



# **Researching Helping Professions for (Applied) Linguistic and Practical Purposes**

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## **Symposium format:**

- **Multimodal Symposium**

## **Symposium mode:**

- **Hybrid**

## **Sub-themes:**

- LANGUAGE IN USE (communication, interaction, conversation analysis, discourse, corpus, media)
- LANGUAGE In PROFESSIONS (translation & interpreting, transdisciplinarity, justice, medicine, food, forensics)
- RESEARCH (methods, approaches and (collaborative) practices)

## **Short abstract in English:**

Helping professionals (i.e., professionals in formats such as doctor-patient interactions, therapy, coaching, supervision, mediation, counselling, etc.) make use of communication as primary means and method to support clients in achieving psychological, physical, intellectual and/or emotional change (Pick & Scarvaglieri 2019). Applied linguistic research has been exploring both the common core of what constitutes such 'professional helping', i.e., the shared practices realizing the helping profession-defining elements such as knowledge asymmetries/transfer, co-construction of the helping relationship, and change-oriented communication, as well as the endemic linguistic practices used in specific helping interactions (i.e., interaction-type specificities; Graf et al. 2014:1). This panel invites applied linguistic contributions on all kinds of helping professions. It aims to further the discussion by addressing intra-, inter-, and transdisciplinary research approaches, as well as the affordances and challenges in researching helping professions and in transferring knowledge from science to practice, and by including other promising research foci.

## **Argument:**

Due to profound socio-cultural and economic developments, numerous helping professions in the sense of person-oriented and interaction-based services that rely on physical and/or emotional relationships between help providers and clients have emerged and continue to form and develop (Graf & Spranz-Fogasy 2018). Such professions include doctor-patient interactions, (psycho-)therapy, coaching, supervision, mediation, various forms of counselling etc. These helping professional formats do not only depend on purposeful interpersonal relationships but are also primarily communicative in nature (Miller & Considine, 2009), i.e., language-based help plays a decisive role in the overall interaction. The helping conversation



is thus primary means and method to support clients' (psychological, physical, intellectual and/or emotional) change, the central goal of these encounters (Pick & Scarvaglieri 2019). Apart from such common denominators, helping professions can be differentiated in terms of their historical origin and degree of standardization, their specific goal definition, target group, preferred medium or the relationship / intervention models applied therein (Graf & Spranz-Fogasy 2018).

From an (applied) linguistic constructivist perspective, then, help is realised in a sequentially organized process of in-situ, multi-modal co-construction between participants and helping formats are thus subsumed into a common research field. Helping conversations share basal characteristics such as goal-oriented communication and the possibility to elicit new perspectives; they tackle common communicative goals and (often) rely on the same communicative practices (e.g., interpretations, (re-)formulations, extensions, questions etc.) to do so. Applied linguistic research is thus twofold: It investigates what constitutes the common core of "professional helping" that is, the shared practices realizing the helping profession-defining elements e.g., knowledge asymmetries/transfer, co-construction of the helping relationship, and change-oriented communication. On the other hand, it explores the forms, functions, and general significance of endemic linguistic practices of helping professionals to carve out the "interaction-type specificities" (Graf et al. 2014: 1). By doing so, applied linguistic research enables, inter alia, insights into the change potential of discursive interventions and thus into the help seekers' (local) change processes.

The findings can be of particular importance to practitioners, in the sense of an empirically based language awareness and thus 'best practice' (talk-in-practice vs. talk-in-theory, Stokoe 2012). However, both contrastive and format-specific applied linguistic research is still lacking. Furthermore, the systematic integration of linguistic findings into practice remains problematic (Sarangi 2005). Other limits and challenges are linked to qualitative evaluation methods. Apart from difficulties in acquiring authentic (sensitive) data and time-consuming analyses, (in-depth) results are often not generalizable. Proposed solutions to remediate these shortcomings include the designing of inter- and transdisciplinary research projects which combine perspectives from academic disciplines and / or from practice.

We invite researchers focusing on helping professions to contribute to our panel. Possible topics include:

- (Intra- and inter-disciplinary) Research methods and / or approaches to helping professions • Project designs that accommodate both practice and science perspectives or the transfer of research into practice
- Affordances, challenges, and benefits of researching helping professions
- (Contrastive/format-specific) Analyses of discursive practices in helping professions / typologies of discursive practices / research on helping professional interventions
- Research on the local effectiveness of interventions / change-process-research
- ...

Abstracts can be submitted in English, German, or French.



## Bibliography:

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- Stokoe, E. (2012). The systematics of social interaction. Inaugural lecture for Loughborough University.