

**“Researching Helping Professions for (Applied) Linguistic and Practical Purposes” –
AILA 20th World Congress, Lyon**

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.

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