

Alastair Pennycook

University of Technology Sydney

Strangely bordered entities: languages, bodies, animals and things

It is not just the borders between countries and cultures, and the resultant co-constructions of language, nation and ethnicity, that we need to address in any attempt to rethink the possibilities of language, but also the borders that have been assumed between humans and other animals, verbal and nonverbal communication, mind and body, the internal and the external, people and things. The era of European thought and empire building not only turned nations and languages into strangely bordered entities (south, north, east and west), but also insisted on a range of oppositional divisions (humans and animals, humans and things, men and women, the mind and the world) that were deemed forever different (in here, over there, up above, down below). As we witness a shift, however, from an era of stable sociolinguistics – with its assumptions about relatively secure languages, dialects, societies, codes and domains – to a more fluid era focused on sociolinguistic practices, several trends that undermine these older certainties are emerging: an understanding of language as an integrated assortment of embodied and embedded resources; a focus on a wide spectrum of semiotic potential, including not just the multimodal but also the multisensorial; an emphasis on communicative processes as they happen in the moment, rather than regularity of structure over time; a view of cognition, agency and language as distributed beyond human actors; and an insistence on the need for ethnographic descriptions of these entangled assemblages. This shifting terrain of sociolinguistics demands a rethinking of time and space and thus also the borders and entities that have been deemed to exist within these configurations. Drawing on recent research on semiotic assemblages, this paper will examine the ways in which things, language, people and places come together in particular momentary constellations.

Rita Kothari

Professor of English, Ashoka University, India

A Multilingual Nation: Translation and Language Dynamics in India

This talk builds upon an engagement with India's multilingualism, a state of translation in which languages criss-cross, building a network of contiguities as well as separateness. What is to speak in multiple tongues, without being aware of their multiplicity? And how does this lack of consciousness, if you may, transact with more self-conscious and ideologically driven usages of Hindi and English? The talk will provide a view of received understanding of India's multilingualism, as well as the challenges to this concept in the process of translation.

Anna De Fina

Georgetown University

Crossing paths: storytelling and storytellers in a mobile world

The study of narratives has occupied for several decades a central position in research about migrants and mobile individuals and groups. Most narrative based research has focused on the construction of identities and reconstruction of experiences, usually by migrants belonging to specific ethnic or national groups. And although the shift in narrative studies from representational to interactional

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approaches has led to greater attention to narrators' local positioning and the co-construction of narrative worlds, the focus of such research is still very much on positionalities and the representation of experiences by members of homogeneous communities. The patterns and composition of new migrant flows often pose challenges to such approaches to storytelling first because migrants who share dramatic experiences of uprooting and separation more often than not do not come from the same country and do not form homogeneous communities in the country of arrival, and second because given the nature of those experiences they are less prone to sharing them with researchers. In this paper I will argue that a practice-oriented and reflexive view of narrative that puts the stress on participants and on processes rather than on stories and events can offer an alternative tool to understand some of the experiences of migrants in our mobile world. At the same time, such approach can help us move the focus from identity building among groups with common denominators, towards meaning making practices stemming from encounters and sustained interactions between mobile and local individuals, thus also allowing for the investigation of shifting identities and chronotopes and of diverse narrative formats. To illustrate this point, I will use data from a project involving the social and linguistic integration of unaccompanied migrant minors in Sicily.

Li Wei

University College London

Linguistic Innovation and Change: A Translanguaging View

In this talk, I revisit some of the key approaches to linguistic innovation and change in contact situations. I set the discussion within the broader context of global-scale migration and the explosion of new communication media. My focus is on the multilingual language user and their motivations to innovate through multilingual and multisemiotic resources. I draw examples from Chinese language users and discuss how they use linguistic innovation as a creative and subversive tool to challenge the ideologies regarding the Chinese language, culture and society. I present a Translanguaging perspective on linguistic innovation and change in language contact. This perspective emphasizes the transformative capacity of dynamic Translanguaging practices of the language user. Methodological implications of this perspective will be explored.

NZ Sociolinguistics Panel

Rawinia Higgins

Victoria University of Wellington

Te Whare o Te Reo Mauriora – Developing a new construct for Māori language revitalisation

In 2016, Te Ture mō Te Reo Māori (Māori Language Act) introduced a new approach to language revitalisation in Aotearoa New Zealand. The earlier Māori Language Act 1989 had declared te reo Māori to be an official language of New Zealand and established key rights to speak, learn and promote the Māori language. However, subsequent reviews of the Māori language sector found that the original legislation and strategies had not gone far enough in reversing language decline. A new Bill was introduced in 2014 but it had major limitations, a wary public response and was stymied by a change of Minister, which altogether prompted another independent review.

The review group (which I chaired) used Language Planning and Policy (LPP) principles to frame its findings. The group's recommendations were largely adopted by the Government and are a strong feature of the 2016 legislation. Using the analogy of a whareniui (traditional meeting house), we highlighted the need to consider both micro and macro language planning principles. We also outlined the roles and responsibilities of Māori and the Crown for language revitalisation, in order to give effect to the Treaty of Waitangi partnership. This distinctive new legislation has changed the policy landscape and, although it is only early days, has challenged both Māori and the Crown in the development of a new 'whareniui'. The journey to construction has been an arduous one but, ultimately, will test this country's commitment to addressing language shift. This presentation will provide an overview of Māori language development in Aotearoa New Zealand and outline how both LPP and mātauranga Māori paradigms have influenced legislation and reset the policy landscape for Māori language revitalisation.

Allan Bell

Auckland University of Technology and University of Hong Kong

Sociolinguistics from the Edge

As a country, Aotearoa/New Zealand is positioned internationally as both periphery and centre. Even in a digital age we remain geographically remote, challenging to reach, and lying beyond the usual northern hemisphere circulations of academic networks and involvements. But regionally, New Zealand functions as a centre for the South Pacific, goal of emigration and ambition for many Pasifika people.

This dynamic holds also for our field, and has affected the history of sociolinguistic research here. The empirical work I will refer to in this paper is particularly micro-linguistic research in New Zealand, especially through variationist or related approaches. The first variationist work in this country was the Porirua Project conducted by Janet Holmes, Mary Boyce and me some 30 years ago. Scholars such as Miriam Meyerhoff and Jen Hay, who began their careers in that and subsequent projects, now lead the next generation of local sociolinguists.

Aotearoa/New Zealand has also contributed to the growth of sociolinguistic theory at an international level. As example, the study of sociolinguistic style now occupies central ground in 21st century

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sociolinguistic theorizing, having developed - and often departed - from the Audience Design approach that came out of my NZ data and reflection in the 1980s.

I note a particular and relevant dynamic in the growth of NZ sociolinguistics: until the 1980s we used NZ data as exemplary of wider and international contexts rather than for its own interest. But from the late 1980s we turned our attention to the local and the distinctive, and it was this – paradoxically - that led to findings and theorizations which drew much more interest world-wide. The local cast light on the global. Now, particularly in Auckland's highly diverse society, a significant proportion of the population speaks languages other than English, and we see the contemporary tropes of mobility and diversity played out in our locality, a challenge to the coming generation of sociolinguists.

Janet Holmes

Victoria University of Wellington

Discourse, identity and intercultural communication

This Panel contribution will focus on how New Zealand sociolinguists who analyse discourse illuminate our understanding of the relationship between language and society. Discourse analysts have explored the ways in which individuals construct and index their personal, ethnic, gender and professional identities in social interaction in a range of New Zealand contexts. Intercultural and multilingual interaction has also been a focus of interest for New Zealand discourse analysts, yielding insights into the way people negotiate their complex identities in contexts such as home, school and work. The presentation will include discussion of the research of the Wellington Language in the Workplace Project (LWP) team whose methodology has been adopted as a model by many researchers internationally. LWP research has contributed particularly to understanding intercultural interaction in monolingual workplaces.