Parts of the Puzzle: Focused Instruction of Formulaic Sequences Through the Lens of Activity Theory*, reports on an innovative study in which English for academic purposes (EAP) learners were taught specific formulaic language through focused instruction. The writing produced by the learners was evaluated by a team of EAP teacher judges who also reflected on the efficacy of teaching formulaic language. Randy Appel's *Formulaic Sequences in L2 English Academic Writing: Proficiency level differences* reports on a study of formulaic language in the writing samples produced by EAP learners in proficiency test contexts. The results show some noteworthy differences in the use of formulaic language by learners of different proficiency levels. The third contribution is from Alisa Zavialova, whose study *Explicit Instruction of Formulaic Expressions and Second Language Pragmatic Competence*, focused on LINC learners who were taught formulaic sequences relevant to specific pragmatic speech acts. The learners were later tested on their use of the sequences, and reflected on the learning process and their evolving awareness of formulaic language and pragmatic competence.

As in the past, we enjoyed preparing this Special Research Symposium Issue for readers of *Contact* and wish to thank the contributors for submitting written versions of their papers. To grow, members of the TESL profession need to continue to investigate research and teaching practice; this continual striving for more sophisticated research questions and teaching techniques allows them to meet the challenges encountered in their classrooms. We hope that the stimulating contributions contained in this issue of the referred proceedings of the 2015 Research Symposium will inspire teachers to experiment with a new methodology or new techniques in their classrooms.

We regret to announce that this is the final Research Symposium and the final published proceedings. Due to funding priorities, TESL Ontario will not offer a Research Symposium for the foreseeable future.

Hedy McGarrell, David Wood  
Co-editors

# CONTRIBUTORS TO THE PROCEEDINGS

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Randy Appel is a PhD student in the Education program at Concordia University in Montreal. His research interests include academic writing, second language writing, corpus linguistics, and the study of formulaic language by L1 and L2 users.

## **Derwing, Tracey, PhD, University of Alberta & Simon Fraser University**

Tracey Derwing is a Professor Emeritus in the TESL program (Department of Educational Psychology) at the University of Alberta and an Adjunct Professor in the Department of Linguistics at Simon Fraser University. Her research interests include pronunciation and pragmatics for ESL learners, as well as immigration issues affecting integration.

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Maggie Heeney is an English Language Studies instructor and coordinator of the ACE TESOL teacher-training program at Renison University College, University of Waterloo. She also has years of experience in both teaching in the workplace and writing workplace curricula for internationally educated professionals. Her research interests are the relationship between teaching and learning in second language development.

## **Strachan, Andrea, MEd, Touchstone Institute**

Andrea Strachan is a language and communication specialist whose projects have included occupation-specific language training curricula and assessments for adult immigrants, language proficiency policies for professional licensure and registration, and research on the language and

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Alisa Zavialova is a PhD student in Applied Linguistics at Carleton University. She has taught ESL/EFL in a number of contexts in Canada and abroad, and her research interests centre around formulaic language, pragmatics, and communicative competence. Alisa Zavialova is a PhD student in Applied Linguistics at Carleton University. She has extensive English language teaching experience in Canada and abroad. She currently teaches ESL, EAP and LINC in Ottawa. She conducts research on teaching formulaic language and its role in promoting second language pragmatic competence.

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Hedy McGarrell is Professor of Applied Linguistics at Brock University. Her research focuses on ESL writing and technology in language learning and teaching. Her publications include Language Teacher Research in the Americas (TESOL) and, with K. Brillinger, Writing for Results: Academic and Professional Writing Tasks (Longman).

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