

The old order changes

It has been a privilege and a pleasure – and (one must admit) an occasional pain – to edit *English Today: The International Review of the English Language*. The first issue appeared in January 1985, just over two decades ago, and there have been to date just ten short of a century of issues.

Two more remain in my remit, after which, in January 08, a new *ET* will emerge, and, while it will continue to report on English as a world phenomenon, the approach will be different – and creatively so. In *Comment* in January 1985, I noted, with regard to getting the first issue out:

‘I have developed a fellow feeling for tightrope-walkers and chefs. Certainly, *ET*’s success will depend on keeping one’s balance and getting all the ingredients right.... In this issue my main concern has been to cast our net widely enough – to bring in history, geography, statistics, social issues, literature, lexicography, etymology, usage, linguistics, institutions, technological change, and other languages besides English.’

In *ET*, other languages have always been important: even if it is the most widespread medium the world has ever known, English does not exist in a vacuum, as attested by its mongrel vocabulary. In *ET*1 (Jan 85) we brought in French, Spanish, Latin, Arabic, Tamil, and Chinese, and subsequent issues have routinely registered, and enlarged on, the interplay between English and the planet’s many other systems of speech and writing. To adapt John Donne (1624), ‘No language is an island, entire of it self; every one is a piece of the Continent, a part of the main.’ *ET*’s next avatar will continue to report on that ‘main’.

It is the good fortune of the vast number of native users of English that their language is globally primary, but it is the co-equal good fortune of the vaster number of non-native users that they have, in addition to their own rich lingual heritages, a *vade mecum* that will serve them almost everywhere they go.

Tom McArthur

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