

Guest Editorial: Introduction to *BALE 2008*

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The papers selected to appear in this volume of *Biolinguistics* were first presented at a conference held at the University of York in July 2008: *Biolinguistics, Acquisition and Language Evolution (BALE 2008)*. *BALE 2008* was a small but successful meeting that happened as a joint effort of the post-graduate research students in the Department of Language and Linguistic Science at the University of York.

BALE 2008 came about in the autumn of 2007, when we, 14 post-graduate students, were granted money from the university to organize a linguistics conference. The research interests and backgrounds of us doctoral students on the committee varied across a number of linguistic sub-disciplines. It soon became apparent, therefore, that finding a topic for the conference could prove problematic. After some debate, we concluded that instead of addressing a subject that a few of the students specialized in, the conference theme should be one that unites different linguistic disciplines. The topic that emerged deals with a question that, in our opinion, is at the core of all linguistic research: *What are the biological underpinnings of language, and what is the interaction between the innate knowledge of linguistic structure with the language input to which we are exposed?*

Thus, a main goal of *BALE 2008* was to be an interdisciplinary meeting, something we think is reflected by the diversity of papers selected for this issue. For the conference, we welcomed research papers that would lead to a wider understanding of the unique language ability of human beings. This meant that we accepted papers that were primarily based in linguistic research but that also tied its findings to other fields like anthropology, evolutionary biology, psychology, genetics, and computational modeling. This way, we hoped to present a conference dealing not only with the nature of our genetic endowment for language, but also the acquisition of language, the neurological and biological underpinnings of language, and the cultural and historical perspectives on evolution of language. We are very grateful to our excellent plenary speakers at *BALE 2008* who showcased this multidisciplinary in their papers: Koji Fujita, Jim Hurford, Simon Kirby, and Juan Uriagereka.

The conference would not have come about without the enthusiastic help from the Department of Language and Linguistic Science at the University of York, and our thanks are directed, in particular, to Marilyn Vihman and George Tsoulas, who helped make *BALE 2008* such a success. Neither would *BALE 2008* have originated without the financial support from the University of York, which we are grateful for. We would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for the initial paper selection for the conference, and Kleantes Grohmann and Cedric



Boeckx for their editorial efforts in publishing the selection of papers here in this special issue of *Biolinguistics*. Finally, our heartfelt thanks go out to the presenters and attendees of *BALE 2008* for making those three days in July 2008 such a memorable conference for us.

On behalf of the other committee members for *BALE 2008*: Suzanne Bardeas, Maryam Gholizadeh, Phil Harrison, Alan Hsieh, Marianna Kaimaki, Koji Kawahara, Kaj Nyman, Jillian Oddie, Daniel Redinger, Rein Ove Sikveland, James Strang, Norman Yeo, and Xinfeng Zhang.

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