I was initially told by a few sceptics that I would never be granted a scholarship for a Master degree which did not have a scientific or economic leaning of some sort. 'It's not engineering or commerce related,' they scoffed, 'don't put you hopes up too high I proved them wrong. The fact that I was awarded a TESS scholarship shows that the adjudication board values the teaching profession and does have at heart teachers who wish to undertake scholarly research and apply it pedagogically in the classroom trenches.

Focus of my research

Determining the Prosodic Polarity of Words beyond a reasonable doubt: using corpus tools to foster a semantic prosody awareness

The numerous scholarly advocations of the importance of transferring semantic prosodic information to learners, without which, it is argued, learners cannot lay claim to holistic word knowledge, have yet to percolate into actual classroom practice and classroom practitioner mentality. This dissertation focuses on whether the cultivation of a semantic prosody (SP) awareness in secondary school learners should be left to the teachers' intuitive antennae or else fostered through a more exploratory and inductive Data-driven learning methodology (DDL). Both methods come with their fair share of advocates and opponents. Such a study is important as it heeds the copious exhortations in the literature for more studies to focus on the L2 pedagogical applications of classroom concordancing whilst addressing the scant academic attention paid so far as to how SP is best nurtured in the classroom. The study also seeks to validate the diatribes levelled at 'intuition' which is overwhelmingly portrayed as unreliable. To meet the research aims, the research approach adopted includes an extensive study of relevant literature coupled with the implementation of empirical research. The latter was carried out through a Teacher Diagnostic task on SP awareness, the development of pedagogically-filtered DDL worksheets and an attitudinal post-lesson learner feedback survey. A strong case is made for the coinage of the term 'prosodic competence' to establish itself as part of quotidian classroom parlance and hence be on a par with the other well-established competences (collocational competence, communicative competence, grammatical competence etc.) often mentioned in teachers' books. Furthermore, the researcher argues that although DLL is not the pedagogical manna it is often depicted as on paper, it nonetheless deserves to be another arrow in the teacher's methodologically eclectic quiver. This dissertation recommends that further studies explore SP in the burgeoning field of creative idiomaticity. Further research should also aim to inject a new lease of life into the concept of SP through the study of novel items with prosodic potential to complement and supplement the existing canon of items for which attested prosodies exist.

Donovan Gatt

Master of Arts in Applied Linguistics and TESOL