AN INTERVIEW WITH PROFESSOR JOHN FLOWERDEW
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I conducted this interview with John Flowerdew over the month of August 2006 yet it has none of the desultoriness of the long hot summer afternoons during which both the questions and the answers were written. Instead Professor Flowerdew brings to the task of responding the same thoughtful vitality that characterises his work, work carried out on four continents (Europe, America, Africa and Asia) and in many areas of Applied Linguistics. He is perhaps best known for his studies of academic discourse and more particularly the problems of students and scholars studying and working outside B.B. Kachru's "inner circle." He has, therefore, much to contribute to the debate on the globalization of academic discourse, a debate which is central to this monographic issue of our journal.

In our field, he is unusual in that he has devoted much of his attention to spoken rather than written genres. In this respect he can be regarded as something of a pioneer. It is only now when written academic genres seem so thoroughly researched that more and more applied linguists have begun to focus on lectures and conference presentations. The creation of corpora of academic discourse such as MICASE (Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English) and BASE (British Academic Spoken English) testifies to and supports this interest. John Flowerdew was again an innovator in the area of corpus-based studies, as he comments in the interview, and was using concordancing at a time when many had not even heard the word.

Not all of his work has been text-based however. Several of us here in the English Department at ULL share with Professor Flowerdew a focus on the con-

texts of production and reception of academic texts and the people who produce and receive them, a concern which this volume reflects. For us, Flowerdew's work on Cantonese speaking scientists seeking to publish in English has been nothing short of inspirational, sparking off as it has done a replication study with Spanish-speaking academics here at our university.

Professor Flowerdew visited our department in 2004 and gave a series of seminars on researching academic discourse. We have continued our association with him since that time and have now embarked on a collaborative project examining mentoring of non-English speaking background scholars.

SB: Many of us working in the analysis of academic discourse began our professional lives as language teachers. I wonder if you could begin by telling us something about your professional beginnings and what part they played in making this your chosen research area.

JF: Well, I have to go back to the beginning. My undergraduate study was in French and Spanish, although the emphasis was mostly on literature. So I have always been interested in language and discourse analysis, even if we didn't use that term when I was studying literature —we called it "explication de texte." My first real job was as a teacher of French and Spanish in the UK, but I wanted to travel, especially to Latin America, so I took an MEd in TESL. With that in hand I got a job working for the British Council in Maracaibo, Venezuela, teaching English. While there I became interested in more theoretical aspects of English teaching and so I moved on to teach ESP for an oil company in Libya, as ESP was quite the thing back then. From Libya I went to Kuwait. I got there just after John Munby and we used some very sophisticated ESP teaching materials which he had helped to develop using his model, as presented in his book (Munby). After that there was Oman, where again we had a very sophisticated ESP operation. While in Oman I worked on my PhD, which was on pragmatics and syllabus design. My thesis was quite theoretical, but I also did some empirical work, studying lecture discourse – the science lectures our students were attending. I also started to use corpus-based techniques, which was very new then, especially using a p.c. This work gave me my first publications. With a PhD and some publications, I was able to move to my present university in Hong Kong, where I have been involved in teacher education and have done a lot of discourse analysis research. I have been in Hong Kong for over 15 years now and that is where I have done the bulk of my research. So to get back to your question, I guess I sort of morphed from being a classroom language teacher into a much more research-oriented academic. But to do this I think you have to have a lot of curiosity about language and how it is used, which is something I have always had.

SB: Something I'd like to explore with you in a little more depth at this stage is the role of theory for an applied linguist such as yourself. It strikes me that much of your work has solid theoretical underpinnings while being eminently practical. Do you see yourself as adhering to any one theory of language?

JF: As an applied linguist my approach is problem-driven rather than theory-driven. That is to say, I start of with the language related problem I want to investigate and then choose the best theoretical approach. Having said that though, the sort of problems I am interested in investigating all tend be susceptible to the application of more socially oriented theory. I do believe that there are systematic relations between form and function, even if these are very subtle. In terms of theories, I think Hallidayan Systemic Functional Linguistics is very relevant to what I do, and I have done work using that framework. Unlike people working strictly within SFL, however, I think pragmatics theory is also very useful. (In SFL pragmatics and semantics are conflated and I am not so sure about that.) I also work with ethnography, which goes beyond the strictly linguistic. I'm not really into the cognitive aspects of language learning and use. Indeed, even the book that I recently wrote on second language listening (Flowerdew & Miller), with my colleague Lindsay Miller, which you might have expected to emphasise cognition, was based on a model I developed that emphasised social and socio-cognitive dimensions of the listening process. So, the short answer to the question is I guess I am not an adherent to any one single theory of language, but I do have a predilection towards socio-linguistic theory focussing on language in use.

SB: I imagine that your initial interest in listening skills in the academic context grew out of the desire to help your students in Oman. What kinds of difficulties were they experiencing and how did your discourse analysis work contribute to solving these problems?

JF: My initial interest was aroused when, as part of our content-based approach in Oman, I observed the foundation year science lectures. Working on my PhD thesis, I had read a lot on speech act theory and I was struck by the number of definitions in the lectures (it turned out to be on average one in just under every two minutes). Given this high frequency, I thought a systematic description of the form and function of definitions in these lectures could feed in usefully to materials design. So that is what I did, a bit of basic discourse analysis. I say basic, but actually, as well as writing a paper which developed a taxonomy of definition forms and functions which could be applied to materials development, I also wrote a couple of papers which were more theoretical and addressed issues in speech act theory, specifically how so called representative speech acts (Searle), although characterised as presenting basic propositional information, in natural language can also convey attitudinal meaning. This is something that I like to stress about the value of Applied Linguistics: although it may be problem-driven, as I already said, it can also make contributions to linguistic theory in general.

SB: What kinds of attitudinal meanings do definitions convey in the science lecture context? Also I wonder if they somehow parallel Sinclair and Coulthard's framing moves in that they mark transitions in the lectures.

JF: The types of attitudinal meanings, as I remember, are to do with the importance the speaker attaches to the definition. So they might have what I called

a downtoner, such as *just*. For example An X is *just* a thing that you do Y with, or they might have a booster such as *important*. For example, an X is an *important* Y which does Z. These examples are internal to the definition itself, but pragmatic value can also take the form of what I called a preparatory utterance or a confirmatory utterance, either before or after the actual definition respectively. So a speaker might say something like. "Now this is important. An X is a Y which does Z" or they might say, "An X is a Y which does Z. No need to write this down." A propos of this last example, I remember sitting next to a student at the back of the lecture room and observing her note-taking (In Oman the women sat at the back and the men at the front, so the men couldn't look at the women). The lecturer said "Now there's no need to write this down and the student wrote in her notes "No need to write this down." But to get back to the second part of your question, you are right about definitions having a framing function, in some lectures at any rate. I think it has to do with the content. In biology there is a lot of taxonomising. So the lecture could be structured around definitions of the major members of the class being taxonomised. In fact, definitions can be more or less salient. The example I have just given is where they are very salient. In these cases you often get preparatory and confirmatory utterances. For example. "Now I'm going to give you a definition of X" —preparatory— or "So, that is the meaning of X" —confirmatory. At other times, definitions might just be thrown out in passing. This is where you get the use of downtoners like *just*. These definitions are not the main focus of the discourse, but the lecturer needs to be sure that the listeners understand the terminology in order to get the message across clearly. This is probably more frequent with second language listeners than with native speakers. It's a way of oiling the discourse if you like.

SB: Your science lectures study was also corpus-based and as you mentioned this was at a time when not many people were using these techniques. Could you tell us a little more about that?

JF: I started to use corpus techniques in Oman following a short visit from John Sinclair. At that time nothing was known about concordancing software for PCs (although I think Tim Johns, a colleague of Sinclair's, was probably working on it at the time, but we didn't know him or his work) maybe also Chris Tribble. I'm not sure. All we knew about concordancing was that it was used in creating the Cobuild Dictionary. Anyway, we had a technician Dave Poulton –who was very keen on programming and shortly after the Sinclair visit he produced a concordancer for use with PCs. He must have talked to Sinclair and got the basic principles and then worked it out by himself from there. So we were in the lucky position of having this concordancing capacity before just about anyone else. It was immediately clear to me how this could be a very useful tool in ESP course design. If we used it on the corpus of science lectures and readings that we had, we could first of all get lists of the most frequent words the students were coming across using the frequency list function and then find out how these were used by using the concordancer. We could then incorporate these words and their typical usage patterns into the materials we developed. So this is what we did. In addition to work-

ing from form to function, we also found we could work in the other direction, from function to form. So, for example, we realised that spatial relations were very important in our science corpus and so we found out the most frequent patterns expressing these. Then again, description of structure and process was important, so we used the concordancer to identify the patterns to express structure and processes. I was very lucky to be working with a very creative materials writer, James Scott, and he produced what I think are some very good materials.

SB: I'd imagine that the seeds of your interest in signalling nouns were sewn round about that time. I know that a number of my colleagues have found that aspect of your work (see for example Flowerdew, "A Pedagogic") extremely interesting and immediately applicable to their own writing. Has your work on signalling nouns lead to any materials production as your listening work did?

JF: Yes, the reason I started a systematic study of signalling nouns was due to my use of concordancing. These nouns had been studied by people like Gill Francis as a cohesive device operating across clauses. When I started to run concordances on these nouns (I think this was for materials writing purposes) I found that they also functioned within the clause. This is something that had never occurred to me, but when I started to read the concordance lines I immediately became aware that there was a range of in-clause patterns.

Quite a few EAL writers and ELT teachers have told me that signalling nouns are very important for being able to write well, especially in the academic genres. This is related to Halliday and Martin's claim that one of the main barriers to academic literacy, in both L1 and L2 contexts, is the heavy use of nominalization in academic language, of which signalling nouns are an important part.

I don't know of any published material focussing on signalling nouns. In fact, when I surveyed the available commercial materials a couple of years ago, I was unable to find hardly anything at all. The paper that I published in the *Revista Canaria de Estudios Ingleses* tries to give a very clear template of what needs to be covered by any materials writer. Indeed that was the purpose of the piece.

SB: I'd like to explore with you another important strand in your research: your use of ethnography. Did any of your work in Oman have an ethnographic element?

JF: No, I didn't get started on that until shortly after I arrived in Hong Kong. We had a new Department (again) under the leadership of Jack Richards. We decided we wanted to get some research going, so Jack, myself and Martha Pennington circulated some suggested areas we thought research would be fruitful in, asking for colleagues to collaborate. One of the topics I suggested was to study the listening strategies of our first cohort of BATESL students. This would be useful evaluation/ needs analysis of the course, I thought, and might produce something publishable, as all of the work I had ever seen on listening was experimental. Lindsay Miller, who was to become my long time collaborator in this, was interested, so we did a small

scale study to start with, just observing the students in the lectures and interviewing them about their first experience of receiving lectures in English. As this proved successful, we then went on to study expatriate lecturers across the disciplines and later local Chinese lecturers who had to lecture in English (Flowerdew, "English) We really learned how to do ethnography by doing it and reading up on it as we went along. I think this is actually the best way to get into ethnographic approaches.

SB: What about your studies of Cantonese-speaking academics seeking to publish their work in English?

JF: Again, that started with what I perceived to be a problem, or at least a potential problem. During the colonial period Hong Kong only had two universities, it now has eight and a lot of the senior academic staff were expatriates, mainly from the British Commonwealth countries. With the change of sovereignty coming up in 1997, there was a policy to increase the number of universities and expand those already existing and I thought there would probably also be a localisation drive, which would mean that many more Cantonese-speaking academics would be needed. (In actual fact there has been an increase in the numbers of Chinese-speaking academic staff, but, as it turned out, a lot of them came from Mainland China, via academic careers in the United States, but that's another story). These Cantonese L1 academics would need to be able to publish internationally in English. As a result, I put in a grant proposal to study the problems and strategies of those Cantonese L1 academics already working in Hong Kong universities (across the disciplines), with a view to developing awareness of this issue and possible ways to ameliorate the situation.

One of the most interesting aspects of this project for me was its multi-method approach. I conducted a large scale quantitative survey (something I had never done before), did in-depth interviews, used other sorts of qualitative methods, as well as textual analysis. The paper that gets cited most coming out of that project is the single case study I reported on about a young scholar trying to get his work published. That study seems to ring a bell with a lot of people for some reason maybe because of the considerable difficulties it highlights that this person has in writing and getting published in English, in spite of having an English-medium education. Also for the way I situated the study within a theoretical framework based on the notions of discourse community and Lave and Wenger's legitimate peripheral participation. One of the issues in this project is to what extent the problems are L2 problems and to what extent they are problems that scholars from both L1 and L2 backgrounds experience.

Another interesting paper I did was based on interviews with about a dozen *Applied Linguistics* editors. It was very useful to get their perspective on the issue. This was also very useful for me on a professional level, as I got to know these editors personally, a very useful publishing strategy in itself!

SB: I imagine it would be. As I understand it, in our field editors and peer reviewers quite rightly operate a tacit policy of "positive discrimination" towards

scholars on the periphery. Is that what you found in your study and how different is the situation in other disciplines?

JF: I mentioned the interviews I did with the *Applied Linguistics* editors. Most of them said that they considered the content more important than the form and they were not too worried about surface errors such as subject verb concord, article usage etc. Some of them also said that they would tend to give NNES submissions more of a chance in the revise and resubmit process. By this I mean giving them more chances to get a paper up to a satisfactory quality. Some even said that they would put a lot more editorial work into such papers if they thought that particular paper had something important to say. Also, some editors said they were keen to get papers from what you call the periphery, especially if they hadn't published anything from a particular country. They also said that people working in English as a Foreign/Second language contexts were closer to particular types of data and therefore had something special to contribute. One of the problems they found, however, was that these writers often have difficulty in highlighting how what they report is relevant to the broader Applied Linguistics/Language teaching community.

Of course, this is all self report, so you can't rely on it too much, but at least it is interesting in the picture it shows that these editors want to get over. That is to say a positive attitude to contributions from non-native English speakers (NNESs). Regarding the other disciplines, again, the few editors I have talked to tend to downplay the surface features, although some of them complain about what they perceive to be problems with coherence. Here it is very difficult to say if such problems are L2 problems or just general problems that any scholar, especially a beginning one, has. One thing worth point out, however, in all this is that a lot of the editors and reviewers of international journals are themselves NNESs. I don't know of any surveys, but scholarship is becoming more and more international by the day and more and more NNESs are publishing in English. So it is only natural that NNESs will become editors and reviewers. In our own field, the editor of *TESOL Quarterly*, Suresh Canagarajah, is a NNES and so is one of the editors of *Applied Linguistics*, Gabriele Kasper. Of course, this doesn't mean that because they are NNESs themselves, they are necessarily any more sympathetic. (I'm talking in general terms here, not referring to the editors just mentioned.) Indeed one editor told me that he thought NNES reviewers tended to be more demanding in terms of language than native English speakers (NESs). I guess their attitude is, well I managed to get where I am through my own efforts, so why cant these other people. I've found this attitude quite a lot too with university administrators in the English-medium universities I have worked in, who tend to play down the difficulties students have in studying in English. I can't say that I agree with the position though.

SB: In some of our newer postgraduate programmes, for example in Astrophysics, a certain proportion of the teaching is to be done in English. Though the teaching staff don't seem particularly concerned about having to teach in English, presumably because they have long since become accustomed to speaking at

conferences in English, I do wonder what kind of hurdle it will represent to students. Do you think using English as a medium of instruction in an EFL context can prove to be counterproductive?

JF: This seems to be a trend which is developing very rapidly as part of the globalisation/marketization of higher education. I must admit I don't have much experience of those sorts of programmes. My work has been focussed on universities which have always had a policy of English-medium of instruction across the board. They didn't adopt English for the same reasons as those that are introducing it now in Europe for instance. The countries where I have worked belong to what B.B. Kachru calls the outer circle (although on the outer edges of it) i.e. they have a tradition of using English as an internal means of communication (if only a limited one). The contexts to which you refer are part of Kachru's expanding circle, countries where English is only starting to make inroads. I think some research into these new contexts would be very worthwhile.

SB: The notion of the marketization of academic institutions was something I first encountered in the work of Norman Fairclough. Alistair Pennycook, who was once a colleague of yours I believe, is also well known for his work on the cultural politics of English as a global language. You too have done a lot of work in the area of critical discourse analysis. Could we conclude our interview by your telling us a little about that research area?

JF: This is some research that I again started in response to a linguistic problem. The "problem" in fact was a man named Chris Patten, the last British governor of Hong Kong. When he arrived in Hong Kong to oversee the last 5 years of British rule up to 1997 he created a tremendous impression on the people of Hong Kong through his use of rhetoric. He was extremely popular, which was no mean feat given that his job was to hand six and a half million people over to a country controlled by a Communist party, people who had either fled from that regime or were the children of such people. As I listened to Patten more I realised that here we had a classic case of the exertion of language power and manipulation. Effectively what Patten did was to demonise China while at the same time praising Hong Kong and its people. He created a classic case of them and us, positioning himself on the side of "us," the Hong Kong people. In fact one interesting feature of his discourse was his use of us and we, as if he was a bona fide member of the group he was in the process of handing over to "them," the Chinese communists. Although I sound critical, I think Patten was positive for Hong Kong in the long run and for those people who support the development of democratic elections in Hong Kong, something which was promised under the formula of one country two systems. This question of elections is what I have been looking at recently, the debate over the pace of constitutional development. It pits the pro-democracy movement in Hong Kong against the mainland government and its supporters in Hong Kong (including the Hong Kong government). Beijing is basically trying to drag out the process to make it as slow as possible, while the pro-democracy people

are saying Hong Kong is ready for universal suffrage right now. The argumentation strategies are fascinating, if somewhat ridiculous on the part of those who are trying to slow things down. One other aspect of CDA is that it is beginning to develop in mainland China, which most people would find surprising. I recently was invited to a conference on CDA (the critical was actually in brackets) on the mainland along with Ruth Wodak and Paul Chilton. There are a lot of students who are very interested in it. Of course they are very restricted in what topics they can touch, but there is a lot of interest.

SB: I would imagine so. Perhaps we too could pursue some work along "critical" lines in this Department. Thank you.

JF: Thank you.

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