

PRESENTATION

A New School-Wide Publication

It is a pleasure to introduce this peer-reviewed online serial, published by the School of Languages and European Studies. As announced in the initial Call for Papers, its contributions reflect the School's main research areas: academic literacy; discourse and sociolinguistics; phonetics and phonology; second language skills and processing; Italian studies; German studies; and French studies.

Language Studies Working Papers is a brainchild of the Department of Applied Linguistics and follows an earlier serial (*Reading Working Papers in Linguistics*, 1997-2005) created by the Department of Linguistic Science. It is published once a year during the summer term and invites original submissions from members of staff and postgraduate students, as well as external researchers.

The seven papers in this issue deal with a broad range of topics, with both theoretical and pedagogical insights. The first group, comprising empirical studies, begins with a paper by Liu X. and P. Thompson that illustrates the analytical value of Appraisal Theory. Following a useful description of its conceptual framework, the authors engage in a contrastive account of a Chinese student's academic writing in English/Chinese, centred on the interpersonal values of attitude, engagement and graduation.

The second paper, by N. Schembri, looks at academic writing among Maltese students. Semi-structured interviews with six undergraduates were carried out to account for citation practices in their English dissertations. The results show that citing behaviour is influenced by such factors as language competence and explicit training, with significant pedagogic implications for EAP learners as well as practitioners.

Completing this group is a corpus-based study by W. Rimmer that employs qualitative tools to explore grammatical complexity in undergraduate essays from the International Corpus of Learner English. Its results show the importance of contextual considerations, which are normally overlooked by quantitative approaches, when assessing a text's grammatical complexity across sentences.

The second section contains literature reviews on specific topics with a discussion of related theoretical issues. It opens with a paper by A. Heuboeck that advocates an approach to textuality capable of integrating three conceptual dimensions: coherence, genre analysis and rhetoric. After a critical assessment of key contributions in the field, the author makes a useful distinction between the global level of text organisation (communicative purpose), its building blocks (macro units) and the micro level realised by clauses and sentences.

In the next paper, D. Muñoz discusses the concept of reliability in its relationship to validity for writing-assessment purposes, based on an overview of the statistical and pedagogic significance of each variable. The fact that the former is strongly influenced by the educational context, its purpose and availability of resources, means that validity (though often based on subjective perceptions) is a sounder criterion for assessment.

The intercultural dimension of student speech is examined by P. Cutrone, who looks in particular at how language anxiety may affect oral performance. Drawing on the literature and on his experience of teaching EFL to Japanese undergraduates, the author describes the

main causes of anxiety and suggests ways to minimise their impact, such as improved awareness of cultural codes, greater intimacy in the classroom and a move away from the evaluation paradigm. Though often cited as a contributing factor in this context, such psychological aspects as motivation, personality and self-confidence deserve further empirical investigation.

The last contribution, by N. Toumi, offers a critical outline of the literature on reflexive metadiscourse in academic writing. Based on the two leading models in the field, it offers an analytical framework capable of accounting for metadiscursive variation in English research articles written by native speakers and Tunisian scholars. The author's purpose is to gain insights that will lead to improved EAP teaching materials in Tunisia.

As will be noted from this brief overview of contents, most of the papers are part of ongoing work by the authors and will therefore be followed by further publications. They offer a glimpse into the work carried out by students (and staff) at the School of Languages and European Studies in 2009. We hope they will prove useful to fellow researchers at the University of Reading and beyond. Thanks to all those who contributed, and especially to Dr P.A. Thompson for starting the project, to Dr J.V. Laws for assistance with online editing, and to our referees (whose names will be listed in the 2010 issue) for reviewing submissions at such short notice.

The Editors