

Siamese quadruplets

Several threads run together – and at times get tangled up – in this issue:

- First, the question of whether English can, should, or will become – or indeed whether it already *is* – the first language of the European Union. Pieter Loonen, a teacher trainer in the Netherlands, and Ross Smith, a British interpreter working in Spain, address this issue in two panoramic articles: the first historical, the second concerned with tendencies and policies that are in their way every bit as crucial as European Monetary Union.

- Second, the *de facto* success (if that is the word) of English as the lingua franca of international commerce, a state of affairs that embraces everything from the smooth and glossy 'Business English' course materials currently being turned out by ELT publishers to the haphazard – and at times desperate – business of doing deals in a tongue that isn't quite safe for either side. Irreverent and unrelenting, Barry Newman of *The Wall Street Journal* describes what really goes on when Japanese and Czechs have production lines to maintain and Danes and Egyptians do deals – without an Anglophone in earshot.

- Third, the plethora of lexicographical material now available for 'advanced foreign learners', particularly the four similar-but-different learners' dictionaries displayed as Siamese quadruplets on our cover. Three new editions of already existing works (Oxford, Longman, and Collins) came out last year, along with a newcomer on the block (Cambridge). Robert Allen in Scotland as a lexicographer and Paul Pauwels in Belgium as a teacher trainer examine them in turn and in detail, each from his special perspective. Such a distinctive tradition – which began in the 1930s in Japan, when Hornby, Gatenby and Wakefield worked on what years later became *The Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary* – deserves careful assessment, especially because the stakes are so high and the competition so fierce in this particular global business.

So far, however, the lexical competition has been intranational, British publishers having always had the field to themselves. At some stage, however, the sleeping American giants must surely wake up and seek their share of an apparently insatiable market. There's no business like English business.

Tom McArthur

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