



COMMUNICATING IN
PROFESSIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Professional Communication

Consultancy, Advocacy, Activism

Edited by Louise Mullany



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Communicating in Professions and Organizations

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Adelaide, SA, Australia

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Louise Mullany
Editor

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Editor

Louise Mullany
School of English
University of Nottingham
Nottingham, UK

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For Abigail and Tommy, in the hope that you will enter professions that will treat you well and bring fulfilment to your lives in the years to come.

Preface

This volume responds to a series of political, social and technological changes that are transforming the global landscape of professional communication research. It focuses on original empirical studies carried out in a number of international locations, including Africa, Asia and Australasia, as well as Europe and North America. All contributors take innovative approaches to professional communication drawing on consultancy, advocacy and activism, or a combination of these approaches. A defining feature is that all chapters have clearly identified contemporary socio-cultural problems that are explored and investigated by professional communication analysis. The volume includes authorial contributions from some of the most internationally respected and well-known academic researchers in professional communication, whose seminal work has helped shape the discipline over many years, including Janet Holmes, Maria Stubbe and Elena Semino. These contributions sit alongside established researchers who are transforming the field with their recent work in a variety of global spaces, along with contributions from experienced practitioners. Contributors have been carefully selected as collectively they represent emergent work across a range of different traditions in linguistics, communication studies and beyond, including: sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, intercultural communication, corpus linguistics, conversation analysis, critical discourse analysis, stylistics, ethnography, pragmatics, narrative studies, law, crime and criminology, medical

humanities and organisational studies. The volume also incorporates important collaborations with researchers from different fields coming together around a particular socio-cultural problem to produce genuine interdisciplinary work.

The fields of businesses, healthcare and institutions, with the latter category incorporating politics, education and law, have been selected as the key domains where consultancy, advocacy and activist research is being carried out most prominently and most effectively. A series of pertinent questions are asked about the evolving relationships between researcher and researched, the changing nature of researcher identities, the negotiation of power and research reciprocity, and the impact on and subsequent development of new theories and methodologies. At the centre of these questions is the overarching importance of the production of research consultancies, advocacy and activist work, dedicated to addressing and resolving socio-cultural issues with global significance, based on the findings of robust, empirical research.

The initial inspiration for this volume stems from my experiences of setting up a research consultancy and business unit at the University of Nottingham from 2015, *Linguistic Profiling for Professionals*. The consultancy-style approach to professional communication research, part of a broader business and external engagement agenda for the University, has changed the relationship between the researcher and the researched in expected and unexpected ways. A variety of projects have been commissioned in different settings including businesses, the public sector, the third sector and healthcare. All have been unified by the desire to investigate and attempt to resolve particular socio-cultural problems, often around miscommunication and conflict, communication breakdown and issues of professional identity in relation to workplace equality and intercultural communicative competence. Experiences of feeding back findings and recommendations, including observing how these may or may not be taken on-board, and how the relationship between the researcher and researched develops during advocacy and activist work, have provided the impetus to explore these issues further. This includes critically considering different demands, expectations and roles that are placed on researchers and practitioners and how these emergent issues influence theoretical and methodological developments in the field. The

resultant volume investigates all of these issues in a detailed and sustained way, drawing on the experiences and expertise of a large group of academics and practitioners. It is the intention that this work will be of long-term practical use, value and interest to professionals, practitioners, academics, students and scholars across the widest range of areas of professional expertise.

Nottingham, UK
October 2019

Louise Mullany

Acknowledgements

The last time that I saw Ronald Carter in person, we discussed the gap in the market for a volume of this nature and as always he approached the topic with his infectious enthusiasm, passion and encouragement. Although he is no longer with us, his influence runs deeply throughout this book. I will remain forever grateful to him for his mentorship, friendship and for being the best senior colleague that anyone could ever wish to work with. The book is dedicated to his memory.

I also wish to express my sincere gratitude to all of the contributors who have made this volume possible. It has been a genuine pleasure to work with you all. As professional communication research reaches an important juncture in its development, it is a real positive that we have such a vibrant community of innovative researchers, consultants and practitioners who are not afraid to push the boundaries of the discipline forward. I feel very privileged to be part of this global interdisciplinary network. A particular mention to all of the practitioners who have contributed here—this volume is much richer for your insight and engagement. Working more closely on publications is certainly a productive way to ensure that professional communication research makes its way into everyday applied practice.

Many thanks also to Cathy Scott, Beth Farrow and Alice Green, who have been an excellent team to work with at Springer Palgrave and to the Series Editor Jonathan Crichton, for including this volume as part of the

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I have had the pleasure of working with a wide range of professional communication academics and support staff over the last few years at the University of Nottingham as part of *Linguistic Profiling for Professionals* (LiPP) and I am very grateful to everyone who has been employed as part of LiPP since 2015 for their hard work, dedication and vision: Sarah Atkins, Vanessa Augustus, Gavin Brookes, Malgorzata Chalupnik, Wasim Chaudry, Luke Collins, Spencer Hazel, Claire Mann, Kay Snowley, Dimitra Vladimirou, and PhD students Tristan Emerson, Leigh Harrington and Victoria Howard. I have learnt a great deal from working alongside all of you and I am proud of what we have achieved together. Special thanks to Victoria Howard for being such a dedicated and diligent research assistant on various LiPP projects over the last three years and in particular for assisting me with formatting and proofing the final version of this manuscript.

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Praise for *Professional Communication*

“In this superbly edited volume, we see the problem-solving potential of a mature and committed applied linguistics, and its relevance for addressing the complexities of communication in an age of globalization.”

— Jan Blommaert, *Professor of Language, Culture and Globalization, Tilburg University, the Netherlands*

“An imperative underpinning the modes and modalities of professional communication research is to embrace a societally relevant impact agenda through intervention and influence. The editor and the contributors – committed to ‘responsive’ and ‘responsible’ research with a ‘reflexive’ mentality – rise to the practical and ethical challenges of ‘translational research’ admirably and refreshingly in linking empirically grounded research across diverse settings, domains and methodologies with their lived experiences of consultancy, advocacy and activism.”

— Srikant Sarangi, *Professor in Humanities and Medicine, Aalborg University, Denmark, Emeritus Professor, Cardiff University, UK*

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Notes on Contributors

Erika Darics is Senior Lecturer in English at Aston University, UK. She is an applied linguist specialising in communication in professional, workplace and digital contexts. Drawing on her research and extensive training experience she works with businesses and organisations to realise their business potential by improving their communications through business consultancy. As a researcher she is particularly interested in professional (and) interpersonal communication in workplaces, including non-verbal communication, politeness, relational and gendered communication. She specialises in computer-mediated communication and social media. She is regional Vice President for Europe, Africa and the Middle East for the Association for Business Communication.

Boyd H. Davis is Professor of Applied Linguistics at University of North Carolina at Charlotte, USA. Her research focuses on sociohistorical and pragmatic approaches to healthcare, including dementia discourse, ageing and digital corpora. She is Co-PI of the Carolinas Conversation Collection, an NIH-funded web portal for researchers to several hundred conversational interviews with impaired/unimpaired older persons.

Zsófia Demjén is Associate Professor of Applied Linguistics at University College London, UK, and specialises in language and communication around illness and healthcare. She is author of *Sylvia Plath and the*

Language of Affective States (2015), co-author of *Metaphor, Cancer and the End of Life: A Corpus-based Study* (2018), editor of *Applying Linguistics in Illness and Healthcare Contexts* (2019), and co-editor of *The Routledge Handbook of Metaphor and Language* (2017). Her work has appeared in the *Journal of Pragmatics*, *Applied Linguistics*, *Communication & Medicine*, and the BMJ's *Medical Humanities*, among others.

Kevin Dew is Professor of Sociology at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. He is a founding member of the Applied Research on Communication in Health (ARCH) Group. His current research activities include studies of interactions between health professionals and patients, health inequities in cancer care decision-making, and the social meanings of medications. His books include *The Cult and Science of Public Health: A Sociological Investigation*, *Borderland Practices: Regulating Alternative Therapy in New Zealand*, *Sociology of Health in New Zealand* (with Allison Kirkman), and *Public Health, Personal Health and Pills: Drug Entanglements and Pharmaceuticalised Governance*.

Tony Dowell is Professor of Primary Health Care and General Practice at the University of Otago in Wellington, New Zealand. He is a founding member of the ARCH Group and co-directs the ARCH Corpus of Health Interactions. He is a practising GP and has worked in New Zealand, the UK and Central Africa. He undertakes research in community settings using quantitative and qualitative methodologies to investigate primary mental healthcare, communication between patients and health providers and the application of complexity and implementation science in healthcare settings.

Gill Ereaut is Founding Partner and CEO of *Linguistic Landscapes*, where she has pioneered the commercial application of language sciences, linguistics and discourse analysis to a range of organisations. She has 30 years of experience working in business research and consulting. She writes and speaks regularly on the topics of language and organisations, including guest lecturing at Cass Business School and the London School of Economics.

Kieran File is an Assistant Professor in the Centre for Applied Linguistics at the University of Warwick, UK. His research explores issues related to language use in high-performance sporting contexts. His current research interests are in the areas of managing professional relationships in sports teams, building empowering team environments and the strategies professional sports managers and coaches use to manage their impressions when speaking to the media. He also applies this research and has helped some of the world's biggest sporting teams and organisations consider the role and impact of language choices in their high performance sporting contexts.

Susannah Fish, OBE, QPM is CEO of StarFish Consulting Limited, working with a range of clients on transformational change, leadership and equality in the UK. Previously she was a police officer for 31 years and retired as Chief Constable of Nottinghamshire Police. She was awarded the OBE in 2008 for services to policing. She received the Queen's Policing Medal for distinguished service in 2016. She was also awarded 'Upstander of the Year' in the National Hate Crime Awards 2017 for her leadership on misogyny hate crime. She continues to campaign to have misogyny hate crime adopted nationally.

Lesley Gray is a Senior Lecturer at the University of Otago in Wellington, New Zealand, and a fellow of the UK Faculty of Public Health. She is a member of the ARCH Group and led the formation of the TabOO study (Talking About Overweight & Obesity). Her research interests concern health risk communication and behaviour relating to obesity, health equity and disaster risk reduction (DRR), and research into interprofessional education and community informed learning.

Michael Handford is Professor of Applied Linguistics at Cardiff University, UK, where he is Director of Internationalisation for the School of English, Communication and Philosophy. His published work focuses on discourse in professional settings, cultural identities at work, the application of corpus tools in discourse analysis, using corpora for the analysis of intercultural communication, English as a Lingua Franca in the construction industry, engineering education, and language learning.

He was previously Professor of International Education at the University of Tokyo, and has worked as a communication consultant with several organisations.

Claire Hardaker is Senior Lecturer in Forensic Corpus Linguistics in the Department of Linguistics and English Language at Lancaster University, UK. She researches online aggression, deception and manipulation; directs the Forensic Linguistics Research Group (FORGE); and produces a podcast on forensic linguistics and language mysteries called 'en clair'. She is also part of the ESRC's Corpus Approaches to Social Science (CASS) Centre.

Jo Hilder is a Research Fellow based in the Department of Primary Health Care and General Practice at the University of Otago in Wellington, New Zealand. With a background in applied linguistics, she is a member of the ARCH Group which investigates a wide range of communication issues in clinical practice using video recordings of authentic interactions between health professionals and patients.

Janet Holmes is Emeritus Professor in Linguistics at Victoria University of Wellington, New Zealand. She is a fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand and an officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit (2016). She is Associate Director of the Wellington *Language in the Workplace* project, an ongoing study of communication in the workplace which has described small talk, humour, management strategies, directives and leadership in a wide range of New Zealand workplaces. She was also Director of the project which produced the influential Wellington Corpus of Spoken New Zealand English.

Veronika Koller is Reader in Discourse Studies at Lancaster University, UK. Her research interests centre on corporate and health communication and she supervises a number of PhD students in these areas. Outside academia, she is a senior associate analyst with the consulting company *Linguistic Landscapes*. She has been involved in the rebranding of the charity Prostate Cancer UK as well as in projects for the NHS and a number of UK-based and international charities. Her published works

include *Language in Business, Language at Work* (Palgrave 2018, with Erika Darics) and *Metaphor and Gender in Business Media Discourse* (Palgrave, 2004).

Masibo Lumala is a Senior Lecturer at Moi University's Department of Communication Studies, Kenya, where he specialises in gender, communication, writing for public relations and strategic corporate media relations. He is actively involved in advocacy and campaigns and has successfully supervised a number of Masters and PhD students in a range of areas including gender, media and political communication in Kenya.

Lindsay Macdonald is an adjunct Research Fellow at the University of Otago in Wellington, New Zealand. She is a founding member of the ARCH Group and co-director of the ARCH Corpus of Health Interactions. She has brought her clinical background in nursing to a wide range of applied research projects on health communication and health promotion in the primary healthcare domain.

Claire Mann is a Senior Research Fellow in the School of Pharmacy working closely with the Nottingham University Business School's Centre for Health Improvement, Leadership and Learning (CHILL) at the University of Nottingham, UK. She is an interdisciplinary researcher who has worked on a number of research projects in various clinical settings across the fields of medicine and health sciences. She specialises in ethnographic approaches to education and healthcare. She also works as a freelance consultant and research practitioner in evaluation, education, organisational behaviour and professional communication.

Roshni Mooneeram is a freelance communication strategist and consultant in corporate training. She specialises in global Englishes in the workplace, multilingualism and workplace identities. She has also worked at the University of Leeds, Birmingham City University and the University of Nottingham Ningbo China, where she founded and directed the Division of English Studies.

Louise Mullany is Professor of Sociolinguistics at the University of Nottingham, UK. She is founder and director of *Linguistic Profiling for Professionals*, a research consultancy and business unit based at the University. She specialises in sociolinguistic investigations of professional identities and workplace cultures. Her works have been published widely with a range of international publishing houses. Books include *Gendered Discourse in the Professional Workplace* (2007, Palgrave) and *Language, Gender and Feminism* (2011 with Sara Mills). She has delivered research consultancies and training to numerous public, private and third sector organisations. She is editor of Routledge's monograph book series *Applied Professional Communication*.

Charlene Pope, PhD, MPH, RN, FAAN, is Chief Nurse for Research at the Ralph H. Johnson VA Medical Center, USA, where she conducts health services research on health disparities, patient-provider communication and health literacy. She is Co-PI of the Carolinas Conversation Collection, an NIH-funded web portal for researchers to several hundred conversational interviews with impaired/unimpaired older persons.

Helen Sauntson is Professor of English Language and Linguistics at York St John University, UK. Her research areas are language in education and language, gender and sexuality. She is the author of *Language, Sexuality and Education* (2018), *Approaches to Gender and Spoken Classroom Discourse* (Palgrave, 2012), co-author of *New Perspectives on Language and Sexual Identity* (Palgrave, 2007). She has also co-edited a number of volumes and her work has appeared in a wide range of academic journals. She is co-editor of the *Palgrave Studies in Language, Gender and Sexuality* book series.

Stephanie Schnurr is an Associate Professor at the University of Warwick, UK. Her main research interests are professional and medical communication with a particular interest in leadership discourse, culture and gender. She has published widely on these topics. She is also the author of *Leadership Discourse at Work* (Palgrave, 2009), *Exploring Professional Communication* (2013), *Language and Culture at Work* (2017

with O. Zayts) and *The Language of Leadership Narratives* (2020 with J. Clifton and D. van de Mieroop).

Elena Semino is Professor of Linguistics and Verbal Art in the Department of Linguistics and English Language at Lancaster University, UK, and Director of the ESRC Centre for Corpus Approaches to Social Science. She holds a Visiting Professorship at the University of Fuzhou in China. She specialises in corpus linguistics, medical humanities, health communication, stylistics, narratology and metaphor theory and analysis. She has co-authored over 90 academic publications, including *Metaphor in Discourse* (2008), *Figurative Language, Genre and Register* (2013), and *Metaphor, Cancer and the End of Life: A Corpus-based Study* (2018).

Maria Stubbe is an Associate Professor at University of Otago in Wellington, New Zealand. She leads the ARCH Group which investigates communication issues in clinical practice using video recordings of authentic interactions between health professionals and patients. She is an interactional sociolinguist and qualitative health researcher, and has published widely in the fields of pragmatics, language in the workplace and health communication.

Rachel Tester is a Research Fellow at the University of Otago in Wellington, New Zealand. She is a part of the ARCH Group, and manages a service user education and research group 'World of Difference'. Her research includes studies of health communication, and projects with a mental health and addictions focus that draw on the power of personal narratives to help raise awareness about the social, cultural and political drivers of mental distress.

Loretta Trickett is Associate Professor of Criminal and Human Rights Law and Criminology at Nottingham Trent University, UK. Her research interests are in gendered victimisation and hate crime. She has undertaken research on fear of crime, bullying, gangs, hate crime and policing. She has published extensively in these areas. She is a member of a number

of steering groups and community organisations on hate crime and victimisation.

Kathryn Van Ravenstein works as a teacher on Chamberlain University's online programmes in the USA, and she is a former Assistant Professor at the Medical University of South Carolina, USA. She has a diverse nurse practitioner background, having practised in the areas of family and internal medicine, urology, orthopedics, cardiovascular surgery and community health. Her primary research interest is in using technology to manage chronic diseases.

Bernadette M. Watson is Professor of Health Communication and Director of the International Research Centre for the Advancement of Health Communication (IRCAHC) in the Department of English at The Hong Kong Polytechnic University, Hong Kong. She is a health psychologist who studies communication. She researches the influence of identity and intergroup processes both on patient-health professional communication and on communication in multidisciplinary and multicultural health teams. Her research focus is in the area of language and social psychology and she has been a member of the International Association of Language and Social Psychology executive since 2000 and was President between 2012 and 2014.

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1

Rethinking Professional Communication: New Departures for Global Workplace Research

Louise Mullany

1 Professional Communication: Changing Landscapes

The socio-political importance of conducting professional communication research in contemporary societies cannot be under-estimated. Over 20 years ago, Gunnarsson et al. (1997: 1) pointed out that efficient communication in the professions ‘is absolutely vital for society to function properly’. Since the time of this publication, in the highly digitised, globalised world, effective professional communication is arguably even more critical to the robustness of social, political and economic functions of societies worldwide. But how do professional communication researchers feed their research findings into professional contexts? At what stage in the research process should this happen? What is the relationship between the researcher and researched? What happens to the identity of the ‘researcher’ in such a process? What topics and professions should be

L. Mullany (✉)
University of Nottingham, Nottingham, UK
e-mail: louise.mullany@nottingham.ac.uk

researched? How can professional communication researchers genuinely work with, for and on behalf of others, including marginalised and/or vulnerable groups? What roles do/should researchers' own political beliefs play in influencing research questions, the direction of projects and how findings are interpreted and disseminated? What about the role of the 'impact agenda' and other, similar agendas that have affected multiple universities in different parts of the world (Lawson and Sayers 2016; McIntyre and Price 2018)?

This collection aims to investigate these questions in a range of global contexts through three different yet interrelated approaches: 'consultancy', 'advocacy' and 'activism'. Professional communication work drawing upon one or more of these approaches is presented in each chapter to identify, analyse and assess the changing practices of professional communication research due to considerable social, cultural and political transitions taking place in contemporary societies. The volume's authors demonstrate how different practices of conducting professional communication research via consultancies and/or forms of advocacy and activism have emerged through changing research priorities, partly in response to the rapidly shifting landscape of higher education, including the increased marketisation of universities within neoliberal economies (De Costa 2016; Morrish and Saunston 2019).

'Professional communication' is defined in this volume as an umbrella term to cover approaches within language, linguistics and communication studies where research in professional settings takes place. A broad definition of 'professional' has been adopted, conceptualised as any individual who has a workplace role responsibility, including all interactions between lay person(s) and those who occupy professional role responsibilities. This expands upon earlier definitions, including the influential notion whereby a 'professional' was defined as any individual engaged in paid work (Gunnarsson et al. 1997). The wider definition taken here enables studies of those engaged in non-paid work, including voluntary occupations with charities and NGOs to be included, as well as those who engage in work but who do not know with any degree of certainty that this will be financially rewarded, as in agriculture in developing countries (discussed in Chap. 4). In terms of defining 'communication', again, a broad definition is taken, inclusive of approaches from applied

linguistics, interactional sociolinguistics, discourse analysis, corpus linguistics, critical discourse analysis (CDA), conversation analysis, ethnography, stylistics and pragmatics, enabling a range of perspectives and approaches to be covered.

The defining principle for professional communication research in this volume is that, whatever geographical location it is taking place in, the authors place investigation of a particular socio-cultural problem at its core, which is then empirically investigated. The exact focus of the socio-cultural problem may be decided at the beginning, or it may be emergent during empirical work; it may be jointly negotiated and collaboratively developed between the researcher(s) and researched and/or with remits and stipulations of funding bodies, or in discussion with those commissioning research consultancies, and/or with those granting access to research sites as gatekeepers. All of these processes can be fraught with complexities, which will be discussed at relevant points in the volume (see also Mullany 2008; Cook 2012). However, the foundational principle of socio-cultural problem-solving through empirical investigation sits at the core of all chapters; in my view, this foundational principle should be at the centre of all work that is carried out in the global field of professional communication research. There are some echoes of sociolinguistic and CDA traditions here, with Labov's (1982) view that social problems have been core to his sociolinguistic work and studies influenced by his tradition. Fairclough and Wodak (1997: 271) list addressing 'social problems' as a core principle of CDA research. However, as Roberts and Sarangi (2003) point out, although the topics of CDA research are social problems, traditionally, CDA researchers do not prioritise coming up with practically relevant feedback, interventions or recommendations to change future practices.

Professional communication research which includes a practical engagement element of feeding back to those being researched is in itself not new. Within applied linguistics, in language learning and second language acquisition in particular, a core focus has been on enhancing teaching and learning practices through empirical research, including advocacy and activism (see de Costa 2016 for an excellent overview of contemporary work in this area). In sociolinguistic research, there has been a long-standing set of principles for advocacy work. This includes the principle

of ‘linguistic gratuity’ (Wolfram 1993), that researchers should ‘repay’ those they research and the advocacy principles of Labov (1982), based on his role as an expert witness in a case successfully challenging part of the US educational system for linguistic discrimination. Furthermore, Cameron et al.’s (1992) proclamation to empower those being researched by working ‘with’ and ‘for’ research participants instead of ‘on’ is still influential. Sarangi and Roberts (1999) and Roberts and Sarangi (2003) trailblazed with their reflexive research consultancies in commissioned healthcare projects in the UK on linguistic discrimination, described as ‘action-orientated’ research; The work of Candlin (2003) demonstrated perspectives from those officially working ‘within’ professions as ‘insiders’, where they applied practical linguistic tools to workplace issues that they identified ethnographically, when carrying out their everyday job roles.

Whilst the historical development of professional communication research from a variety of linguistic traditions and approaches shows the trajectory of early research and its importance at the foundation of the discipline, the academic landscape has changed significantly in the last two decades and is quite unrecognisable to the one that existed in the 1980s and 1990s, when initial work was being undertaken. Academics have been increasingly held to account in terms of exactly how they are spending their research time, who they are researching and why; research with clear, demonstrable, measurable ‘impact’ on populations is becoming more essential if research funding bids are to be successful. This transition can be seen in a growing number of university systems in different global locations (cf. McIntyre and Price 2018; McEnery 2018).

In order to ensure that cutting-edge communications data is analysed, which most accurately reflects the complex communicative processes in twenty-first century professional life, the focus will be across spoken, written and digital forms. The landscape of professional communication has changed dramatically in the last ten years, with the advent of social media and a range of other interactive digital communicative forms, including instant messaging and professional communication interactions through global media platforms. Public self-images of businesses, individuals and organisations are under constant scrutiny by the general public and the mass media. The digital professional landscape continues to change rapidly,