

researching language and language users

INTRODUCTION TO PART TWO:
LANGUAGE IN RESEARCH

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The papers in this section are written by authors who would not call themselves sociolinguists yet language and language use have played important roles in the research and research frameworks of their disciplines. To investigate and celebrate the links between the interests of sociolinguists and specialists from other fields, scholars in departments other than linguistics were invited to participate in the Language and Society Conference held at Palmerston North in 2004. The papers in this section were written by psychologists and communications specialists researching ‘the community’ and ‘communities’ in a manner in which language and language issues arise. Demonstrating that other researchers in other fields are sensitive to language and sociolinguistic issues, these papers remind us of the importance of language in all fields of social enquiry.

Unsurprisingly there is a great deal of overlap in the thinking about language in the fields of social psychology and communications research, and these scholars have utilised methodologies and models that are both familiar and unfamiliar to the researcher working in the sociolinguistic tradition. Like sociolinguists some of the scholars in this e-book look at language usage within particular communities and examine problems and issues in reaching an understanding between cultures in interaction. Another avenue of research is the role language takes in research or research design in other fields. In understanding ‘the social’ in social frameworks of psychology,

language plays an important role, as do the contexts in which participants 'do' things with language.

Pauline Guerin's paper looks at the problems of intercultural communication as experienced by refugees and migrants in New Zealand, and examines particular issues regarding the communication of health and mental health information between parties. With a great deal of experience working with the Somali community of New Zealand, she suggests that one of the results of researching 'alongside' rather than 'into' these communities will be better communication practices between health professional and members of refugee and migrant communities. Acknowledging language issues faced by both the refugee communities as a whole or as individuals, and the special pressures faced by translators for these communities will not only result in better understanding of their needs but also better outcomes in crucial aspects of their lives such as health and mental health care.

A discussion of a literacy research project involving university researchers and a Māori community is presented by Frank Sligo. Here the role of metaphorical language is explored as a means of creating a new research partnership. The metaphor *ngā awa e rua* 'the two rivers' was promoted by the project to promote collaboration in the hope that the two rivers would meet. The paper tracks the success of the metaphor and highlights the evolving relationship between the professional university based researchers and the new researchers members of the Māori community. Sligo sensitively presents some insights into the nature of community based research and the metaphor itself becomes a metaphor for the research journey.

Bernard Guerin's work also examines the role of language in research. As a psychologist researching attitudes and interactions, his interests overlap with the discourse specialist. Bernard Guerin's first paper, 'Sampling community discourses', claims attitudinal surveys on such topics as racism utilise 'attitude' as an unproblematised construct. Taking a discourse orientated approach, he proposes that attitudes are embedded in talk, and

that attention to context is important to fully gauge the attitude of a given individual. Guerin argues that discourse belongs to the community not the individual. Only by examining how racist talk is embedded in individuals' conversations and identifying its functions in given contexts, will we understand a community's attitudes towards such things as race.

The second of Guerin's papers also deals with the contextualisation of research practices. Though perhaps 'preaching to the converted' sociolinguist, his warnings against decontextualising talk collected for analysis suggests that a less careful approach to discourse misses the importance of social relationships among interlocutors. He illustrates this point by examining two devices speakers might use to get information past their listener. The first he labels the bluff game - where the speaker presents a lot of information that would all have to be challenged by the listener should they want to challenge any part of it, and the second conversational consistency, where the speaker carefully maintains information, aware of the monitoring process of the listener.

These papers from P. Guerin, B. Guerin and Sligo provide the sociolinguist with insights into language issues encountered in researching communities from the perspective of other disciplines. The shared concern with language as both an object and instrument of research and the importance placed on contexts - within particular communities and within particular discourses in various fields - should encourage further cross disciplinary engagement.

LANGUAGE AND REFUGEES:
BEYOND MERE CULTURAL MISCOMMUNICATION

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Introduction

New Zealand has been a host country to over 16,000 refugees since 1980 (NZIS, 2004). The majority, if not all, of refugees coming to New Zealand have very little, if any, English-speaking ability. Effective communication is absolutely essential for the successful resettlement of refugees in New Zealand partly because of the nature of refugee migration compared with other migration into New Zealand. Refugees, on arrival in New Zealand, have many needs that need to be addressed, usually immediately, such as physical and mental health issues as well as housing, financial assistance or employment, schooling for both their children and themselves, electricity, and transportation. Successfully negotiating all these issues within a short period on arrival and without English ability is truly admirable for those who are able to achieve it, but it nearly always requires the assistance of good interpreters.

One of the major questions that needs to be addressed in the New Zealand context of interpreting is who *are* interpreters anyway and what *is* their job? Raval (2003) describes a variety of different roles that interpreters can take on. For example, interpreters can be *simple translators* who are direct, neutral and impartial. Interpreters can take on the role of *cultural broker* who gives further information and the cultural context in order to improve understanding for the service provider or professional. Interpreters can also function as an *advocate* for the client, where the interpreting is focused on