

○ EDITORIAL

This special issue of *ARAL* marks an extension to a former practice. Previous special issues in the volume have been thematic issues devoted to special topics. The 2007 issue, for instance, focused on language in action and conversation analysis, and was guest-edited by Maurice Nevile and Johanna Rendle-Short. (Prior to 2006, the special issues were known as the “S” Series.)

This issue is devoted to the theme of “English as an international language: Challenges and possibilities”. This theme is current, timely and full of potential. Studies like Graddol’s (2006) *English next* have identified both the dynamic current position of English outside its native-language domains, and have helped to identify tensions, opportunities and major issues in addressing and managing this powerful and possibly unruly vehicle.

The format of the present issue is a merging of the idea of a thematic special issue with a pattern invented, applied and refined by Steven Harnad during his period as editor of the online journal *Psycoloquy* and the CUP paper journal *Behavioral and Brain Sciences* (Harnad, 1990; Harnad, 1991; Sussex, 1994). Concerned at the long delays between submission, publication and response to articles in the academic literature, which could easily run into 3–4 years and more, Harnad developed a strategy to promote a more rapid turnaround and the consequently faster and richer exploitation of original intellectual work. The new sequence was:

- a paper is submitted
- the editor circulates the abstract to selected potential commentators
- the commentators indicate readiness or not, and identify an angle
- the editor sends the full paper
- the commentators respond within 4 weeks
- the author receives the commentaries and writes a response
- the whole package of original paper, commentaries and author’s response are published as a piece of coherent scholarly interaction.

Harnad estimates that this procedure enhances the impact of scholarly work by an order of magnitude. That number is conjectural. But the effectiveness of this strategy can be gauged from the ongoing successes of *Psychology* and the dominant position *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*.

This issue of *ARAL* adapts the Harnad pattern by having the guest editors, Michael Clyne and Farzad Sharifian, prepare a position paper outlining a series of issues. In

consultation with them a list of potential contributors from the international and Australian specialists in this field was formulated, and the abstract of the Clyne-Sharifian position paper was sent to each, together with an invitation to participate. The number and range of the invitees who agreed to participate are a tribute to the guest editors and their position paper. The two guest editors received the submissions, and prepared a response and synthesis. In this issue of *ARAL* we publish the complete package: the Clyne-Sharifian position paper, the seven responses and the final Clyne-Sharifian synthesis.

This format combines the merits of the focus issue with a more interactive format. It brings together a high level of international participation and distinction; and the response + synthesis paper from the guest editors allows a shaping of the papers and interactions in a way which is rich and full of potential.

This special issue of *ARAL* has been delayed by a series of editorial problems brought about by the cancellation of a previously contracted special issue. Michael Clyne and Farzad Sharifian agreed to step in and anchor this special issue. The editor is most grateful to them for their readiness to take on this responsibility at short notice, and for Monash University ePress for collaborating in its production. I regret the delay with the production of this issue. But I believe that the profile of the contributors, the quality of their work, and the way in which Michael Clyne and Farzad Sharifian have pulled it all together, make this a worthy contribution to *ARAL*'s special issues.

Roland Sussex

Editor, *ARAL*

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