

Editorial introduction

After a successful launch in May 2013, we are now sharing the second issue of AJAL. According to Banfi (2013, p. 26), AJAL, as part of new forums in Argentina, “is an auspicious event that will hopefully mark the beginning of a new era in academic publications in our midst.”

Banfi’s (2013) contribution signals the need for networks which allow ELT professionals to share their practices and research. ELT in Argentina offers a wide range of conferences and workshops through which colleagues can disseminate their work. While these events should be encouraged under a critical view and high standards, we would like colleagues to write about their work. We feel that conferences and isolated talks could reach a wider audience if presenters shared their experience, research, and theoretical views in writing. In so doing, their contributions will not be only synchronous, but asynchronous, and, as it is the case of AJAL, will be part of an archive which will attest to the endeavours of individuals, research teams, and institutions.

Through AJAL we seek to co-construct quality professional networks. These networks may also provide professional development for novice and experienced teachers and trainers, and experts in our field. Blind reviewing is an excellent experience since it promotes critical perspectives, reflection, and an opportunity to learn to accept and benefit from criticism. Reviewers’ comments are usually constructive and their aim is to help authors improve the quality of their own work, highlight their strengths, and help us all see how readers may approach a contribution. It also helps achieve democratic processes since big names, whatever that means in our arena, receive the same treatment as neophytes in the world of academic writing and publishing.

This issue opens with an original contribution by Livia Carolina Ravelo who shares her semiotic analysis of *Maus*, a war comic by Art Spiegelman based on the Second World War and the Holocaust. Ravelo, however, asserts that in *Maus* “there are as many wars as anecdotes being retold.” The author includes an introduction to semiotic analysis and summarises the language and characteristics of comics, a genre, in our views, rather unexploited in language education (for an example see Liu, 2004, and Norton, 2003). Readers will find quotes in Spanish without a translation to English. This has not been arbitrary; it is an invitation to engage in code-switching and multilingualism. In addition, Ravelo’s contribution may be seen as a word of encouragement to those

colleagues interested in Literature and discourse analysis without the need to include direct classroom implications.

The second and third original articles illustrate the international interest AJAL is generating little by little. In this opportunity, Kenyan authors Alice Kiai and Geoffrey Maroko, cross the Atlantic to share with a wider readership their research interests and findings.

Based on her doctoral thesis, Alice Kiai examines teachers' perceptions of teachers' guides which are inseparable companions to textbooks. Her contributions start by offering a description of ELT in Kenya and the intricate publishing context of her study. Although it is different to other contexts, it may resonate with what we experience as practitioners and trainers when it comes to engaging with publishers and our views on teaching practices which seems to depend on coursebooks solely. Are teachers seen as part of a Fordian model to education? To what extent have we contributed to this view? Do teachers' guides and other published materials contribute to deskill teachers?

Geoffrey Maroko's article may be useful not only to trainers who lead academic writing seminars but also to all teachers who seek to share their interests with colleagues through the medium of writing or those who are in the process of writing their postgraduate dissertations. Maroko introduces us to different aspects of authorial stance and voice through the examination of six masters dissertations following a genre-based approach. Inspired by Maroko's contributions and based on our editing experience, we would like to argue that the teaching of a faceless passive voice has been overused and misused in some contexts in Argentina. It seems to be that the use of the pronoun "I" should not be found in our writings and therefore we can read authors who express their views through "It is believed that" when, in fact, a straightforward and supported "I believe that" is more accurate and logical.

The landscape of AJAL reaches Mexico through a contribution by González Quintero and Roux Rodríguez. These colleagues investigated rater variability in EFL writing. They approached this task from a mixed-methods research perspective and the participating raters were two EFL teachers from a small-size, private high school in northeast Mexico. The authors pose this question: "Are there significant differences between the scores assigned by raters to the same papers?" The answer to this question is an invitation to make room for introspective moments in our professional development so as to assess our conceptions of the writing process and language learning at large.

The last article in this issue takes us to examine initial language teacher education programmes by focusing on the Practicum. From a reflective perspective, Flavia Bonadeo shares her personal experience as a Practicum tutor at a tertiary institution in the province of Santa Fe (for a similar experience see Braun, Cheme Arriaga, & Monserrat, 2012). Driven by an interest in reducing trainees' anxiety and maximising collaboration,

reflection, and the first years of teaching, the author describes her explorations of setting up and using a virtual classroom with a group of future teachers. Bonadeo highlights the high participation rates of trainees and their willingness to learn in a virtual learning environment despite economic and technical constraints. This article illustrates how Web 2.0 tools have started to permeate language teacher education, and that if we wish teachers to incorporate new technologies in their practices, these technologies need to be explored and manipulated by trainers and trainees in their pre-service programmes.

In our materials review section, we are proud to include two book reviews. First, Gabriela Tavella reviews a collection of contributions edited by Estela Braun from Universidad Nacional de La Pampa in 2011. As the reviewer, puts it “[e]ach chapter is a thorough introduction to the topics included in this publication, an excellent starting point for further reading.” What we value about this book is that it is the product of Argentinian ELT professionals writing about their experience and expertise. And second, María Alejandra Soto reviews Wedell and Malderez’s book recently published. Their accounts and views illustrate a critical view of our field and a bottom-up approach to change.

If you are the author of books or any other materials aimed at teacher education and recently developed in Argentina, do not hesitate to contact us at ajaleditor@faapi.org.ar so that we review your work.

Finally, we would like to close our editorial by thanking our reviewers, whose insightful comments to authors and generosity helped us with our first volume: Liliana Anglada, Cristina Banfi, Anne Borsinger, Piera Carroli, Gloria Carrozo, Erika Chrobak, Neil Cowie, Suzanne Eggins, Gillian Lazar, Mario López-Barrios, Georgina Ma, Cristina Mayol, Mariza Méndez, Mariana Montaldo, Oscar Montoya, Mónica Pérsico, Luke Plonsky, Melina Porto, Gabriela Racca, María Alejandra Soto, Gabriela Tavella, Ema Ushioda, Yong Yi, Amanda Zamuner, and Sandra Zappa-Hollman.

Darío Luis Banegas and Raquel Lothringer

References

- Banfi, C. (2013). The landscape of English language teaching: Roots, routes and ramifications. In L. Renart & D.L. Banegas (Eds.), *Roots & routes in language education: Bi-multi-plurilingualism, interculturality and identity. Selected papers from the 38th FAAPI Conference* (pp. 17 – 34). Buenos Aires: APIBA.
- Braun, E. N., Cheme Arriaga, R., & Monserrat, I.L. (2012). Teacher education in the digital literacy era. In L. Anglada & D.L. Banegas (Eds.), *Views on motivation and autonomy in ELT: Selected Papers from XXXVII FAAPI Conference* (pp. 104 – 108). San Martín de los Andes: APIZALS.

- Liu, J. (2004). Effects of comic strips on L2 learners' reading competence. *TESOL Quarterly*, 38(2), 225 – 243.
- Norton, B. (2003). The motivating power of comic books: Insights from Archie Comic Readers. *The Reading Teacher*, 57(2), 140 – 147.