

Editorial

In a speech ‘on the prospects for the European idea’ he gave on 22 February 2013, the German President Joachim Gauck called for English to be seen as the common language of Europe, and especially of the European Union. Here’s what he said:

To date, Europe does not have a single European public space which could be compared to what we regard as a public sphere at national level. First of all we lack a lingua franca. There are 23 official languages in Europe, plus countless other languages and dialects. A German who does not also speak English or French will find it difficult to communicate with someone from Portugal, or from Lithuania or Hungary. It is true to say that young people are growing up with English as the lingua franca. However, I feel that we should not simply let things take their course when it comes to linguistic integration. For more Europe means multilingualism not only for the elites but also for ever larger sections of the population, for ever more people, ultimately for everyone! I am convinced that feeling at home in one’s native language and its magic and being able to speak enough English to get by in all situations and at all ages can exist alongside each other in Europe. (<http://www.bundespraesident.de/SharedDocs/Reden/EN/JoachimGauck/Reden/2013/130222-Europe.html>)

Writing to *The Times* on 28 February, the British Council’s Director of Strategy, John Worne, was quick to try to forestall any suggestion that such an idea supported the notion, sometimes put forward, that English is a ‘killer language’ that grows at the expense of other languages. He asserts this by saying:

English is not a neo-colonial power tool for the UK, but a language which belongs to the world as much as to [the British]. It opens doors and creates

prosperity for people around the world. It does not seek to elbow out mother tongues, but to coexist and continue to evolve alongside other languages.

The place of English in the world, its interaction with other languages and with other cultures, is of course a major theme of *English Today*. Not everyone will agree with John Worne that the influence of worldwide English is entirely benign, though many will. Not everyone whose first language is not English will agree with the German President that it should be recognised as a lingua franca, though he is not of course alone in thinking this. This journal is an ideal place to conduct this fascinating debate.

Several of the articles in this issue of *English Today* speak directly to issues concerning the global reach of English. Leimgruber calls for a rethinking of the concept of individual geographical varieties, and Pablé critiques the notion of variety in his discussion of English in Switzerland. Seilhamer and Hudawi both address thorny issues of cultural identity as they relate to the learning of the international lingua franca that is English, and Ong, Ghesquière and Serwe focus in on the interaction of English and French in Singapore. Matters of English language learning in China are addressed by Rao and by Zou, Feng and Zheng: the former concentrates his attention on the interface between traditional ways of learning and newly-emerging methodologies, and the latter address the very specific matter of grammatical number as dealt with in English-Chinese dictionaries. Schneider’s article treats both issues of language learning and the lingua franca, in a demonstration of the utility of English for Special Purposes. Three reviews, by Hernández-Campoy, Robinson, and Persley, cover respectively resources on historical sociolinguistics, slang and dialect.

The editors