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Preface: Language Change and the New Millennium

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All linguists, at some time in their studies, run headlong into fundamental issues associated with language change, and I could not celebrate the ESJ 12th anniversary without investigating the English Language of the New Millennium.

Change in languages over time seems to be an inevitable constant. All languages have undergone and, if not dead, are undergoing change. As Ferdinand de Saussure put it more than a century ago, “the linguistic river never stops flowing” (*Course in General Linguistics*, 1916:110). The English language has been no exception and continues to be widely discussed from different areas or branches of linguistics, such as generative, historical, variationist or corpus linguistics. There is, however, much that still needs to be investigated.

Already completely immersed in the 21st century, we are witnessing great changes of paradigm, demands of the present society and globalizing trends, in a world that is getting increasingly unpredictable, unforeseeable and in constant transformation.

In addition, English has become a global language, as well as “the meeting point” of the widespread New Age phenomena where Eastern and Western cultures and literatures unite metaphorically. It is also the language of international communication, of the New Media, as well as the official language of scientific research.

Since Coronavirus struck in early spring 2020, English has even become the shared code to describe this pandemic. Communication has been more important, not just because the world has had to deal with much of it remotely, but also because the messages from politicians and scientists have come under scrutiny.

New uses are now the “rule”, even in literature and in international communication. The globalised world is richer in more sophisticated approaches to teaching and learning English language(s) and literatures.

I developed this special issue around the theme of *Language Change and the New Millennium* to highlight the critical importance of this topic in the ongoing progress in linguistics and literature.

I have assembled a collection of articles that address some of the research questions within a departmental project I am a member of, entitled *Cyclical ages and human development*, P.I. Prof. Letterio Todaro (Dept. of Educational Science, University of Catania).

I felt it was time for an informed exposition and discussion of this important topic. Naturally, there was more content than could possibly fit into a single journal issue, so I right-sized to a representative sample of the major approaches and themes, with a bias toward multidisciplinary methodological integration.

The articles in this special issue are those that survived the journal’s rigorous peer review process and whose authors persisted and accommodated the requirements for multiple revisions to the original submissions.

I would like to thank the ESJ editorial board and a long list of anonymous reviewers for their thoughtful suggestions and constructive criticisms. The individual articles and the special issue in its entirety are now more direct thanks to their hard work.

Although each of the following six articles stands solidly on its own merits, I have made the effort to impose a rough thematic structure and logical flow in their ordering, motivated by an interest in emphasizing some of the methodological similarities and differences.

The issue begins with Paola Clara Leotta and Tamar Dolidze’s research, *Language Change, New Millennium and the Watershed in the Use of English*, which provides a general overview of the development of English as a global language and focuses on changes in vocabulary, with example use cases in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic. Through a synchronic and diachronic literature review, the role of the so-called “future of English” is under scrutiny, with its variety of discourse communities making the English language global and culturally diverse at the same time.

The second article, written by Tatiana Canziani, *COVID-19 and its linguistic 'variants': from Miss Rona to Boomer Remover*, emphasises the importance of the main English monikers coined to rename Covid-19. The author focuses on an unprecedented linguistic innovation and lexical explosion, ranging from the medicalisation of everyday language to the creation of new word-formations. She emphasises that although many of those word creations will probably disappear by the end of the pandemic, the lexical creativity used in social platforms will remain, triggered by the need to discuss and share emotions in today society characterised by common feelings of anxiety.

In the next article, Cristina Guccione, author of *Migration Discourse and the New Socially Constructed Meanings of the English Lingua Franca*, introduces a topic of historical linguistics through the description of the role of English as a Lingua Franca in public discourse. In particular, the author reports on the migration phenomenon and examines some traditional English key terms used to represent migrants since their mass arrival in Europe in the 1990s.

The research concludes with the current international debate conducted by the mass media and non-governmental organisations on some new, socially constructed meanings.

Our issue, then moves on towards the topic of language change in teaching and learning. The first study, Vincenza Tutino and Heidi Littunen's *The Impact of the English Language on Italian Lexis. A study on students from the University of Catania in international exchanges*, deals with the sub-topic of English language learning in multilingual contexts and brings the Italian perspective to the impact of English as a second language during international exchange programmes in the new millennium. Through a survey questionnaire administered to students of the University of Catania, the two authors have questioned whether the exposition to multilingual contexts can determine an impoverishment of the respondents' native vocabulary or not.

Still researching in the field of teaching, Concetta Maria Sigona, author of *The Use of Literature in EFL Classroom: Italian Canadian short stories as a teaching innovation experience through flipped classroom strategy*, proposes the methodology of the flipped classroom as a "New Millennium" change in teaching literature, considered as a means of teaching the language.

Finally, Alba Fernández-Alonso, author of *The Role of the Student in the Literary Translation Classroom: A Pedagogical Approach Towards a New Learning Perspective*, challenges traditional teaching patterns, addressing the practice of translation in the classroom as a pedagogical approach in the 21st century. She shows how important it is to make students aware of both linguistic and cultural knowledge, and consequently, to broaden their points of view of life.

The English language has been presented here in aspects of change at various levels. This is not an issue regarding the history of English, but a study that sees change at work in contemporary society, networks, educational contexts and indeed, individuals. Such new perspective on the English language has led to an academic challenge to the very notion of its essence, in that the individual users, drawing upon a changing repertoire of resources, renew and reshape their own identity as speakers of English.

It will be interesting to see how things develop in this new sociolinguistic domain.

Thanks to all the contributors, special colleagues and friends, for their interest in the journal and for volunteering to share their research and experience fruitfully. I encourage them to continue to send us their invaluable feedback and ideas for the further improvement of our journal.

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