
The pragmatics of ‘global centres’ and ‘peripheries’ in healthcare communication research

Panel proposal

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This panel brings together an international group of pragmatics scholars working in the area of health communication in Asia[1], in particular in Hong Kong, Mainland China, Singapore, Japan, Malaysia and Thailand, among other countries. The overarching objective of the panel is to bring together health communication research from the ‘global South’ to problematize the hegemonies of the Anglophone tradition of research with regards to its empirical, epistemological and theoretical foundations.

The paramount importance of effective communication in delivering successful healthcare outcomes has nowadays become an axiom. While ever emerging medical technologies and discoveries (e.g. novel genetic tests that lead to new knowledge about our genetic makeup) undoubtedly expand our understanding of health and illness, what ultimately matters is how the new knowledge generated by these technologies and discoveries is communicated to patients, and to and among healthcare professionals, as well as other involved parties, to improve healthcare outcomes. Through the primary interest in context-specific language use, pragmatics scholars have much to contribute to effective communication in healthcare. The ‘global South’, with its multiple cultures and languages, presents a rich and particularly complex research context for pragmatic investigations, and the number of studies emerging from this context has been on the rapid and steady incline in the last two decades. Paradoxically, while the pioneering role of Asia¹ in some major recent technological developments and discoveries has been widely acknowledged, when it comes to research on communication in healthcare, it is not uncommon to downplay the scope and the impact of the emerging research in the ‘global South’ in favor of a longer standing tradition in the Anglophone world. The empirical, epistemological and theoretical foundations of the majority of the studies also appear to be predominantly ‘borrowed’ from the Anglophone tradition. While the universal applicability of some pragmatics frameworks (e.g. politeness) has been questioned, other frameworks appear to be unquestionably adopted (and *not* adapted, or developed). Drawing on a range of empirical data from a variety of healthcare communication contexts in the ‘global South’, the panel participants will present their metareflections on the empirical, epistemological and theoretical foundations of doing research outside of the Anglophone contexts. Panel participants will engage in the discussion of the specifics of handling the raw data (e.g. collection, transcription, translation), engaging with research participants, the linguistic, cultural, and social aspect of health communication in their research contexts, epistemological hegemony of the Anglophone research tradition, and doing empirical research on the ‘periphery’ or outside that tradition, and the heterogeneity of the research contexts in the ‘global South’. Ultimately, the panel will question the dichotomy between the ‘global centers’ and the ‘peripheries’, and bring to the forefront and highlight the ‘global South’ with its rich research tradition in its own right.

[1] We are using ‘Asia’ here in its geopolitical sense