Bernarda Leva, Simon Zupan and Nastja Prajnč Kacijan
University of Maribor, Slovenia

English Studies at the Dawn of the 21st Century

In recent years, English Studies has been affected by several global events and developments, with the most notable being the COVID-19 pandemic. Although it has somewhat receded into the past by now, it is worth reminding ourselves that not that long ago, in 2020, the pandemic disrupted the education of 1.6 billion students worldwide, including 220 million tertiary-level students, some of whom were also future language professionals (UNICEF 2021, n.p.). Although many students returned to school within a year, the then World Bank Global Director for Education Jaime Saavedra estimated that "COVID-19 related school closures [were] likely to increase learning poverty to as much as 63%" (UNICEF 2021, n.p.). It need not be highlighted that English was among the disciplines and languages that were affected the most. One testimony to that is a collection of essays with the telling title *The Challenges and Opportunities of Teaching English Worldwide in the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Kılıçkaya, Kic-Drgas, and Nahlen 2022). As the volume demonstrates based on essays by educators from 15 countries on different continents, the pandemic forced teachers to turn their practices upside down and move away from standard routines: they had to modify their teaching and assessment methods; adapt the course content and materials; deal with technical challenges; overcome the digital divide; and find new ways of motivating their students and dealing with student absenteeism, to mention but a few of the challenges they faced. The volume also shows that similar problems were experienced at all levels of education: from pre-university and university institutions to language schools. At the same time, the pandemic proved the resourcefulness of English teachers and students alike (e.g., Moorhouse and Kohnke 2021; Lukas and Yunus 2021; Farkhani, Badiei, and Rostami 2022).

Another prime example of the impact of the pandemic on English Studies is theatre and drama. Following the safety precautions that were put in place, many theatres had to close almost literally overnight and sometimes it took months for them to reopen, and even then they had to operate under restrictions. On Broadway, for example, 31 shows had to close in March 2020 alone, which was unprecedented for an industry that is estimated to support over 96,000 jobs and contribute $14.7 billion to the New York City economy every year (Solomon 2021). If these effects are extrapolated onto the global level, their implications become even clearer. Fortunately, theatre and drama proved their resilience by quickly adapting and finding an alternative venue online. This applied to the theater-makers, who started producing and streaming shows online; the theatregoers, who watched these productions; as well as the playwrights who began thematizing and reflecting on the pandemic in their plays. As observed by Fuchs, "a great deal of creativity has been unleashed under the extraordinarily difficult conditions of lockdown" (2023, 183). The extent of that creativity is yet to be fathomed.

In addition, recent years have witnessed an unprecedented rate of technology development. Although digitalization has been an integral part of the humanities for over two decades, we

have yet to see its full implications for the future of English Studies. What we have in mind is not just the applicative facets of digitalization such as corpus studies, remote teaching, or "digital theatre", whose extensions by now are relatively familiar. Instead, it will be much more intriguing to see where artificial intelligence (AI) will take us. Although AI, too, is not new, most of us have only recently become aware of its applications, the best known of which probably is ChatGPT, which has already had a noticeable impact on English Studies. For those of us who are in academia, it has become customary to ask ourselves questions such as the following: How much of the work generated by our students is based on AI? How does one recognize students' original input? How do we distinguish between the two? Which AI tools are important for us and for the students? How do we incorporate AI in literary studies, in linguistics, in teacher training, or in translation? How do we incorporate AI into teaching, learning, and research? What will be the long-term consequences of AI on language professions in general?

On the other hand, the advent of new technologies does not mean the end of "traditional" English Studies. On the contrary, a random look at the special issues of *Elope* alone in recent years proves that most scholars still explore traditional avenues regarding the English language (e.g., Lipovšek and Ilc 2023; Lauersdorf and Kavalir 2022; Fabijanić and Stopar 2019), literature and culture (e.g., Gadpaille and Mohar 2022; Gadpaille and Blake 2020), language teaching (e.g., Dagarin Fojkar 2019; Hempkin, Kukovec, and Težak 2017) and translation (e.g., Hirci, Pisanski Peterlin, and Zupan 2021). These issues also prove that what typically is *new* are new topics, research methodologies, and tools for examining them, whereas the very core of scholarly interest in English Studies remains relatively stable, to the relief of many.

And this is also the intersection where the present issue of *Elope* is placed: the contributions in it follow perennial themes, addressing them from new perspectives. In the language section, Katja Plemenitaš analyses Slovenia's tourism brand "I Feel Slovenia", focusing on the English website's use of evaluative language. It highlights the term "green" as a value-laden placeholder, integrating various aspects of Slovenia's image into a cohesive concept. In an earlier corpus-based study, the author also examines the use of the term "green" in the context of environmental changes (Stramljič Breznik and Plemenitaš 2023). Aleksandr Gaisov and Igor Rižnar examine Slovenian MSMEs and large companies' mission statements across six industries, revealing conservative, company-focused approaches with less stakeholder emphasis. Despite individual variations, they identify common industry-specific themes using similarity and discourse analysis. Sándor Czeglédi presents Hungarian-American communities' views on federal English officialization, revealing they maintain Hungarian privately but embrace English publicly, opposing Hispanic demands for minority-language accommodations. The section is rounded off by Alexey Tymbay, whose study explains the occasional failure of phonologically trained non-native speakers of English to identify certain accent types: the reason can be found in the listeners' mother tongues' prosodic interference in English prominence perception. The ELT section opens with a paper by Nikola Dobrić, who demonstrates that rating writing involves overall impressions rather than discrete elements, yet preconscious stimuli influence these judgments, combining micro-judgments into a complex score. Tagle et al. analyse Chilean EFL teachers' assessment instruments, revealing a preference for language tests over performance evaluations, emphasizing writing, reading, grammar, and vocabulary. In a paper

about AI in education, Lena Tica and Ivana Krsmanović look at the correlation between English learning motivation and ChatGPT usage, highlighting its practical appeal and mixed user attitudes. The last paper in this section is by Vesna Petrović, who examines LSP teachers' assessment challenges for oral presentations, recommending a unique rating scale to improve evaluation practices.

In the section dedicated to translation and contrastive studies, Katja Dobrić Basaneže analyses metaphorical collocations of "right" and "pravo" in English and Croatian legal contexts, revealing cognitive similarities and cultural differences. Silvana Orel Kos, on the other hand, looks at the subtitling trends in Slovenia amid the growth in global audiovisual content and advances in machine translation, analysing student performance in post-editing machine-translated subtitles. In the first paper of the extensive literature division, Michelle Gadpaille explores 19th-century Protestant attitudes toward deathbed scenes, comparing real and fictional narratives to highlight ritualized reassurance and cultural significance. Andrej Zavrl writes about early modern drama's authorship and collaboration through digital analysis, emphasizing challenges in interpreting textual transmission and attribution reliability. Ifeta Čirić-Fazlija's paper examines how theatre reflects societal contexts, noting the COVID-19 pandemic's impact on new genres and themes in British and American drama, exploring whether authors continue to incorporate pandemic experiences into their works. In an earlier study, Čirić-Fazlija (2022) also addresses the manner in which the US theatre has responded to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In another paper on post-pandemic theatre, Vesna Tripković-Samardžić analyses the reception and impact of nine contemporary Anglophone plays in Montenegro amidst societal challenges, with insights into theatre's role in addressing global themes and local norms. In another paper on drama, Mahasen Badra explores metatheatrical techniques in Brian Friel's *The Loves of Cass McGuire*, highlighting play-within-a-play, expressionism, and self-reflexive elements akin to Brecht and Pirandello. The final paper in the volume is by Martina Kastnerová, who writes about Philip Sidney's European travels (1572–1575), which profoundly influenced his political and literary growth. This paper explores his interactions with Central European scholars, focusing on Johannes Crato von Krafftheim's influence on Sidney's views on irenicism, medicine, and botany.

As editors of this issue, we want to thank the journal editors Dr Smiljana Komar and Dr Mojca Krevel for accommodating the proposal for this special issue; all the contributors for their papers and for bearing with us and the editorial process; and several dozen anonymous reviewers, who also deserve credit for the volume's scholarly merits. Finally, we must thank the *Elope* Technical Editor, Dr Andrej Stopar, whose continuous support and advice that often went beyond the mere technicalities was instrumental in the making of this issue.

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