

Scholarly Collaboration, Teacher Authenticity, and Ecolinguistics: Walking the Talk

Prof. George Jacobs, Universiti Malaya, and Chenghao Zhu, Universiti Malaya

One of our featured sessions at the 2023 Korea TESOL International Conference will be by co-presenters, George M. Jacobs and Chenghao Zhu. They will not only be talking about collaboration; they will be practicing it – as they do in much of their research activities. Their featured session will be coming to us virtually from Singapore and Malaysia, where they are based. They will also be presenting a second session with three additional co-presenters, demonstrating the effectiveness of scholarly collaboration. The following is our interview with Prof. Jacobs and Chenghao Zhu. — Ed.

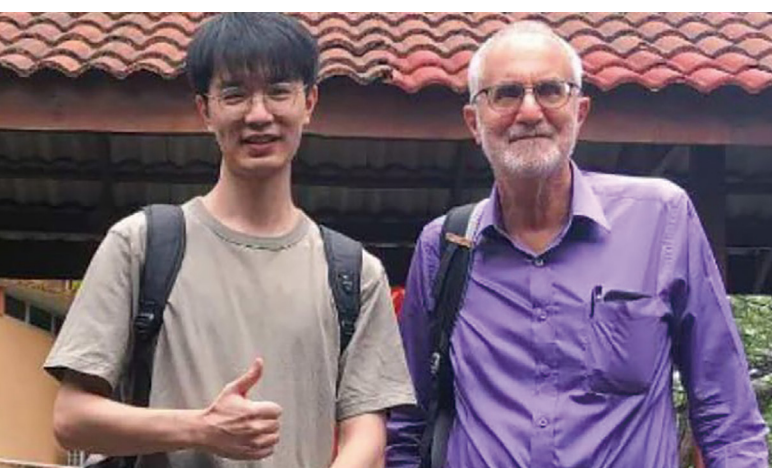
KOTESOL: Thank you, Prof. Jacobs and Chenghao Zhu, for agreeing to do this interview for *The English Connection*, and thank you for agreeing to speak at the upcoming KOTESOL International Conference. To begin with, Prof. Jacobs, could you give our readers a little background information on yourself?

Prof. Jacobs: Hi! Please call me “George.” I was born (in 1952) and raised in the U.S., but since 1993, I’ve been in Singapore.

the Sustainable Development Goals,” published in the *Journal of World Languages*. And perhaps more importantly (at least to me), it was in that collaboration that we found that we were compatible as to topics of interest and work style, that is, we’re both nerds. Now, we are like family (also with many other family members, like Qingli and Dr. Roe, who will also join our second session). And I’m more than happy to see the family getting bigger and bigger in the future.

KOTESOL: The title of your featured session at our international conference is “Collaboration Among Educators: Multiple Authorship in Language Education Articles.” Would you give us a brief overview, George, of what we can expect from this session?

Prof. Jacobs: We noticed a trend toward multiple authorship in academia, especially in the physical sciences. There’s even something called “hyperauthorship” with 100s of authors for one publication. We both prefer having co-authors, so we were curious about multiple authorship in language education. Fortunately, Chenghao has skills in bibliometrics. That made doing the study relatively easy. The session will report our study and look at some of the advantages and disadvantages of multiple authorship.



▲ Chenghao Zhu (left) and Professor George Jacobs.

I also taught in the U.S., Central America, China, and Thailand. These days, I teach English and education, along with doing a lot of volunteer work.

KOTESOL: And Mr. Zhu, would you also give us some background information on yourself?

Chenghao Zhu: Hello! I’m Chenghao Zhu, please call me “Chenghao.” It’s my great honor and pleasure to be interviewed by *The English Connection* and to co-present with Prof. Jacobs at the 2023 Korea TESOL International Conference. Now, I’m a doctoral researcher at Universiti Malaya, Malaysia. In recent years, I’ve been fortunate to work with Prof. Jacobs and have joined many exciting projects about multiple authorship, teacher authenticity, and ecolinguistics.

KOTESOL: The two of you will be co-presenters for your featured session at the conference. How did the two of you come to work together?

Chenghao Zhu: Prof. Jacobs frequently collaborates with Dr. Meng Huat Chau of Universiti Malaya in Kuala Lumpur, and Dr. Chau is my dissertation supervisor. It was in 2020 that Dr. Chau introduced us. What the two of them were going to research at that time attracted me a lot. They very kindly invited me to join their research team, so I had the great opportunity to work together with them. That work was “Ecolinguistics for and Beyond

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KOTESOL: And you will also be doing a second session for us entitled “Walking the Talk and Walking with Students Together: Teacher Authenticity.” What will this session focus on, Chenghao?

Chenghao Zhu: The idea originally came from Yoshi Grote, who wrote a chapter about teacher authenticity in a book called *Becoming Community-Engaged Educators*. She talked about how the teachers who most influenced her in primary and secondary school were those who really “walked their talk.” When she started teaching ESL in Japan, she didn’t share about her sexual orientation. Her chapter discusses why she decided to be an authentic teacher as to that area of her life and what happened when she did. Prof. Jacobs co-edited the book with Yoshi’s chapter, and with Dr. Willy Renandya of Nanyang Technological University in Singapore and Prof. Adelina Binti Asmawi, also of Universiti Malaya, they decided to do a book on teacher authenticity. Prof. Adelina was dean of the Department of Language and Literacy Education at Universiti Malaya where my close friend, Qingli Guo, is doing her doctorate. Soon, Qingli and I were both writing chapters for the teacher authenticity book, and Qingli also became an editor of the book. This session will share

stories from the free online book that has a publication date of February 2023.

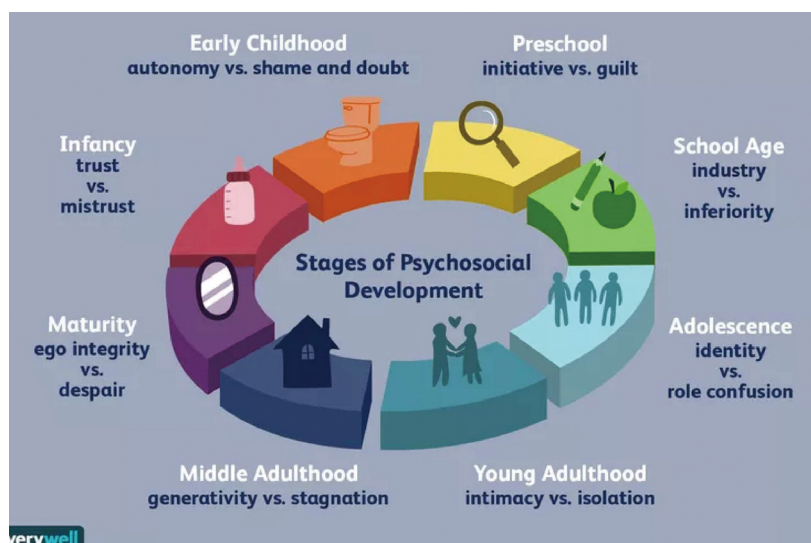
KOTESOL: In addition to the work already mentioned, I hear that the two of you are also collaborating on additional research in the area of ecolinguistics. Could you tell us what that research entails?

Chenghao Zhu: Everyone knows that humanity is in big trouble due to climate change. Ecolinguistics looks at the intersection of language and ecology. How do the words and images we use impact how we interact with the rest of nature and other humans? It's not a pretty picture. Fortunately, a lot of work has been done recently to help us understand better the messages that texts send. (The website of the International Ecolinguistics Association is a great place to learn about that.) Our research involves applying ecolinguistics' concepts to, among other texts, animated children's films: *The Sea Beast*, *The Lorax*, and *Back to the Outback*. (By the way, all are on Netflix.)

KOTESOL: George, you once mentioned to me that you have been influenced by Erik Erikson's eight stages of human life, especially on one of those stages. Could you expand on that for our readers?

Prof. Jacobs: Many years ago, when I first saw Erikson's eight stages, it made sense to me, and now that, at age 70, I've experienced all eight, the stages make even more sense. In particular, I feel the pull of Stage 7, generativity vs stagnation. I feel that I have a lot to share that others have shared with me, and collaboration helps me share it.

Figure 1. Erikson's Eight Psychosocial Stages of Development.



KOTESOL: You have also done numerous studies on cooperative learning in recent years. Some authors make a distinction between cooperative learning and collaboration as language learning approaches. Do you view them as distinct?

Prof. Jacobs: I'm in a minority, but to me cooperative learning and collaborative learning are minor variations on the same theme. I discuss this in my 2015 article *Collaborative Learning or Cooperative Learning? The Name Is Not Important; Flexibility Is*.

KOTESOL: You are also doing a great deal of writing in environmental education, including animal welfare and vegetarianism. How did you become so involved in this area, and are you actively involved in ways other than writing?

Prof. Jacobs: Back in the 1970s, I read a book called *Diet for a Small Planet*, which explained that meat eating wastes a lot

of food, and that if humans ate plants directly instead of first feeding the plants to animals to get meat, we'd have more food for the hundreds of millions of people without enough food. Based on that book, I decided to go vegetarian and later vegan. Then, I became active in promoting plant-based diets. The more I learned, the more I saw how meat connects to so many other issues, including environment, animal welfare, economic justice, and gender equality.

KOTESOL: Chenghao, do you see your areas of research continuing in areas similar to those of Prof. Jacobs', or do you have other areas that you also wish to delve more deeply into?

Chenghao Zhu: Yes, I think my research will still have a large amount in common with Prof. Jacobs'. As mentioned earlier, we are compatible as to topics of interest. Those topics that attract Prof. Jacobs may also attract me, and those topics that attract me may also attract Prof. Jacobs. Of course, some of my research interests may differ from those of Prof. Jacobs, for example, I'm also working on a learner corpus study about how bilingual students report and perform emotions. The good thing is that Dr. Chau may share the same interests on learner corpus research with me, and he is also on our research team. Prof. Jacobs, Dr. Roe, and Qingli can also give me some suggestions as a reader. I think it also shows how a research team supports one another to move forward together.

KOTESOL: What areas do the two of you see your research, your interests, and your activities moving into in the next, say, three to five years?

Prof. Jacobs: So many possibilities. It's a great big wonderful world. But maybe it's better to go deeper into the topics we have already explored.

Chenghao Zhu: Yes, I agree.

KOTESOL: This interview has only been able to touch on a morsel of the depth and breadth of your work and your activities. Before we conclude this interview, what else would you like to convey to our readers?

Prof. Jacobs & Chenghao Zhu: We want to thank readers for reading this far. Our final message is that teacher organizations are great. We hope that you will continue to support KOTESOL and other such organizations. We look forward to seeing you virtually at our presentations, and we warmly welcome you to stay in touch moving forward.

KOTESOL: And I am sure that many of us look forward to seeing your presentations at the 2023 Korea TESOL International Conference. Thank you both.

Interviewed by David Shaffer.

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