

Newsletter 01/26

ELTA-Rhine



Happy New Year



January 2026

From the Editor...



Dear members,

Wherever you spent your Christmas—whether down south or in the northern hemisphere—we hope you celebrated in ways that brought comfort, joy, and cosiness with your loved ones. May this year have already begun on a good note, whatever that may mean for you.

In many parts of Germany, winter has arrived in full force. As I write this, looking out of my window, everything is covered in white. The cold still invites us to tuck ourselves in, reach for another hot cup of tea, and finally return to that lovely book postponed so many times in the past months.

For me, January is a time to move gently: a time to tie up loose ends left behind during the festive period and to reflect on the year ahead. According to Chinese astrology, it is the Year of the Fire Horse—so hold your horses; it's going to be a galloping year.

We hope you'll find some time to enjoy this newsletter, which was originally planned for Christmas but unfortunately fell off Santa's sleigh. We now take this opportunity to wish you a wonderful year ahead. May you be protected, healthy, prosperous, and successful in all your new endeavours and projects. May your teaching continue to inspire both you and your learners, and may you find community and goodwill within our ELTA Rhine association.

On behalf of the newsletter Team, here's wishing you all a very Happy new Year!

Warmly,

Johanna





Dear members,

New Year greetings to you all!

I hope you all enjoyed a few days of well-deserved rest over Christmas and are feeling recharged with new energy for 2026.

Looking back, it was a productive and lively 2025 for ELTA-Rhine. We hosted five online events, held an in-person AGM, ran book clubs and Business Builder meetings, and even launched our very first HE Hangout. That's just a snapshot of what's been happening in our supportive community. What's been especially encouraging is the level of engagement, openness and generosity you bring to these events. ELTA-Rhine really is shaped by its members.

And the momentum isn't slowing down. The committee already has plenty of ideas in the pipeline for 2026, and we're excited to build an even more interesting, supportive and fun programme for the year ahead.

A big thank you goes to Johanna and the newsletter team, as well as everyone who has contributed to this issue. Your time, energy and ideas make a real difference.

Wishing you all a calm, productive, and enjoyable start to 2026.

Jane

Wintery white Christmas or Summer sizzle?



“Christmas in New Zealand means being on the farm, fixing fences, chopping trees up for winter firewood and taking a horde of kids on the back of the quad to pick up pine cones for kindling. It means sleeping in bunkrooms, in tents, caravans and even under the table as the farmhouse just has to expand to fit family and friends.



Shortly before the 24th we would gather everyone and head on up the hill for a serious group discussion about which of the 60,000 trees was the best. Whoever grabbed the chainsaw often ended up perched on the side of a steep slope, to extract the desired tree. But, if you look at a tree from above it seems shorter than it is. Inevitably the tree often needed reducing which was done in the middle of the lounge with the chainsaw, before becoming the most lovingly decorated object and piled high with mountains of presents.

Christmas day means walking down to the beach, getting the boats and water skis out whilst applying factor 50 suntan cream.



Actually, the only disadvantage to a summer Christmas is that the candles and lights are not magic until about 10 at night.”

Wintery white Christmas or summer sizzle?

Christmas in Australia is hot - I knew this, having spent 5 Christmases living in Perth as a child when I sang the alternative lyrics to 'Jingle Bells', which involved dashing through the sand in bathers and thongs and rejoicing in the sun. We had Christmas lunch outside, but in the shade, and went to the pageant earlier in the month and stood there in the hot evening air in our t-shirts and shorts.

And yet, I clearly forgot all of this when I returned as an adult having spent the intervening Christmases in Ireland, France and Spain. I'd arrived with my husband in January that year and by the time Christmas rolled around we had our own place and his parents were joining us for the holidays. I asserted that I would make a semi-traditional Christmas dinner (as I knew it) for them. It was about 35 degrees that day, more with the oven on full blast in our small, open-plan apartment. Several hours' cooking and two types of potatoes with chicken (forget the turkey), ham, peas, stuffing and gravy later, we all ate too much and proceeded to sweat even further for the remainder of the day. When I eventually rolled off the couch and outside for a walk, in the heat, don't forget, I swore an end to 'traditional Christmas dinner'.

I think we had shellfish and salad the following year."



Wintry white Christmas or summer sizzle?

Weather? What weather?

Nothing worse than leaving the house on Christmas Day. Or Boxing Day. Rain, snow or shine, home is best. The only place I need to go is back to the 70's. The delicious aroma of a turkey roast, lights blinking on the tree, the sound of 'The Jacksons' singing '*Santa Claus is Coming to Town*', the sweet, sickly taste of a bright yellow snowball drink decorated with a fire-engine red cherry and the excitement of pulling a Christmas cracker. Replete with a traditional meal and all the trimmings, followed by a flaming Christmas pudding with mince pies and cream – taking a short break before the turkey sandwiches – no-one can move. I dig the board games out of the cupboard: Monopoly, Mouse Trap, Cluedo, Scrabble, Battleships. Captive participants. No way to escape. I keep them motivated with Quality Street chocolates. At least until its time to watch Eric and Ernie. Christmas is not weather. Christmas is a collection of time-honoured customs.



Authors: Tracey Salahović Victoria Sheppard, Sandra Ling

Holiday bliss down under...

We left our home in Dormagan at 10 o'clock on Sunday morning and arrived in Adelaide at 22:00 on Monday night. This was a total travel time of about 26 hours; a new speed record for our trips to Australia.

We had an equally speedy trip through immigration and customs; something that is always tricky in Australia. You are given a card on the plane with lots of boxes to tick. The first sentence you read is that if you are in doubt about any of the yes/no questions, answer "yes."

They then ask if you are taking any illegal substance into Australia including unacceptable amounts of alcohol or tobacco, illegal narcotics, weapons, oodles of cash, medicine, food stuff of any kind especially meat, fruit or vegetables all of which are strictly forbidden.

We had a whole suitcase of chocolates and sweets of the most temptingly delicious kind and enough of our prescribed medicine to supply a hospital in Wagga Wagga. As medicine was on the list we answered the question with a resounding and visible "yes."



Our tip for travelers to Australia. If you answer that you have nothing of any illegal nature in your suitcases, you will probably be searched. Previous experience has taught us that it is better to say: yes! And so it was. After we explained we had lots of prescription medicines the customs officer assured us: "That's all right," and pointed us in the direction of the exit.

The next day our daughter took us on a walk on a nearby 28 km beautiful beach stretching around Adelaide. The sunshine really does make everything attractive - even a shopping centre. I was expecting one of the giant fortress-like structures that you can see in Melbourne. Instead it is a long, winding, open air conglomeration of delightful little shops that invite you to go in and spend all your hard-earned cash.

Yesterday we spent time in Morialta National Park on the edge of Adelaide. For someone used to the Lush green of Ireland and Germany the park looked somehow other worldly. All the trees and bushes looked thirsty and the ground itself was dry as a bone. Most of the trees were giant eucalyptus, which is the favourite of the park's most popular animal: the Koala. We had hoped to spot koalas in the wild and, sure enough, we did - all five.

Once again best wishes from Down Under to all of you in the cold North. Although, it is not so terribly warm here either. At the moment, it is a fairly chilly, early evening 20° C here.

Author: Lorcan Flynn

Reflections on the 38th BESIG conference

Business unusual - Athens 2025



Some people say they mainly go to the IATEFL BESIG Conference in November because it makes a nice winter break which is tax deductible. And that might certainly be one factor to consider as long as it is in a nice warm place like Athens.

This year's motto was "Business Unusual", which could not be more fitting as, whatever we do as Business English teachers and trainers, it is certainly unusual.

It is unusual because of specific or even unique requests our clients and learners may have regarding workplace vocabulary or typical situations they are facing; it is unusual regarding the people we are teaching who range from teenagers (yes, we had a presentation on that) and learners in higher education to executives and specialists; it is unusual regarding the methods and approaches that we choose (for example, when teaching pronunciation), and it is unusual because of our own changing roles in this teaching world (for example, moving into coaching or consulting)

Over the three days, we explored how we can rethink Business English for a changing world.

ELTA-Rhine contributed excellent sessions: **Jane Carvell** demonstrated how to do sketchnoting - definitely an unusual method - which was very engaging as learners activate different parts of their brain to improve their learning and memorisation of new words. Sketchnoting can also help when trying to communicate ideas more effectively and to structure and streamline processes. **Andy Vogt-Nas** looked into how we can use icebreakers to foster communication, moving away from language perfection to a focus on active and meaningful interaction. As our panellists Rachel Paling put it: "When you stop trying to be perfect, you can start being good."

Katrin Lichterfeld addressed the question "Who do you want to be?" She (and others) argued that our roles today are manifold and involve a lot more than teaching "the language". We need to do classroom, technological and emotional management. We need to stop worrying and develop strategies to achieve our own resilience and wellbeing. **Laura Edwards** also discussed our role, looking in particular at the specific situation freelancers are in, and the challenges they are facing, such as "professional ghosts". And in my own session, I encouraged teachers to think about their future skill set. We did a risk analysis (and believe me, there is more coming up than just GenAI) and a needs assessment to discuss how we can upskill ourselves and secure a place in the teaching world of tomorrow.

My takeaway from the conference can be summarised in one quote by Carl Rogers: "*The only person who is educated is the one who has learned and is able to change.*" which **Virginia López Grisolí**a used in her opening plenary.

Here are five key observations that I would like to share with you:

1. “*We don’t need another hero*”. Teachers no longer need to know it all nor to be almighty. We accompany our learners in their journey to find solutions that really work for them. We need to facilitate co-creation in the classroom and to explore our own network of learning.
2. We can take a step back and look at the way GenAI tools can be adapted. Teachers need a framework to be able to use GenAI tools and to teach their use. The closing panel discussion talked about how publishers will also need to offer adaptable solutions.
3. Change has to be intentional, not forced from the outside. **Rachel Paling**, talked about how learning is most lasting when it is self-initiated and involves the entire person, i.e. feelings as well as intellect. We need to create a safe space to learn. The GROWth mindset was one buzzword as were the 3 Cs that **Ridha Mejri** gave us: Change. Choice. Chance.
4. Unusual tools will survive and thrive if they fit the context. There were a range of teaching methods. Using your body to remember in a playful way, helping learners build a positive memory archive and reflecting on their own success. **Amanda Croft’s** session on the status of non-native speakers and native-speakers in conversations, and **Silke Rieger** and **Andreas Hövener’s** session on how to use Lego bricks to stimulate learning were two highlights. I attended great sessions on BELF, on self-marketing and learned a lot about pricing and finding your market niche thanks to **Ami Salk**.
5. If we want to thrive, we need more conferences. Conferences are invaluable in the sessions but outside the sessions, too. Online conferences reach more people, but they are more about input and less about interaction: the conversations do not have the same quality.

To conclude: As mindful educators, we need to bring the joy back to learning as without fun, there will be no learning.

Oh, and our birthday party was fun, too – IATEFL BESIG turned forty years old this year! Here is to the next forty and I hope to see you all at our conference in 2026 – wherever that will be.

Kirsten Wächter is a Business English and Communication Skills trainer and materials developer based in Bochum. She is also the editor of the IATEFL BESIG Conference Selections.





On 29 Nov. Clare Hayward, aka the “Canva Queen”, once again provided a diversity of ideas for language trainers to boldly communicate their brand by using designer language material.

Clare helps teachers and ELT professionals to feel confident about using Canva's interface and tools before diving into complex projects. The use of design shortcuts, templates and efficient workflows means there is no need to reinvent the wheel every time. Users are encouraged to create visuals that reflect their personal or business brand.

In this workshop she shared how various canva apps can greatly simplify your creative materials. One is the “lucky wheel” which is a customizable “spin the wheel” interactive graphic to encourage active participation in a fun way. This is often used for vocabulary revision, a warmer or a way to transition to new topics.

Clare emphasized the importance of consistency in choosing colours, font and layout, and to use templates that fit the mood or theme of the topic. Furthermore, she encouraged users to explore Canva's toolkit as there are loads of options available to assist in creating visuals. e.g. the AI magic toolkit generates prompts or lesson sequencing ideas, alternatively, users can integrate interactive content features with Canva Code to create simple games.

A large portion of the webinar was directed toward creating a website within 30 minutes. Although many participants would prefer not to have Canva mentioned on their domain, this is a very cost effective alternative. Indeed, some event participants have successfully used canva website creation with their business students to collaborate and create a phantom business as a part of their training. Additional co-created business themes can then be uploaded onto their class website. This approach has proved to be a very effective and inspiring collaboration whilst practising language and business skills.

All in all an engaging workshop that certainly encourages dipping into Canva more boldly with its wide range of applications.

Author: Johanna Furgoll



Have your say

What professional development experience — such as a course, workshop, book or simply something you tried in class — has had the greatest impact on you, and why would you recommend it to other English teachers? How do you keep yourself motivated to keep learning and growing as a teacher, and what would you recommend to others who want to stay inspired and continue evolving in their practice?

"For me, the most impactful professional development experience has actually been right here in ELTA-Rhine, specifically our monthly Business Builders meet-ups. The format is simple: we meet on Slack once a month for an hour, start by sharing "What's new and good?" to set a positive tone, and then talk about our progress with the action points we set for ourselves, plus there's the opportunity to ask for help or ideas.

Having a regular space to talk about my work with a supportive group, including the gentle accountability that comes with it, has stopped me from putting things off and helped me make steady progress each month. Speaking for myself, the benefits have been far-reaching: I'm earning more thanks to our conversations about pricing and promoting my offers, I felt encouraged to develop my visual thinking approach (a huge source of professional joy for me), and I gained the confidence to grow my network beyond the ELT bubble.

I highly recommend joining a peer-to-peer coaching group as part of your professional development. Talking with people who "get" your world is incredibly motivating. You're very welcome to join us at Business Builders, or you could even start your own group around a specific interest or challenge." - Jane, ELTA-Rhine



"The greatest professional development experience I've had is connecting with other teachers. For a long time, I felt isolated. However, finding community through my work has made me feel part of something bigger than myself. It has also shown me just how many wonderful, dedicated teachers there are. I've been fortunate to have one colleague in particular who always shares articles, recommends books, and engages me in discussions that challenge my beliefs and force me to justify my decisions. In this way, they have become a kind of mentor. So my biggest recommendation to others is to find someone you admire and soak up as much of their knowledge as possible!" - Ethan, ELTABB

Book Club Review: Remains of the Day

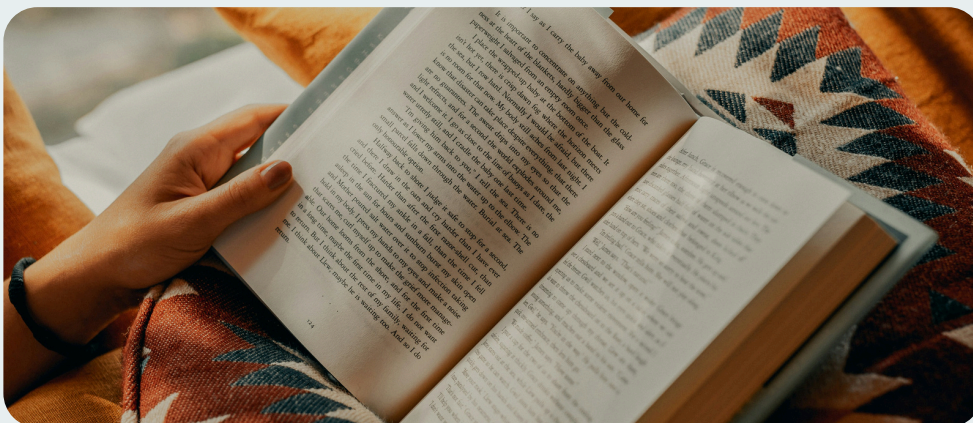
Appropriately, we met at night. 6 avid readers and critics, united by the English language, but unmistakably shaped by our cultural backgrounds which spread over at least 3 continents. If we'd been in a negotiation, we would have found some common ground: we agreed that *Remains of the Day* is a book, published in the 90's. Interestingly it wasn't. It was published in 1989 and released as a film in 1993/94. But let's not pick nits. I believe we shared an admiration for Anthony Hopkins who played the main protagonist, Stevens, the butler, who undertakes a journey both into his past and through England. And, those of us who had seen the film concurred that we had read the book with his powerful screen presence in mind – his regal bearing, stately movements, and minimal yet emotionally communicative facial expressions. Formal and refined.

And then we began to differ.

Was it a book about the life of a butler in the early 20th century? Some said yes, others said not really; it was more of a literary and metaphorical journey. Was it quintessentially British? Some said yes, others said not really; it was a stereotype of repressed English behaviour. Is living in a bubble more of a shortcoming of the upper class than the rest of us? Some said yes, others said not really; we all live in bubbles, myopic and privileged in different ways. Was it a book which argues for less duty and more self-fulfilment? Some said yes, others said not really; the book made no recommendation, but encouraged us to think about the balance of these things both in our lives and those of our forebears.

We were interested in Kazuo Ishiguro. Born in Japan, he moved to England when he was 5. How did he manage to write about the English class system so accurately? We wondered whether there was any link to social conditioning in Japanese culture and found possible parallels with the concepts of duty and honour. The construct of an older person taking a walk down memory lane is well known; this interpretation was long-winded for some, but led all of us to ruminate on allegiance, obligation, and self-denial. And, comfortable in our own bubble, we tended to think that there should be a bit more of it nowadays. Stevens, a hero for our times?

Author: Sandra Ling



Save The Date

Workshop - Practical AI for Language Teachers with Mariana A Ramirez

Live in Düsseldorf

Saturday 24 January 2026, 2pm

Bürgerhaus Bilk

Bachstraße 145, 40217 Düsseldorf

Book Club

The English Patient

Tuesday 27th January 2026, 7pm until 8.30. Contact the Book Club on Slack

Real work, Real words: Diaries in Business English with Lucy Tilney

Wednesday 11th March 2026, 7:30pm till 9

Online.

Full details and registration link will be sent out in the New Year.

ELTA-Rhine AGM

25th April 2026, venue to be confirmed.



Wishing you all....



2026