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PREFACE

SPECIAL ISSUE: SELECTED PAPERS FROM THE 2011 INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE ON APPLIED LINGUISTICS (APPLINGX 2011)

Guest Editor
Michael Tanangkingsing

Since 2006, the Department of English at National Taipei University of Technology (Taipei Tech) has carried on a tradition of hosting an annual conference—on applied linguistics studies in odd-numbered years and on literary studies in even-numbered years—to promote academic excellence in the humanities field, especially in the context of an engineering-dominated technological university. Over the years, the conference has attracted applied linguists not only from around Taiwan but also from neighbouring Asian countries. The breadth of activities and research carried out by applied linguists is especially evident at the 2011 edition of the conference; the papers presented covered studies on semantics, pragmatics, sociolinguistics, as well as research on language acquisition, foreign language teaching, language for specific purposes, and translation studies.

Considering that this field of study covers so many diverse subfields, it was not an easy task to integrate them all under one unified theme. Nevertheless, this has not deterred us from compiling quality work from the previous edition of the conference. This special issue features five articles. The first two delve into second language learning among undergraduate students discussing learning strategies and intonation instruction. The third and fourth papers look into national policies and utilize critical discourse analysis, respectively, to examine how power and domination are reflected in language use. The final paper is a study

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on the role played by collocation in semantic change by the analysis of a specific construction in Chinese.

It is undoubtedly true that no matter what learners do, they don't achieve the same progress as do children acquiring their first language. Thus to enhance the efficiency of the learning process, researchers on second language learning, one of the most popular topics in applied linguistics, have devoted efforts in looking at "specific actions, behaviours, steps, or techniques that students use to improve their own progress in developing skills in a second or foreign language" (Oxford 1999: 518), which are "any conscious strategies learners use to acquire language and can be anything as mundane as underlining new words in texts to more social strategies in which learners actively seek out speakers of the L1 with whom to 'practice'" (van Patten and Benati 2010: 44). In other words, researchers and language learners alike are constantly searching for the most efficient means of learning a language from a wide range of possible methods. Several nonlanguage factors also figure in language learning, namely, age, aptitude, motivation, attitude, and socio-psychological influences (Gass & Selinker 2008: 395). Previous research studies have looked into these factors, including risk-taking, in which "the outcome of the choice is uncertain, and there is a possibility of failure" (Beebe 1983: 89), introversion and extroversion, which can both lead to success (Gass and Selinker 2008), as well as other individual preferences in terms of their learning experience (Reid 1995, Ehrman 1996, Dornyei 2005, among others). The first two articles inquire into this issue in closer detail.

The first paper—A study on language learning strategies of university students in Hong Kong by Kevin Chi-Him Tam—enables us to catch a glimpse of the relationship between gender, second language proficiency, socioeconomic status and the learning strategies adopted by university students in learning English. Tam provides literature explaining the differences between male and female learners in terms of their language learning strategies, as female learners are found to adopt more learning strategies than male learners. The results also show that Compensation, Cognitive, and Social Strategies are very much correlated to better proficiency in second language learning. Socioeconomic status, highly correlated with the adoption of Social Strategies that leads to more effective learning, is especially regarded as another important factor driving the learning behaviour of students. Finally, Tam offers some recommendations to educators with regard to conducting learning

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strategies training, which must include assessment of learning strategies of students, preparation of suitable materials compatible with the students' learning strategies, actual demonstration of learning strategies in various circumstances, and implementation of evaluation and modification procedures for more effective results.

Learning a language has its main purpose in being able to communicate effectively, and this is where the importance of the listening and speaking aspect lies in the learning process. English being an intonation language, linguistic units are spoken in chunks, which form an intonation contour. Aside from pronunciation drills and exercises, it is important for Chinese learners of English to be familiar with the intonation patterns of the language, which eliminates the situation where the listener is distracted away from hearing the information due to poor intonation on the part of the speaker, and so proper control of intonation increases the chances of being understood for more effective communication. The second paper—A preliminary study of applying shadowing technique to English intonation instruction by Kun-Ting Hsieh, Da-Hui Dong, and Li-Yi Wang—illustrates the application of shadowing technique as a significantly effective means for improving pronunciation. The results are encouraging in that student performance in terms of speech intonation becomes more stable. Shadowing enables the student to be less dependent on short term memory and text reading and to become more aware of the flow in reading English texts. The findings in this study open the door to more research studies to see whether this technique is applicable in teaching reading and speaking to high school and elementary level students.

The next two papers have to do with the relationship between language and power in the Taiwan context as analysed from the perspectives of sociolinguistics and critical discourse analysis. For the past century, Taiwan has struggled in search of its own identity. Colonization by the Japanese and subsequent rule by Mainland Chinese have added to the complexity of its status; both regimes have adopted language policies that have heavily influenced the use of language, a situation that is part of a greater issue going back to as ancient as the Tower of Babel (Spolsky 2004). Implementation of a centralized language policy helps to solidify the status of the rulers, and the Japanese and the mainland Chinese did just that, contributing to the present situation in which the language policy needs to reconsider the nation's assertion of "real independence" (Spolsky 2004: 133). It is in this light

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that the third paper—Mixing and crossing: Marked language choices and uses in Taiwan by Jennifer Wei—examines marked language choices in Taiwan that thrive in both real and virtual worlds. The paper claims that marked or mock language uses and the mixing of languages, which create a space for poking fun and subverting old ideologies, can be accounted for by the language policies that have been in place in Taiwan, as well as their legacies. In the end, Wei suggests that linguists must more closely examine the metaphorical usage of language that challenges the existing norms as this is an emerging phenomenon especially among the young people in Taiwan.

Dominance and power are clearly observed manifest in language through the lens of critical discourse analysis (CDA), which investigates discourse from the perspective of the underprivileged and aims to illustrate social inequalities (Meyer 2001; Gee 2011). Using van Dijk's model (1993), the fourth paper—A critical discourse analysis of Taiwan's national debate on economic ties with China by Pei-Ling Yang—explains the power play behind Taiwan's debate on the Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement (ECFA) with China. She examines the contents of a 142-minute long discourse, in which she observes the language of authority producing a distinct form of discourse representing Us, the administration, from that representing Them, the opposition. Moreover, the language of authority engages in evasive language or “non-communication” (Holly 1989: 22), which is avoiding what is disadvantageous, but at the same time attempts to be diverse in terms of linguistic form, or by the use of different languages. Such an analysis allows us to a further understanding of how a social issue, wherein language is manipulated to “express, signal, constitute, and legitimize” power and domination (Wodak 2001: 2), is being talked about.

The final paper—Collocation and semantic change: Derivation of excessive X-*si* by Liu Hsiu-Ying—aims to trace the grammaticalization pathway of the construction X-*si* in terms of form and especially its ‘excessive’ meaning in historical texts. Liu examined literary works from different eras in Chinese history to observe the use of *si* and its collocations with various predicates. She found that the semantic change from an indication of death to the emergence of an ‘excessive’ meaning was triggered by the application of the *si* phrase in describing psychological states, inasmuch as psychological predicates are relatively abstract, and it is more difficult to explain ‘death’ through psychological

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reasons. From here, *si* collocations with the ‘excessive’ meaning then spread to other predicate types, including action verbs and attributive/physiological predicates.

Lastly, it is our hope that these papers will have contributed to the advancement of applied linguistics studies, especially in the study of language in use within the educational, social, economic, and other contexts; at the same time, we also look forward to more quality research work to be presented in the coming 2013 Applied Linguistics Conference.

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