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Exploring the Subject-specific Genres of Liberal Studies in the Reforming Secondary School Curriculum

Presenter: Shiu Kee SHUM

Affiliation: Faculty of Education, the University of Hong Kong

Email: mskshum@hkucc.hku.hk

Abstract: This paper aims at investigating subject-specific genres of a school subject, namely, Liberal Studies (LS) which is an elective subject at the matriculation level (i.e. Secondary 6 & 7) at present, but will evolve to be a compulsory subject in the New Senior Secondary (NSS) Curriculum in Hong Kong starting from September 2009. Based on Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1994) and Genre theory (Martin, 1999), the study will identify the major relevant genres in the subject and their characteristic linguistic features that students are expected to master by analyzing public examination questions and teachers' teaching materials. Furthermore, the study will focus on students' problems in constructing written texts in LS with reference to the genres identified, as well as the general linguistic errors made. The study is part of a series of research on subject-specific genres (Shum, 2006). The findings will have important implications for enhancing secondary students' mastery of the subject, in particular, their competence in expressing concepts and ideas in Chinese. It will also throw light on issues related to teacher training and student high order thinking skills, which are essential components of the current education reform.

Key terms: liberal studies, subject-specific genres, senior secondary, curriculum reform, linguistic features

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