

Editorial

At the close of each calendar year content providers throughout the media engage in the activity of retrospection. The months of December and January are filled with recaps, reminiscences and rankings of various kinds: ‘the best music of the year’, ‘the year’s top news stories’, ‘the best-selling books of the year’, ‘the year in movies’, etc. Each of these selections, collections and countdowns reminds us that the old year is ending and a new one has begun.

For those of us interested in language, the various ‘words of the year’ offer a chance to consider the ways that the English language has changed or developed over the past year. The American Dialect Society (ADS) voted to name *fake news* as the 2017 Word of the Year. Similarly, Oxford University Press named *youthquake* as their Word of the Year for 2017. And there are a number of other interesting and compelling choices for words of the year announced in the past few weeks. The Australia National Dictionary Centre named *Kwaussie* as its choice and the Macquarie Dictionary has chosen *milkshake duck* for 2017. Merriam-Webster’s announced *feminism* as the word looked up in its online dictionary disproportionately more frequently in 2017 than in previous years. Each of these words provides an insight into the various shifts, innovations, developments, news or trends that took place within the previous year.

In a manner of speaking, the selection of these words at the start of a new year shows us something of what English is today, and what recent events have arisen within the past year to attract our prolonged attention. We don’t know that these words will continue to dominate our thoughts about the English language; we don’t even know whether they will continue to be used beyond today, and a quick look at previous words of year suggests that not all of them will be able to sustain such attention. How many members of the American Dialect Society,

for example, would remember the meaning of *to web* or *to newt*, the shared Words of the Year for 1995. Or how often is *Y2K* used since it was chosen as 1999’s word? This is not to say, however, that the choices made in the past are entirely ephemeral. *Not!* (as in ‘just kidding’) is still in use since its selection in 1992 and words like *red state* and *blue state*, selected in 2004, remain in current usage (even if *purple state* is not quite so common). Instead, the point about these selections is that they represent a particular point in time — a point that is intrinsically current and represents the use of the language today.

The current volume of *English Today*, like these endeavours to select an important word from the past year, is an attempt to describe the English language of today, and the articles of this issue do that by focusing on a variety of places: the Maldives, Cameroon, South Korea, Mainland China and the Hong Kong SAR. And the volume also seeks to understand the future of English by examining its past as well as the values introduced to new learners of the language.

This issue also marks the introduction of a new editorial team for the journal, with one member continuing from the previous team. But the work presented in these pages, like the selection of a ‘word of the year’, represents work that has been undertaken for most of the past year by the previous editorial team. The journal’s editorial team is humbled by the accomplishments of the journal under its previous editor, Professor Clive Upton (Leeds) and the members of his capable team who are finishing a term of service — Dr Nicholas Groom (Birmingham) and Mr Jonnie Robinson (British Library) — as well as Dr Justyna Robinson (Sussex), who is continuing to serve as an Associate Editor. We are grateful for the efforts spent to ensure a smooth and effective transfer of leadership.

The editors

The editorial policy of *English Today* is to provide a focus or forum for all sorts of news and opinion from around the world. The points of view of individual writers are as a consequence their own, and do not reflect the opinion of the editorial board. In addition, wherever feasible, *ET* generally leaves unchanged the orthography (normally British or American) and the usage of individual contributors, although the editorial style of the journal itself is that of Cambridge University Press.