

*Editorial*

## **TESOL in the New Era: Introduction to the 2021 Global English Education China Assembly Special Issue**

**Rining (Tony) Wei**

Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China

**Jim Hu\***

Thompson Rivers University, Canada

Welcome to the International Journal of TESOL Studies (IJTS) special issue for the 2021 Global English Education China Assembly (henceforth “the Assembly”). This is the first of the three special issues of the 2021 Assembly (see also the Call for Papers at the end of this volume). Organised by *China Daily* in partnership with TESOL International Association, the Assembly is a high-level international English Language Teaching (ELT) event in China. The 2021 Assembly held in July in Hangzhou (Zhejiang Province, China) brought together over 3,000 attendees, both on site and online. They were ELT practitioners, scholars, and researchers in China and from abroad. On the Assembly platform, they exchanged experiences and views and shared research outputs.

We are in a new era where one of the world’s largest disruptions to daily life is still on-going. Despite the stress everyone is facing during the pandemic, contributors have been productive. As Guest Editors, we feel honoured and pleased to introduce the works of 17 scholars (including two prestigious interviewees) that appear in this volume. Prior to our introduction, we need to congratulate these fine scholars for their work completed successfully in the new era.

This special issue features 11 papers from TESOL experts, researchers, and practitioners based not only in China but also in other countries including Canada, the UK, and the USA. These 11 papers are followed by two interviews respectively with two renowned scholars conducted by Ms. Peng Lun, Editor-in-Chief of the Assembly Special Issues. These papers use a wide variety of approaches, ranging from experimental designs, corpus-based methods, survey-based studies, case studies, to mix-methods research.

The first paper, entitled “Measuring Chinese EFL Learners’ Implicit and Explicit Knowledge of Relative Clauses” by Lei Zhang, adds to the line of research examining the three theoretical hypotheses concerning the acquisition of relative clauses: the Noun Phrase Accessibility Hierarchy Hypothesis, the Perceptual Differential Hypothesis, and the Subject-Object Hierarchy Hypothesis. Zhang utilised an experiment-based design, where the participants (viz. Chinese EFL learners from one university in China) were asked to do the same grammaticality judgment and sentence combination tasks within the allocated time. This paper contributes to furthering our understanding of the hypotheses mentioned above.

The second paper, “Use of English Phrasal Verbs of Chinese Students Across Proficiency Levels:

---

**\*Corresponding Author**

Address: Department of English Language Learning and Teaching, Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, BC, V2C 0C8, Canada

Email: [jhu@tru.ca](mailto:jhu@tru.ca)

A Corpus-Based Analysis,” authored by Yuanyuan Wei, reports on a corpus-based study examining phrasal verb use in free conversations from a learner corpus, the Spoken and Written English Corpus of Chinese Learners (SWECCCL). The SWECCCL is a two-million-word corpus compiled by Nanjing University, Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press, and Beijing Foreign Studies University. One advantage of the SWECCCL is that it demonstrates Chinese students’ actual use of phrasal verbs. The study finds that students with a higher level of proficiency in English tend to use more phrasal verbs in oral communication. Based on this and other findings, the paper offers pedagogical implications such as enhancing ELT practitioners’ awareness of the difficulties that students face when learning phrasal verbs.

The third paper, “Does Teacher Engagement Matter? Exploring Relationship Between Teachers’ Engagement in Professional Development and Teaching Practice” by Ying Ji, aims to address the link indicated in the paper title based on a mixed-methods study. This topic is important because although for most teachers, professional development is an intrinsic part of the growth of a professional career, it cannot be assumed that all teachers will be truly engaged in all professional development programmes and comply with the expectations from their schools or organisations. Drawing upon both survey and interview data from a group of Chinese ELT teachers at the primary and secondary levels, Ji identifies (1) a reciprocal relationship between teachers’ engagement with professional development and their teaching practice, and (2) four types of teacher engagement (behavioural, emotional, cognitive, and social). She concludes with pedagogical suggestions to improve the effectiveness of professional development (e.g., identifying ways to satisfy teachers’ individual needs) and directions for further research (e.g., collecting non-self-reported data and employing a longitudinal research design).

The fourth paper, “Formative Assessment in Higher Education Classrooms: Second Language Writing Learning” by Yujie Zhong and Manzhen Yang, uses a mixed-methods approach to investigate how implementing assessment for learning (AfL) influences EFL students’ learning of writing. By studying the writing, peer feedback, assessment sheets, reflection journals, and e-portfolios of 155 Chinese EFL first-year university students, the study found that formative assessment helps the students improve their learning of argumentative writing skills significantly. Qualitative interviews with four focal participants revealed further benefits of formative assessment, such as enhancement of logical thinking, promotion of self-regulated learning, and improvement in peer feedback quality.

In the fifth paper, “A Study of Chinese University EFL Learners’ Online English Classroom Anxiety and Listening Anxiety,” Zhangwei Chen and Jingxuan Ren report upon a quantitative survey-based study of the two types of anxiety indicated in the paper title in an online ELT environment. After analysing the questionnaire data from 261 freshmen at one university in China, these authors found the participants’ two anxiety types slightly exceeding the intermediate level. It is commendable that in their analysis, the authors provide information of effect size, which is more important than the statistical significance (*viz.* the *p* value) in inferential statistical procedures (Plonsky, 2014; Wei et al., 2019), although *IJTS* is not one of the few international journals (e.g., *TESOL Quarterly*) in TESOL research and applied linguistics that mandate effect size reporting.

In the sixth paper, “University Students’ Attitudes Toward EMI in the Chinese Mainland: A Study of the Moderating Variables,” Wei Zhu reports on a study that surveyed 169 university students in the Chinese mainland regarding their attitudes toward English medium instruction (EMI) in academic courses. The survey results point to a generally positive attitude among the participants toward EMI in learning. Reasons for such attitudes include pursuit of better future studies or work, the forces of the all-English learning environment, and the inevitable trend of globalization. The students’ perceived peer pressure which contributes directly to anxiety, appears to be an important predictor for EMI attitudes.

The seventh paper, “Chinese University Students’ Attitudes Towards China English and Teaching China English: Influential Factors” by Wuhan Huang investigates Chinese university students’ attitudes towards China English (CE) and incorporating CE in ELT. Using a questionnaire with 155 Chinese university students in the Chinese mainland and statistical approaches, the study showed the

respondents had mixed attitudes towards CE and generally negative attitudes towards teaching CE. The results revealed that students' academic discipline and understanding of the "World Englishes" concept are statistically significant predictors of their attitudinal response. For example, the students in natural sciences had more positive attitudes towards the global acceptance of CE than applied science students. The study suggests while it is still too early to teach CE, groundwork can be laid for CE to be incorporated in ELT in the future.

In the eighth paper, "Does Volunteering in a Language Learning Centre Help Non-Native English Speaking Students' Emotional Well-Being?" Hilda Freimuth and Joe Dobson report on a mixed-methods study exploring student volunteer perceptions on their experience at a language learning centre of a Canadian university. Survey data cross-referenced with focus group interviews show volunteering in the centre made an impact on student volunteers' emotional well-being, giving them a sense of belonging and the feeling that they were part of a greater community. Volunteering also helped reduce loneliness and build self-esteem.

The ninth paper, "Noticing Collocation in Reading: A Multi-Case Study of Five Chinese EFL Learners" by Miaomiao Sun, examines the effectiveness of incorporating collocation learning into reading lessons, and the learners' perception and attitude towards collocation noticing. The participants in this multi-case study were five EFL learners in a language institution in China. Using data collected from vocabulary tests, pre/post collocation tests, in-class practice tests, questionnaires, and semi-structured interviews, the research shows that the reading intervention effectively raised the learners' collocation awareness, but that learners had mixed attitudes. They valued the collocation orientation and input-enhancement approaches, such as embedding a Chinese glossary in reading texts; however, they found self-directed noticing challenging and collocations learned in reading difficult to output in writing and speaking. Sun suggests that language teachers start collocation teaching as early as possible so that the collocation input and output are not separated.

In the tenth paper, "Designing an EAL Syllabus for Young Learners in a Bilingual or International School," Yanwei Sun investigates how an understanding of course design for primary learners can help prepare English language courses to support the transition of young learners to a bilingual school. Sun discusses cognitive factors, physical factors, and the environment as lenses through which methodologies, including needs analysis, syllabus framework, and assessments, can be reviewed and conducted.

The 11<sup>th</sup> paper, "Using Chinese as L1 in Secondary English as a Foreign Language Classrooms: Does It Matter?" by Ester de Jong and Jing Zhang, is a review article. It examines studies concerning a controversial issue: Whether L1 (the first language) should be used in ESL/EFL classrooms. Their review demonstrates (1) that the use of L1 serves several supportive functions and (2) that teachers and students actively switch codes (L1 and the target language) to enhance the language learning and teaching processes. "Code-switching" overlaps with another term "translanguaging." Although "translanguaging" has been widely discussed in the research literature and applied as a useful theoretical lens (see [Zhang & Wei, 2021](#) for an example of application), this term and its associated notions have recently been challenged (see [Jaspers, 2018](#); [MacSwan & Faltis, 2020](#)).

In the 12<sup>th</sup> article, "Bilingualism, Education and English: An Interview with Hugo BAETENS BEARDSMORE" by Lun Peng, Professor Baetens Beardsmore (the Vrije Universiteit Brussel, the Université Libre de Bruxelles, and a member of the Belgian Royal Academy of Overseas Sciences) shares with the audience both serious and interesting bits concerning/surrounding the three key terms in the main article title, with his signature sense of humour. With an amazingly high proficiency in multiple languages, Professor Baetens Beardsmore is one of the language freaks in the eyes of many, but contrary to many people's beliefs, he was not brought up as a "simultaneous bilingual," as indicated in the beginning of the interview. He then shares what inspired him to write *Bilingualism: Basic Principles* (inaugural edition in 1982 by Multilingual Matters), the world's very first textbook on bilingualism.

Although he humbly says that he “did not master statistics” and points out that today quantitative approaches tend to dominate the research publications in the field, he emphasises the indispensable role of qualitative approaches because we as researchers are dealing with human beings as social entities. In connection with education, Professor Baetens Beardsmore has been invited to educate various stakeholder groups, including parents, politicians, teachers, and teacher educators, in different countries in Europe, North America, and Asia. With reference to English, besides publishing in English and teaching English and its related topics in the academia, he broadcast a daily language spot in English on Belgian radio for two years and has given press and television interviews aimed at raising awareness on ELT-related and other language issues in many countries. Professor Baetens Beardsmore was one of the first scholars to lecture in China at the opening up of the country to foreigners in 1980 and was invited in 1986 to help prepare the linguistic aspects of the return of Hong Kong to China. In the above-mentioned book on bilingualism, his major goal was to show that bilingualism is not intrinsically a problem but an enrichment. But doubts and concerns over the effects of bilingualism remain although more and more people are realising that nowadays bilingualism is “a powerful fact of life in many parts of the world” (Wei, Jiang, & Kong, 2021, p. 291). For ELT teachers and researchers endeavouring to enable ESL/EFL learners to reap the benefits of bilingualism, “there is still a long way to go” as remarked by Professor Baetens Beardsmore in the interview.

In the 13<sup>th</sup> article, “Intercultural Communication and Applied Linguistics - Extending Horizons: An Interview with Lixian JIN” by Lun Peng, Professor Jin (Chair Professor in Applied Linguistics and Dean of Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at City University of Macau) begins with her story of English learning in university. When she began her university education, she “could hardly say a word” in English. It was only through a great struggle that she managed to improve her proficiency in English significantly; for example, in the extracurricular time, she grabbed tape recordings to listen to English for as many hours a day as she could, plus reading texts, reciting passages aloud, learning vocabulary, and even talking to herself in English in her dreams! This period of Professor Jin’s life vividly demonstrates that behind every successful person, there are a lot of unsuccessful years. Throughout Professor Jin’s academic career, she has advocated the importance of intercultural communication for ELT practitioners and researchers; furthermore, she underscores that “true intercultural communication” is indispensable. She shares her invaluable experiences of teaching English to both young and older learners and conducting research targeting these populations. In connection with the advice for TESOL and applied linguistics faculty members to balance teaching, research, and administrative responsibilities in an international university setting, she remarks that “we are all leaders in one way or another: in university, as elsewhere, everyone is a learner, everyone is a teacher, everyone is a leader in some ways.”

It is worth noting that most studies in this special issue have been conducted in economically more prosperous regions, such as mega-cities (Beijing and Suzhou). We call for more research attention to ELT and TESOL practices in less economically prosperous regions. As indicated in the Call for Papers at the end of this collection of papers, the Assembly welcomes research concerning Theme (10) “English education in rural areas.”

We would also like to see, in the near future, more research efforts directed towards socially disadvantaged groups. In China, older adults (usually aged 60 and above) who learn English at a later stage in life constitute a socially disadvantaged group because those seniors are facing a high level of ageism (Wei & Wang, forthcoming). Beyond China, in some countries including the USA and Canada, older immigrants aspiring to begin English learning in late adulthood represent another example of the socially disadvantaged groups and there is very limited research of TESOL provision in this particular kind of immigrant context (Zhu & Zhang, 2019). The above-mentioned topics represent an emerging and promising line of research that examines the cognitive and (socio-)psychological effects of *bi-/multilingualism* among socially disadvantaged groups, and hence can help promote diversity, equity and inclusion in ELT. After all, “at its core, TESOL is an organization that values *diversity*, multiculturalism,

and *multilingualism*” (Cutler, 2021; emphasis added).

Finally, we are pleased to observe that several papers published in the 2020 Assembly special issue (e.g., Egbert, 2020; Zhang, 2020) have been cited by articles published in reputable international journals including *Language Teaching Research* (e.g., Deng, 2021; Lasan, 2021; Liu & Zhu, 2021; Zhang, 2021). We hope that the papers in this 2021 Assembly special issue will be of relevance and importance to TESOL researchers and professionals working in the new era.

Happy reading, reflecting, and researching! Let us stay upbeat and healthy, come what may! We are looking forward to meeting as many of you as possible at the 2022 Assembly and reading your innovative TESOL research in this turbulent but promising new era.

## Acknowledgements

Despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, we have benefited enormously from having a dedicated and supportive reviewer community. We would like to extend our sincere thanks to the following colleagues who have served as reviewers for this special issue:

Dr. Ningyang Chen, Soochow University, China

Dr. Anna Dong, University of British Columbia, Canada

Prof. Qi Fang, Shenzhen University, China

Dr. Lihe Huang, Tongji University, China

Dr. Steve Jeaco, Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China

Prof. Raj Khatri, George Brown College, Canada

Dr. Chunmei Li, South China Business College of Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, China

Dr. Xuemei Li, Memorial University, Canada

Dr. Hong Liu, Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China

Prof. Honggang Liu, Northeast Normal University, China

Dr. Mingkun Lou, University of South Australia, Australia

Dr. Feng (Mark) Teng, Beijing Normal University, China

Dr. Guofang Wan, Loyola University Chicago, USA

Prof. Hongchen Xu, Beijing Language and Culture University, China

Dr. Haiyong Zhao, Capital University of Economics and Business, China

Dr. Qianqian Zhou, Xi’an Jiaotong-Liverpool University, China

We would also like to extend our heart-felt thanks to all the authors and contributors for their hard work and patience during the review process.

## References

- Cutler, D. (2021, March 11). *TESOL condemns global acts of violence and discrimination against Asians*. <https://www.tesol.org/news-landing-page/2021/03/11/tesol-condemns-global-acts-of-violence-and-discrimination-against-asians>
- Deng, S. (2021). Comparing students’ engagement in classroom education between China and Germany. *Frontiers in Psychology, 12*, 754637. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.754637>

- Egbert, J. (2020). Engagement, technology, and language tasks: Optimizing student learning. *International Journal of TESOL Studies*, 2(4), 110-118. <https://doi.org/10.46451/ijts.2020.12.10>
- Jaspers, J. (2018). The transformative limits of translanguaging. *Language & Communication*, 58, 1-10. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2017.12.001>
- Lasan, I. (2021). Salience in EFL speakers' perceptions of formality: (In)formal greetings and address forms combined with (in)formal nouns, verbs, and adjectives. *Language Teaching Research*, <https://doi.org/10.1177/13621688211055086>
- Liu, X., & Zhu, L. (2021). The role of EFL teachers' self-disclosure as predictors of student's willingness to communicate and their engagement. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 748744. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.748744>
- MacSwan, J., & Faltis, C. (2020) (Eds.). *Codeswitching in the classroom: Critical perspectives on teaching, learning, policy, and ideology*. Routledge.
- Plonsky, L. (2014). Study quality in quantitative L2 research (1990-2010): A methodological synthesis and call for reform. *The Modern Language Journal*, 98(1), 450-470. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2014.12058.x>
- Wei, R., Hu, Y., & Xiong, J. (2019). Effect size reporting practices in applied linguistics research: A study of one major journal. *SAGE Open*, 9(2), 1-11. <https://doi.org/10.1177/2158244019850035>
- Wei, R., Jiang, H., & Kong, M. (2021). Attitudes toward trilingualism: A survey study of Chinese Mongolian university students. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 42(3), 291-306. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2019.1689245>
- Wei, R., & Wang, J. (forthcoming). *Exploring ageism among student teachers of English* [Conference paper]. Paper submitted to the 24th Sociolinguistics Symposium, Ghent University, Ghent, Belgium.
- Zhang, M. (2021). EFL/ESL teacher's resilience, academic buoyancy, care, and their impact on students' engagement: A theoretical review. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 12, 731859. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2021.731859>
- Zhang, Y. (2020). The effect of combining computer-mediated communication with instruction on EFL learners' pragmatic competence. *International Journal of TESOL Studies*, 2(4), 50-63. <https://doi.org/10.46451/ijts.2020.12.06>
- Zhang, Y., & Wei, R. (2021). Strategic use of L1 in Chinese EMI classrooms: A translanguaging Perspective. In Y. Zhang & R. Wei (Eds.), *English-medium instruction translanguaging practices in Asia* (pp. 101-118). Springer. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-3001-9\\_6](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-16-3001-9_6)
- Zhu, Y., & Zhang, W. (2019). Active learning for active ageing: Chinese senior immigrants' lifelong learning in Canada. *Educational Gerontology*, 45(8), 506-518.

**Rining WEI (Tony)**, PhD, is a tenured Associate Professor in Xi'an Jiaotong-Liverpool University (XJTLU), China's largest Sino-foreign institution. Dr Wei directs MA TESOL, one of XJTLU's largest postgraduate degree programmes. He has supervised master's and PhD dissertations covering topics such as English for Academic Purposes (EAP) and individual differences in L2 learning. His areas of research include multilingualism, geronto-linguistics, and quantitative methodology. He serves as Co-Editor-in-Chief of *International Journal of EAP: Research and Practice* and Associate Editor of *International TESOL Journal*. He has published in international journals, including *Bilingualism: Language & Cognition*, *English Today*, and *World Englishes*. [ID: <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-4381-7040>]

---

**Dr. Jim Hu** is an Associate Professor at Thompson Rivers University, Canada, where he teaches EAP and TESOL. His research interests include academic writing, academic integrity, English for the workplace, and international education. His research has appeared in journals such as *Journal of Response to Writing*, *Comparative and International Education*, *The Qualitative Report*, *TESL Canada Journal*, and *BC TEAL Journal*. He has received multiple grants from SSHRC.