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The NTU Linguist Chatroom
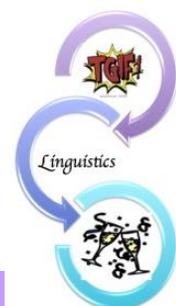
The interdisciplinarity of Linguistics, Communication and Medicine: How language use improves heathcare delivery and outcome?

Patient-centred care has now become a requisite of modern medicine, in which shared decision-making in the medicine consultation is emphasized. In this idealized model, doctors are expected to respect patients' knowledge over their own bodies, as well as their right in deciding what medicine to take, or what procedures to be performed; while patients are expected to respect the medical expertise of doctors in recommending treatment, thereby collaboratively negotiating the best way forward. However, conversation analytic (CA) studies has shown that medical decision-making, far from being an idealized script, is a moment-to-moment interactional process where various contingencies endemic to the process may threaten to derail the trajectory of a successful medical consultation.

Based on video-recordings of 150 first-visit consultations in a Singapore hospital's Urology clinic, I will demonstrate how the intersubjective understandings (or gaps of understanding, even misunderstanding) through a sequential turn-by-turn analysis of the verbal interaction between doctors and patients crucially impacts vital components of delivering healthcare (e.g. treatment negotiation, informed consent-taking etc.). Focusing on the diagnostic recommendation phase of the consultation, I'll draw out a couple of issues that have been regularly observed to impede the progress of good shared decision-making, namely (1) the lack of one particular sort of "health literacy"; (2) the mutual avoidance of responsibility; and (3) difficulty in addressing concerns of pain.

In conclusion, it is argued that the detailed analysis of authentic individual medical consultations can illuminate systematic and recurrent practices of "doctoring" that creates opportunities and/or pitfalls in the consultation. This can consequently form the basis for communicative training sessions to improve the quality of healthcare delivery and outcome in Singapore.

Speaker

Ni-Eng LIM (林尔嵘) received his doctoral degree in Applied Linguistics from the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), and is joined NTU as an Assistant Professor of Chinese, School of Humanities in 2015. He also has a courtesy appointment in the Linguistics & Multilingual Studies programme. The scope of his disciplinary training includes interactional linguistics, conversation analysis, multimodal discourse analysis, and corpus linguistics. His ongoing interest is on the interactional, socio-cultural and cognitive operations at work in everyday and institutional talk. Ni Eng's latest project is funded by the Ministry of Education AcRF Tier 2 grant, and examines doctor-patient interaction within the setting of Urology and Ophthalmology clinics.