PRESENTATION

The Wood Beyond the Trees

It is a great pleasure to introduce this volume, the third in *Language Studies Working Papers* since the series' launch in 2009. As you may have gleaned from the masthead, one of the original co-editors (Lynda O'Brien) has moved on to better things after two years of active service. Thanks, Lynda, for giving so much of your time and energy to this project, both online and on campus; your contribution will be sorely missed. But fortune (sometimes) favours the brave, and a new co-editor (Chiara Ciarlo) was appointed last summer following consultation within the School of Literature and Language. A variationist and Italian dialectologist, Chiara joined the Department of Modern Languages and European Studies at Reading after a PhD in Linguistics at Queen Mary, University of London. She has taken up her editorial position with flair, encouraging authors to submit their work despite the tight deadlines and adjusting the review process accordingly.

The six papers published here were mostly contributed by doctoral students in the School of Literature and Language, whose research ranges from discourse analysis to intercultural communication and language acquisition. As the term 'Working Papers' makes clear, such work usually belongs to ongoing research projects and presents conclusions which (as the authors themselves point out) remain negotiable. Far from being a weakness, however, the opportunity to disseminate one's findings in an 'unpolished' state may generate debate in ways not normally afforded by more institutionalised publications. We are grateful to the authors for making this research available beyond the confines of their departments in a format accessible to anyone interested in the topic.

Part I presents four empirical studies based on textual and/or ethnographic data collected by the investigators. It begins with a paper by Y. Chuenchaichon, which examines how intensive reading affects the written performance of a group of Thai university EFL students. The results show that incorporating intensive reading tasks into paragraph-writing classes improves students' writing skills, particularly as grammatical complexity is concerned. Such findings provide a better understanding of the reading/writing relationship, and highlight the importance of paragraph-writing instruction in EFL university contexts.

The second paper, by L. D'Angelo, presents a preliminary analysis of textual/visual elements in conference posters across three academic disciplines (law, physics and psychology). Using the concept of 'community' to account for how genres are produced, used and responded to by different social-disciplinary groups, this study identifies which interactive and interactional communicative strategies are favoured in poster presentations by each of the disciplines considered. In order to do so, the author adopts an analytical framework based on textual metadiscourse and visual interpretation.

In the third article, A.S. Gonzalez shows that the exploration of students' perceptions of success or failure in foreign language learning can be enriched by an awareness of their cultural traits provided by focus-group data rather than (stereotypical) assumptions. Its conclusions, based on a sample of EFL learners in England and Angola, can help to fine-tune the methodology normally used in Attribution Theory research.

Completing this group is a paper kindly contributed by a guest author (C. Ancarno) on the presentation of public apologies in British and French press uptakes. By analysing explicitly

evaluative metapragmatic comments, this study identifies the conditions that make public apologies successful in two different media cultures and proposes a model of 'public apology felicity conditions' listing the overt conditions of success for public apology speech acts.

The two articles in Part II cover theoretical and methodological issues. P. Cutrone contributes to the long-standing debate on the universality of politeness by looking at the pragmalinguistic phenomenon of backchannelling in L1/L2 Japanese speakers. The author argues that in their use of backchannels Japanese speakers (though sensitive to the hearer's negative face) primarily seek to conform to parameters imposed by the hearer's position in the social hierarchy.

L. Xinghua's contribution provides an overview of developments in contrastive rhetoric research and identifies limitations in three aspects of contrastive textual analysis, namely research focus, methodology and explanatory factors. His conclusion is that contrastive rhetoric needs to expand its focus by including interpersonal factors in writing, to improve its methodology by examining also the L1 output of L2 writers, and to adopt a more context-sensitive approach to the interpretation of findings.

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Barbara Brozyna
Chiara Ciarlo
Pino Cutrone
David Donnarumma
Federico Faloppa
Alice Gruber
Noor Mat Nayan
Daniel Muñoz
Wayne Rimmer
Natalie Schembri

<div align="right">The Editors</div>