

PhD Scholarship in Intercultural Communication

One Comment

24

1,044 views

By Ingrid Piller | February 12, 2018 | Intercultural communication

The Language-on-the-Move team is getting ready to launch a new research project investigating everyday intercultural communication in multilingual and multicultural Australia, and we are looking for a new PhD student to join our team. The sociolinguistic project, which is funded by an ARC (Australian Research Council) Discovery grant, examines how fluent English speakers interact with people who have limited proficiency.



Top 5 languages spoken in Australia in 2016 (Source: ABS)

The research challenge

Australia has seen a significant increase in linguistic diversity in recent decades. [According to 2016 census statistics](#), 22.2% of Australian residents speak a language other than English at home, and in urban areas such as Sydney (38.2%) or Melbourne (34.9%) that proportion is much higher. Figures such as these inevitably mean that for many Australians, and particularly those living in cities, **intercultural communication** – here defined as communication between people from different linguistic backgrounds and with different levels of proficiency in English – is an everyday experience.

While such mundane intercultural communication may seem insignificant, it is anything but as this example demonstrates: [an elderly Perth woman died from infected bedsores and general neglect because her carers interpreted her inability to communicate fluently in English as lack of cooperation and stubbornness](#). While

miscommunication is rarely fatal, as it was in this case, [Australians from non-English-speaking background \(NESB\) have unequal opportunities to access employment, education, healthcare or community participation, particularly if their proficiency in English is low](#). Specific negative consequences may include lower life-time earnings, higher welfare dependency or lower quality of healthcare and even higher mortality rates.

Linguistic and communicative inequality has been a central concern of anthropological linguistics and sociolinguistics since the inception of the field and a wealth of evidence exists demonstrating that speakers of non-standard languages or language varieties – including multilinguals, who are often viewed in deficit terms as “non-native” speakers – are systematically disadvantaged in interaction with consequences for the social roles and competences they can take on. The speech of NESB migrants – be it their pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar or discourse strategies – may be judged as more than just a particular way of using English: as indexing a particular identity, personality, competences and traits. As a result, NESB migrants may be considered incompetent employees, undesirable tenants, incapable students or unwanted friends.

NESB speakers often perceive their interactions with “native” speakers in terms of racism. However, we know very little as to whether such exclusionary effects are in fact intended by proficient speakers. Recent US research suggests otherwise: [Kenison et al. \(2016\) interviewed junior doctors and nurses from English-speaking backgrounds about their experiences with NESB patients](#). The participants described how such patients were more likely to be treated dismissively and condescendingly, or simply ignored and avoided by doctors. However, the interviewees reported themselves to be deeply disturbed by the differential treatment they observed NESB patients receiving. At the same time, they considered the implementation of effective intercultural communication as outside their control due to system factors such as time pressures, inadequate interpreting services or lack of training on how to identify language needs. Overall, the organizational culture in hospitals was such that “efficiency” was valued more highly than good communication and NESB patients were simply assigned a low value in the operation of the institution.

In sum, while we understand the fact of linguistic and communicative disadvantage of NESB speakers in relation to their language practices, our understanding of the contribution of proficient speakers to exclusionary – or inclusive – intercultural communication is limited. However, in the same way that sexism and racism can only be partially understood if we only ever focus on women and people of colour, [linguistic disadvantage can only partially be understood if we only focus on linguistically subordinate groups](#). Given that “it takes two to tango” and communication is never a one-way street, this is a major gap, and one that this research project is designed to address.

The PhD opportunity

The research team is headed by [Professor Ingrid Piller](#) and includes two post-doctoral research fellows, [Dr Shiva Motaghi-Tabari](#) and [Dr Vera Williams Tetteh](#) as well as an existing group of ten PhD students. There exists an opportunity to join our team on a fully-funded Macquarie University PhD scholarship. The scholarship is **open to domestic candidates only** and available for 3 or 4 years (depending on prior qualifications). Details about the scholarship are [available through the Macquarie University Higher Degree Research website](#) (scroll down to “Faculty of Human Sciences” >>> “Linguistics” >>> “Communicating with people who have limited English proficiency”).

We are looking for a committed sociolinguist with a background in intercultural communication, language learning and multilingualism, and a passion for conducting socially relevant research. The PhD project will be

to undertake a critical sociolinguistic ethnography in a diverse institution in Sydney in the education, healthcare, hospitality or IT sector. The successful candidate will develop their specific subproject within the overall project, undertake independent data collection and analysis, and produce a PhD thesis based on that research. The PhD student will work under the primary supervision of Ingrid and the associate supervision of Shiva and Vera.

For further information and instructions how to apply, visit [the Macquarie University Higher Degree Research website](#). For further questions, contact the chief investigator.

 Facebook 45

 Twitter

 Google

 Email

 Print

 More

AUSTRALIA

INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

MIGRATION

MULTICULTURALISM

MULTILINGUALISM

SOCIAL INCLUSION

SOCIAL JUSTICE

SOCIOLINGUISTICS



Author

Ingrid Piller

Dr Ingrid Piller, FAHA, is Professor of Applied Linguistics at Macquarie University, Sydney, Australia. Ingrid specializes in intercultural communication, bilingual education and the sociolinguistics of language learning and multilingual globalization.