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Why did you cite…?

Research Trends Editorial Board

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Why did you cite...?

...So many papers outside your field?

In this issue of Research Trends, we have analyzed the multidisciplinary nature of research and developments. One area that is becoming more multidisciplinary over time is computer science.

A good example is Professor Fionn Murtagh's recent paper, "The structure of narrative: The case of film scripts" in *Pattern Recognition*, cited in *Nature (1)*. Murtagh is from the Computer Science Department at the University of London. His paper is clearly multidisciplinary, citing many papers from linguistics. Murtagh adds: "it also strongly cites media arts and digital humanities, mathematics and statistics."
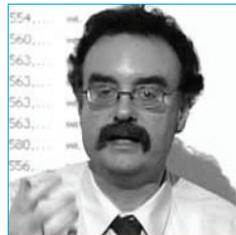
Following a theme

One of the linguistics papers referred to is a paper by Yves Bestgen *(2)*. Murtagh says: "We cited the Bestgen paper due to its content – readying input data for analysis of discourse (in the case of that particular author) and analysis of the particular narrative form provided by a filmscript (in the case of our paper). But I paid no interest whatsoever to whether this paper was categorized as linguistics or otherwise. The way I work is to pursue themes that I think are (very) important, find supporting data, perform extensive evaluation and write all that up.

Fionn Murtagh

"Then, if I am convinced at that point that it is presentable, I start thinking of an appropriate journal. I publish, or have pub-lished, regularly in journals that are categorized as computer science, statistics, mathematics, physics, astronomy, geology, and other areas."

Murtagh goes on to explain that in this instance they chose a computer science journal rather than a linguistics journal because "I always seek the most appropriate journal, irrespective of area. I have published in *Pattern Recognition* before, my first being in 1984, and it is high on my list of 'personal best' journals. I am also mindful of discipline-specific evaluations at national and other levels, which can have career implications. I therefore ensure that I have sufficient publications in any given area when I think this is necessary."

Breaking boundaries

On the topic of multidisciplinarity in general, he says: "I personally have research interests overlapping many fields. My personal aspiration is to always pursue my interests, irrespective of the labels applied to the fields or journals. I would suggest that the core of what computer science is all about is 'computational thinking'. This is applicable to all disciplines and beyond – to humanities, and to governance and management too.

"However, I do admit that career structures in particular mitigate strongly against cross-disciplinarity. In universities you are in a particular discipline and your performance in all aspects, including research, is evaluated in accordance with the discipline you are in. No one ever said that life is easy!"

References:
(1) Merali, Z. (2008) "Here's looking at you, kid", *Nature*, issue 453, p. 708.
(2) Bestgen, Y. (1998) "Segmentation markers as trace and signal of discourse structure", *Journal of Pragmatics*, issue 29, pp. 753–763.