

Editorial

This issue of the Journal of Modern Languages features papers highlighting pertinent issues in different language contexts. These include evolving features of local varieties of languages, language use in health communication, language education among a migrant community, acknowledging learners' multilingual resources and understanding the use of GenAI in translation.

Two of the papers in this issue highlight the variability and adaptability of language. The investigation of Malaysian Mandarin tones not only shows how a Mandarin variety has developed in a diasporic and multilingual context but also challenges the notion of a single, monolithic variety of Mandarin in Malaysia. Ren's study shows that tonal variation in Mandarin is related to both the primary language of the Malaysian Chinese speakers (e.g., Cantonese, Hakka and Hokkien) and their geographical location in the country. Malaysian Chinese speakers are also exposed to the national language, Malay, and English in school as well as to the various Malay dialects depending on their location. Her study is an important reminder for researchers to take an approach to language research that moves away from the norms of what is considered the standard or native variety of a language.

While Ren focuses on tones, the study by Wong and Badiane examines the reduplication of the Malay pronoun *kita* across time based on two corpora: Korpus Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka and the Malay Concordance Project Corpus. Although small in terms of occurrences, there was a declining pattern in the use of *kita-kita* from before 1950 and after 1960 coinciding with the socio-political dynamics of a new nation state forged in 1957. The authors claim that there has been a shift in the use of *kita-kita* from emphasizing solidarity among the Malay community and forging a Malay identity during the independence movement. However, from the 1960s, this pronoun barely appears in the Korpus Dewan Bahasa dan Pustaka suggesting that it is confined to a more socio-pragmatic context when the standard form *kita* is somehow not enough to capture the nuances of in-group solidarity.

Away from the Malaysian context, the paper by Mlanga et al. examine the use of hedges by Shona-speaking male nurses in a hospital in Zimbabwe. Based on the Community of Practice framework their study found a diverse use of hedges in the nurses' discourse as they were used

to express different functions such as to express uncertainty and downplay doubt. They also found that the nurses used hedges to soften orders and to maintain a collaborative environment. Their findings suggest that hedges are an important aspect of communication for nurses in the context of healthcare communication, and should thus be considered as part of communication training for healthcare professionals like nurses.

The next three papers are set in diverse educational settings. The first of these three papers highlights the experiences of Chin refugee children in Malaysia attending what are known as Alternative Learning Centres (ALCs). In this paper, Nakamura highlights the tension between preparing the children for anticipated resettlement in a majority English-speaking country and the reality of staying in Malaysia until they are adults. Her study shows that an English-only policy in ALCs can have a negative effect on the learners' classroom participation, identity and emotional well-being as well as to the maintenance and use of their heritage language Chin. Her study also points to the limited resources of the ALCs including for the teaching of Malay. Nakamura, therefore, calls for a more inclusive and supportive multilingual education practices that not only focus on English in preparation for potential resettlement elsewhere but are those which encourage the use of learners' heritage language and teaches the local language.

Like Nakamura's call for a more supportive educational environment, the paper by Siddique et al. also highlights the importance of support systems in higher education programmes. Their study examined how a group of Pakistani postgraduate students perceive and construct their identities as academic writers in English asking them to reflect on their earlier years of education. Similar to Nakamura, their findings suggest that a rigid one-language only policy does not facilitate learning, more specifically in this case to negotiate their identities and agency as second language writers who possess multilingual and multicultural resources.

The third paper set in an educational setting is by Sivakumar and Pillai who looked at the use of the first language, Tamil, by three teachers in English classrooms in Tamil Nadu, two in an English-medium school using the IGCSE syllabus and one in a Tamil-medium government school using a state-based syllabus. Their findings showed a stark contrast in the use of Tamil with no Tamil in the IGCSE classrooms and in the other classroom, Tamil is used only to explain, for example, concepts to the students. All three teachers felt that the use of Tamil would have a debilitating effect on the English of their students. This brings us back to the English-only policy in the classroom (e.g., Nakamura in this issue) but this policy is also related to the different profiles

of the students, e.g. whether they are from bilingual English-Tamil- or Tamil-speaking homes. Thus, even if the students possess the Tamil language in their repertoire, and in a majority Tamil speaking context (Tamil Nadu), this is not made use of as a resource for translanguaging in the English language classroom, which given possible diversity of students' backgrounds may be a wasted opportunity (see Siddique et al. in this issue).

Moving from language education to academic and professional practice, the sixth paper in this issue investigates a widely discussed issue: the use of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI). In this paper, Tsuji et al. compared an English translation of a Japanese academic paper in Japanese by the original author of the latter with translations by ChatGPT, Neural Machine Translation (NMT) and a professional translator. The two raters who evaluated the four translations rated the author's own translation the highest as it captured the essence of the original text whilst the other three produced a more literal translation of the text. In fact, ChatGPT specifically was found to have produced a word-by-word translation of the text which suggests that the fault may lie in the prompt given. This would be an interesting area to pursue to enhance the quality of the translation produced by LLMs considering the increase in the use of GenAI models.

Although the papers in this issue focus on different areas, they underline the increasingly multilingual backgrounds of language users and language development. This calls for more ecological and dynamic approaches to language research, whether we are dealing with language varieties, language education and the use of emerging technologies. On behalf of the Journal of Modern Languages, I look forward to receiving contributions related to these areas, particularly in relation to heritage languages. I encourage authors to visit the journal's website to obtain information about the journal's policies and guidelines for authors.

My deepest appreciation to everyone who contributed to this issue, especially the authors and reviewers, as well as to everyone on the editorial team.

Stefanie Pillai

Editor-in-Chief

stefanie@um.edu.my

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1693-5022>

June 2026