

## Editor's Introduction

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This special issue of *Linguistics and the Human Sciences* includes four papers that were presented at the Free Linguistics Conference, 2010. The Free Linguistics Conference (FLC) is an annual conference hosted by the Department of Linguistics at the University of Sydney. One of the core aims of the conference is to create a space where linguists and other researchers with an interest in language can exchange their work in a friendly and engaging environment. As such, the principles of FLC are well aligned with the goals of *Linguistics and the Human Sciences*.

Given space constraints, only four papers have been selected to be published in this special issue of the journal. The four papers selected for publication in this special issue include Angela Cook's 'Why should men break all the rules? A new approach to the analysis of the plural marker men in Mandarin Chinese'; Jing Hao and Sally Humphrey's 'The role of *coupling* in biological experimental reports'; Lihua Liu 'Formalizing power in editorials in *China Daily*: A genre analysis'; and Yanning Yan's 'The relationship between a visual art and its cultural background: A comparative analysis of *Early Spring* and the *Hay Wain*'. These papers reflect a range of different topical interests that are represented at the FLC. A number of other papers that were presented at the conference will also be published in upcoming issues of the journal as they are finalized and accepted for publication.

In her paper, Cook investigates the use of the plural marker *men* to see how, when and why it is used in spoken Modern Standard Chinese. Cook's interest in the plural formation in Chinese stems from the fact that Chinese nouns are transnumeral in nature. This means that a Chinese noun on its own,

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without any additional modifier, can generally be interpreted as singular or plural. Cook notes that the results of her study do not conform to the current descriptions of the functions of 'men' as set out in a number of standard reference works. She argues that a fine-grained quantitative analysis of synchronic data of such phenomena enables linguists to improve the level of detail of the descriptions currently on offer.

Hao and Humphrey's paper sets up a linguistically principled analytical framework to explore evaluation in biological research. They report on a study of the introduction of published research papers in the field of biological sciences, and reveal specifically how 'couplings' – particular combinations of interpersonal and ideational meanings – pattern together in these texts in predictable ways to inform learners in undergraduate biology. Hao and Humphrey, grounding their work in the SLATE project (Mahboob *et al.*, 2010), argue that an understanding of how published texts work in such ways across different disciplines has significant pedagogical applications.

Liu's contribution to this volume presents a detailed genre analysis of editorials published in *China Daily*, the largest English language newspaper in China. Liu notes that because *China Daily* is a state-owned newspaper, it serves to shape public opinion by following state ideology. As such, these editorials are markedly different in purpose from editorials from other parts of the world. Liu points out that the editorials are less argumentative than the ones in the western world. She posits that this functions to project a particular image of China to the outside world, and that this impacts upon the language choices made in the editorials and the staging structure of this genre.

Yan's paper uses Michael O'Toole's (1994, 2005) systemic-functional model for the analysis of visual images to explore the relationship between a particular culture and its visual art. By comparing two landscape paintings – *Early Spring* by Guo Xi (1072) and the *The Hay Wain* by John Constable (1821) – the author shows that semiotic choices made by the artists are different across their Modal (i.e. attention-getting), Compositional (i.e. structuring) and Representational (i.e. reality-conveying) functions. Yan suggests that such semiotic distinctions in visual arts arise from different understandings of values and principles across cultures.

In conclusion, these four papers combine linguistic work that spans the interests of this journal in the human sciences, from work on language description in Chinese grammar, to evaluation in published biology papers, to ideology in the language of media, to the language of visual art across cultures. The issue thus displays the eclectic nature of such ventures as the FLC and *Linguistics and the Human Sciences* as forums that we hope will continue to extend the pathways of linguistic enquiry as the field grows and develops in interesting, multifaceted ways.