

GURT 2000 closing panel discussion, May 6, 2000

Participants include conference chairs, plenary speakers, and audience members

Heidi Hamilton:

To start off our discussion this afternoon, I'd like to say a few words to lay out how I see the kind of endeavor that we're engaged in as we work across disciplines. Sometimes people stumble into medical discourse or into discourse of the law, education, technology, business, or media because of some interest in linguistics, in language. They're not necessarily interested in the other discipline; they just happen to be working on some linguistic feature or discourse strategy and they want to find various contexts in which to look at it. So, for example, they could be very interested in questions and want to look at how questions are used institutionally as opposed to in everyday conversation. It doesn't mean that they want to go out and change the world.

On the other hand, there are linguists who have a very strong commitment to societal change or at least to addressing what they see as being not quite right with the way things are. And then everything in between. And I think if we choose to look at change and addressing societal issues, then we run directly into many of the problems that we've seen already in this conference. Work across paradigms or work in different paradigms can present us with stumbling blocks. We may be excellent linguists and think that we have come up with an insightful analysis of a problem within another discipline and then simply not find anyone in that discipline who wants to hear about it. Perhaps they just don't buy the evidence we're presenting or they don't understand our qualitative research methodologies.

So as we're coming together now to close this conference, I want to outline a couple of issues that I think we need to attend to. When you get involved in a project doing linguistics in another profession, what is your role? Who initiates the project? Sometimes it's the professional coming to you, seeking you out for help. Other times, you might come up with an idea and try to gain access to the profession. What's your role as linguist? Is it simply providing a different perspective, are you engaged as a consultant in a fairly systematic way, or are you actually a full collaborator? How much time are you going to spend on the project? Is it something that you're doing along with ten other projects or is it something that you're devoting your entire time to? Are you doing it

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by yourself or are you working with a team? Once you have become involved, how do you develop the research question and design the project across disciplines? Do you set up the design so that it'll work effectively from both perspectives, being respectful of each other's territory and highlighting the assumptions from each discipline? Or are you designing it from your perspective and then trying to be convincing to the other discipline that that's the right way to go? Once you get the project designed, you need to carry out the work. However this is done—through observing or interviewing, taping—depending on the discipline, you'll have to deal with human subjects committees and cross-disciplinary compromises, such as quantitative/qualitative and experimental/natural issues. Then once you get the data, you have to make sense of it in some way, working with analytical units and frameworks that might be attached to one type of paradigm rather than another. What counts as evidence? And then reporting these findings—how are they reported, to what audience? We can obviously report our findings in our own journals to each other. We can also try to report them in the disciplines we are working with through their professional journals. We can also report them, as some of us have been able to do, to the general public and actually get beyond the professions to a point where society can see that what we are doing is important.

So these are some of the aspects we can be thinking about as we try to draw conclusions about what we've learned in this conference. If we think back to the papers that we've listened to, I think we'll see that each person has answered these questions in slightly different ways. So with that said, let's open up to any questions or comments from the audience for any of the panelists. It can be something directed to everyone or to specific individuals on the panel.

John Rickford:

One of the things that really struck me while going from session to session was the sense of the vital importance of the issues at hand—whether it be education, journalism, law, medicine—the sense that people's lives or deaths or people's futures or non-futures were hanging in the balance. We saw that very critically in a number of papers. It's a very invigorating feeling, because sometimes of course in doing linguistics and teaching linguistics you ask yourself (or students ask), "What is this good for? What's the point of all this? I know I enjoy it, but what's it good for?" I have the sense that many of the people who are here have answered that question, or are starting to ask that question, are starting to work toward a good answer to that question. So you can come away with a kind of spring in your step, or a sense of meaning and significance in your lives.

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One of the things that struck me about that is how often that sense of the potential applicability is absent even within sociolinguistic texts. Ralph Fasold's book, a two-volume introduction to sociolinguistics, is one of a few to devote a substantial part to the application of sociolinguistics, so even within sociolinguistics, that gets short shrift. And then within introductory texts on linguistics, the topic gets nothing at all. For the vast hundreds and thousands of students who are introduced to our discipline every year, there is no sense that there's any kind of potential application of linguistics to real-world issues. For instance, I know that in my part of the country in California, in Silicon Valley, applied linguistics sometimes just means working with high-tech companies to see how you can help them with their enterprises. There are practical applications of various kinds, but you're a little further away from the life-and-death, future-or-non-future issues that people are grappling with here.

But at the same time that I was struck by that, I was also struck by the need to minimize the danger of having us drift from core areas of linguistics. People were of course drawing on discourse analysis, but sometimes they were trying to draw also very specifically on phonetics and phonology and syntax. And I had this little worry within myself that we can become so absorbed with the applications that we don't often master the tools to be able to do a good analysis. Even in the area of language and education, the one that I was dealing with, I have heard enough people look at data from classrooms and so on and come out with analyses that are absolutely wrong. Or I have heard them talking to teachers, I mean even at the level of calling a pronoun a "preposition," or whatever it may be, and repeat this several times. So as we rush to the application of our tools, I think it behooves us and it behooves us in teaching our students to make sure they do have enough tools to build the building or to put the cart together, whatever it might be.

I was also struck by the importance of the point [Heidi Hamilton] already made of being able to speak to the different kinds of audiences that we address, which takes a remarkable code-switching ability. Obviously, people like Roger Shuy, who has done it in the law cases, have mastered that but I think for others of us, it is not easy trying to speak to the general public. It's not easy trying to speak to a reporter in a way that offers any chance of him or her being able to record accurately what you say.

And the last thing I'd like to say is also the importance of avoiding the demonizing of the institutions with which we work. So you know, the terrible teacher, the awful doctor, the heartless lawyer, whoever it is. I think there are a couple of important points here. One is that—these are very

human and obvious things—but one is that it’s really a hell of a lot easier to see what other people are doing wrong than to be able to see what we ourselves are doing wrong or to be able to correct it. And secondly, I like the point that Richard Frankel was making today that doctors really do want to do better. Teachers really do want to teach better. As we do our analysis and our criticism, we need to retain the sense that with the right way of talking to people and with taking care in our analyses, the people that we are talking about can benefit from and will really want to benefit from the kinds of input we can make. And, of course, there are lots of things that they know that we don’t know, too, that we ourselves can, in all humility, learn. So these are just some quick general points.

Shirley Brice Heath:

I just want to put a footnote on that and something of a caveat, because I think some of the areas of the professions warrant evaluations and warrant some kind of assessment, and language in education is a good example. Courtney Cazden is working on a rewrite of her book on classroom discourse and I talked to her a great deal about that book. One of the points that she has made in our discussions is that so much of the classroom discourse work that’s called educational linguistics or language in education or linguistics in education or whatever, tells you nothing about the learning that is going on. And one of the major difficulties, I think, in working as linguists in professions is that we often don’t feel obligated to undertake serious evaluations of whatever the infusion is that we may have been responsible for. And particularly any kind of assessment that will show what it is that linguistics has done. Roger [Shuy] talked about this years ago when he pointed out that in spite of all the efforts we’ve put as linguists into education, there’s been very little effect in terms of changing basic textbooks. Notions of Standard English or notions of even certain features such as “shall” and “will” and where they sit within questions of correctness, etc., continue. So to that end I wanted to ask [Richard Frankel] a question. Have you had any follow-through from the doctors that have gone through your program, which is obviously so exceptional, five years out, ten years out, fifteen years out, on issues of—the most obvious one would be medical malpractice suits—but on any other indicators that might show that they’re holding the power of the number of hours you give them? And what is your sense of the ability in the medical world to overcome the problem that we’ve not been able to overcome certainly in a number of the other professions with respect to linguistics? Is that making an influence on institutional change in directions that I think we all would agree should be made, if our evaluations hold positive returns?

Richard Frankel:

We have followed up some of the training programs we've done. The best single study of this whole area was done in Great Britain in 1987, and they took first-year medical students and they randomized them to either an experimental or control condition. The experimental group got communication skills training, empathy training, humanistic skills training. They then followed them five years into practice, which was eight to eleven years later depending on what specialty they went into, and there were vast differences between the people who had gotten it in the first year of medical school and what they were doing in practice. They were much more humanistic in their approach. So we know that it can be taught, learned, put into practice; it's not something you're born with or not born with; it's not nature or nurture. When Bill Clinton, I don't know if that's a name that I can say here [laughter], when he was candidate Clinton, he pointed to Rochester as the place where the health care costs were about a third less than they were in the rest of the nation. We've now caught up with the rest of the nation for unrelated reasons. The GAO [Government Accounting Office] actually did a study of Rochester, and one of the conclusions that it came to was that the health care costs were lower in Rochester because Rochester physicians had been taught in this bio-psycho-social model; they knew their patients better and therefore ordered fewer unnecessary tests. I think that there is good evidence that people who practice in this way do a better job.

A third piece of this has to do with physician satisfaction. There are three or four studies that have come out recently where physicians of all types were asked, "What's the most meaningful experience that you've had in providing medical care?" In every single study, 100 percent of the physicians talk about a relationship that was meaningful to them, and none of them talk about technology of medicine. It's all in the relationship. So we know that people who practice medicine in this way are more satisfied. The suicide rate among physicians is four times the national average. The divorce rate is about 70 percent, which is 20 percent above the national average. The rate of alcohol and drug abuse is twice the national average. So we know that physicians don't do so well in terms of their own personal lives, and though this is a bit of speculation, I think people who have learned to balance through their humanity as well as their head actually are at much lower risk as a consequence.

Shirley Brice Heath:

What about the use of these evaluations for institutional change? Your prognosis?

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Richard Frankel:

I can point to a couple of different experiments that are going on. We have a new dean for medical education who was the associate dean for students at Harvard, who has instituted what he's calling the "double helix curriculum" in Rochester. This is an integrated curriculum where the students from the first day of medical school will be seeing patients. I think one of the things that happens in medical training is the most intensive relationship you have with a patient as a beginning medical student is with a dead patient; it's with your cadaver. And you can take all the parts out, you can name them, you can put them back together again, but you still don't have a living, breathing patient. And that's where reductionism takes place. So if you give students the experience of talking to a living, breathing person at the same time as they're taking apart a dead person, it at least gives them a point of reference. [Laughter]. Again, none of this is exactly rocket science.

The other thing that I'll mention is a colleague of mine and I have been invited by the American Association of Orthopedic Surgeons to do some research with them on surgeon-patient communication. This organization has identified surgeon-patient communication as its highest priority. Mostly as linguists or sociolinguists, when we work, we work from the ground up, so we work in a clinic, we work in a medical school, we don't work with national organizations. Here's an opportunity to work from the top down with an organization that has identified a very pressing problem as its highest priority, so I think we're going to start to see more and more experiments of this sort.

One more thing if I may: I sit on the Test Development Committee for the National Board of Medical Examiners that writes the questions for which physicians have to be accountable in order to become licensed. Five years ago, 2 percent of the exam was focused on clinical communication, geriatrics, and ethics. This year, it's 20 percent of the exam. So there's been a wholesale shift in the board's focus on this important area. I think there is evidence starting to accumulate that there's institutional change that abounds.

Roger Shuy:

I'd like to go back to an earlier question, although I like that a lot and hate to stop it. I'm one of the old guys of the field of linguistics and remember what it was like to be a member of the Linguistic Society in the 1950s and 1960s. Many of you may not know that at that time we all met in the same room without concurrent sessions. There weren't a lot of us there. Jim [Alatis] and I were just talking earlier about the fact that there were maybe four textbooks in linguistics or five at most, so it

was easy to master the field rather quickly [Laughter]. But I also remember at that time that there were people at the Linguistic Society of America meetings giving papers who gave them on applied linguistics topics as well as theory topics. There was no split at that time. I remember Harold Allen who seemed to sit on both sides, Nelson Francis, Raven McDavid, Albert Marquardt, probably others I'm forgetting, who were linguists and were also applied linguists—and Charles Friese of course—and there wasn't that dichotomy, there wasn't that split that came. And I suspect it's because our field was young. As it got older, it went through its teenage doldrums and became more immature in some ways, I guess [laughs], but we had a split, and theory people didn't want to be with applied people, and applied people, frankly, didn't want to be with theory people. So we separated and went our different ways for a while.

But I think there is always an ebb and flow of this, and what I'm seeing in recent years is either ebb or flow, I'm not sure which, of a return, a joining again. It seems to me that we're moving now, and this conference is clear evidence that there is a demand, there is a desire, there is a hope among linguists that they can do something useful, besides worry about old Irish pronouns the rest of their lives—not that that's bad, I think we should not demean those people [Laughter]. I think theory is very important. I think a good applied linguist in any of our fields up here needs to know phonology, syntax, morphology, semantics. I think John was saying that we cannot lose the core here because that's what we do.

In any case, to the question of how does this get started, how do we get started, well I think I can speak for law especially. I was sitting on an airplane in 1979, sitting next to a man who was reading. He was crowded in the middle seat and the seats were a little wider then but you could still read what the person next to you had in his or her lap. It was clearly a sermon he was reading and I asked him if he was a minister. He said no, he was a lawyer, and this was part of a deposition. He asked, "What do you do?" and I said, "Well, I go around the country tape-recording people talking." He said, "Tape record? You know we have a case that involves tape-recorded conversations. Would you be interested in working with us?" And I did. I agreed to do that. The case was about soliciting murder, and I never heard anything like that before on tape [laughter] but I guess what I'm saying is, you seize the opportunity. There was a chance there to apply my field in a way that I never dreamed. I had no intentions of getting into language and law, no intentions of working with sex-ring cases out in Washington or with John DeLorean or any of those people. It was a happy accident, but one that I took when it happened. And I think now today the

initiation for people in language and law comes from lawyers, clearly, and my job, our job, is to make it known that we exist and that we can help them. In fact, I gave a paper at a legal education conference in Seattle a couple of weeks ago called “If You Have Language as Evidence, a Linguist Can Help You.” And I was speaking to lawyers. All the lawyers in the Northwest, I think, were there.

I think we have to do some promoting of our field, and that means traveling around and giving speeches—from here I’m going to speak to lawyers in Portland, Maine. It’s not maybe the most efficient way, but maybe that’s one way of getting to them. How do you work together? (Laughs.) With some difficulty. My paper was on that topic yesterday. I won’t go into that, but I think one of the recruiting problems—and I want to stress this—is that even where they have programs like the one Gerald McMenamin told us about today, an actual forensic linguistics program in the linguistics department at Fresno State, students who take those courses still are not experts. You have to be a linguist with expertise before they can call you to be an expert. You can’t start out being an expert; that’s what I’m trying to say. But that is what makes it difficult to recruit students because the problem is you have to be an expert before you can do the work. So you do the work as a linguist, you are a linguist first, and I think all of us on this panel probably agree that we are linguists and we happen to be working in these areas using our linguistics.

I rebel against the term “forensic linguistics” on the grounds that I’m a linguist. I happen to be working with law. I can’t think of why Rich [Frankel] would call himself a medical linguist or you [Allan Bell] would be a media linguist. These terms are helpful maybe for categorizing ourselves and holding meetings, but we should remember as John [Rickford] pointed out that we are first of all linguists.

Allan Bell:

One need that occurs to me is for insider researchers, especially where it’s hard for outsiders to get access and this is particularly the case in the media. The big hole in media research is on the production side because media organizations suspect and hate researchers and so it’s very difficult for a linguist or any other kind of mass communication researcher to get inside and do the research. But it’s possible for people like Colleen [Cotter] or me who’ve worked in the field to actually put that, as it were, insider access to work both in the service of linguistics and in the service of understanding that particular area. And I think in other areas, such as business, law, and so on, there would be great benefits from insiders having the linguistic and discourse analysis tools but

bringing the insight of their insiderness to the research because it's very hard to acquire those kinds of, as it were, hands-on insights. I think that's something that all our subfields would benefit from.

Philip Gaines:

I wanted to go back to Professor Heath's concern about developing avenues for influence as linguists and this may require seven different answers. I'm wondering what systematic or institutional obstacles exist to developing the kind of interest that we would like to see happen in institutions and professions. I'm thinking of Australia. Isn't it true that in Australia, there has been quite a lot of adjustment to some aspects of education as a result of impetus by linguists? In other words, the educational system has, at least at the secondary school level and perhaps the middle school level, adjusted itself, in terms of texts even, as a result of linguists working on ways of reforming education. However, in terms of the medical model it sounds to me as though doctors are thinking, "Well, this is a better way to do medicine; it's a better way to get good results too." So part of this is outcomes-driven, whereas in the realm of education, perhaps, some of it is outcomes, and perhaps some of it is "this is the right thing to do, this is the truth." So maybe it depends on the profession or the institution as to whether or not there are going to be systematic obstacles to linguistics making headway and if there are, how should we be thinking about that?

Shirley Brice Heath:

Let me just make one comment and observation on that. My observation in terms of influence on the institution of schools is that where linguists' work has had the greatest influence is where local people have taken over their schools and you have far fewer certified or professional educators in the system than was the case in the past. So much of the professional track for teachers is to ensure that their own job security is tightly held and that often means not doing the kinds of things that would involve humane behaviors or would involve extensive time with students around some of the most difficult issues in terms of language change. But that is an observation that I would make in terms of what I know about Australian schools and also the schools in Alaska. In the remote villages where so many of the native groups have been able to take over much more influence in the schools, that's when you have much more application of the work of linguists going on, and the same is true when you slip outside those edges of the institution into the arenas of learning that are not controlled by the professionally trained but rather are controlled by, in the case of the example that I gave you the other night

[Heath's plenary speech], by professional artists. Or who are coaches as artist, or by those who are coaches in dance, or in therapy, or in community service work. And that has been a very beneficial observation for me to make across a number of situations.

John Rickford:

I think one of the key things, in relation to education, is being able to “show me the money” or “show me the evidence.” Even though I support a lot of the original philosophy behind the California Standard English proficiency project that has been in place for seventeen or eighteen years (sound principles of Contrastive Analysis and so on and so forth) as I got involved in the Ebonics controversy and I went to the very highest levels and asked for quantitative evidence, it simply did not exist. Millions of dollars had been spent year after year, and nobody had the slightest bit of concrete evidence of any kind as to how effective this intervention was. The reason why the DeKalb County Bidialectal project in Georgia (see Harris Wright 1997) is so successful is partly because it bubbled up from the community itself, partly because it's smaller, but also because it's very tightly controlled and year after year after year, she shows concrete empirical evidence that her program is working. At the same time, when Simkins and Simkins (1981) did the same thing showing that their bridge program that started with Black English and then transitioned into Standard English worked, their very success was the undoing of the program. As soon as that success became known, people were no longer interested in the end result. They said, “What? What *means* are you using? You're using the dialect of the kids.” And although I don't know how true it is, one parent is reported to have said, “If you're going to teach my kid to read using dialect, I'd prefer you didn't teach him how to read at all.” That could be an inaccurate quotation, but some subjects are very volatile and there are differences in our respective subfields as to what will work and what won't work. My wife and I have written an article titled “Dialect Readers Revisited” (Rickford and Rickford, 1995, *Linguistics and Education* 7(2): 107–128) where we say that one of the ways to respond to that anxiety is to work in a smaller setting and be far more involved than linguists naturally are. We normally come in like a quick doctor, write a prescription, and go back to our teaching and our books. Very few of us are willing to take the time and trouble to get more involved, and as we do that, to understand the problems better, to build enough support from parents in the community so that you engender more trust and develop more understanding. Once we can show more concrete success at the local level, we can spread out more successfully to other levels and locales.

Deborah Tannen:

I was very moved by what you said, Roger, about thinking back to a time in the 1950s when, and I've heard this from other people too, there was one LSA meeting and it was both applied and theoretical, and all plenary sessions. But another thing that has happened since then, I think, is the profusion of theoretical approaches that probably didn't exist back then. And I'm thinking just over the, say, twenty-five years that I've been around seeing the theoretical approaches, some that came and went, others that developed their own following and paid no attention to the people who worked within another theoretical paradigm. I guess my question is twofold: over the years that all of you have worked, or any of you have worked, have you seen the emergence of particular theoretical paradigms that seem to be more powerful than others? In many fields now, the theory is really overtaking the study of data. It's particularly true in cultural theory, feminist theory, literary theory, English departments where people don't read literature any more. I saw a recent quote that I was really taken by: that women's studies used to be the academic arm of the women's movement and now it's the women's arm of the academic movement. [Laughter.] So I guess my question is a kind of a vague one, but from all your perspectives, any of your perspectives, any comment on this proliferation of theories? Is there any particular emerging or classic theoretical framework that is particularly powerful and useful or do all theoretical frameworks get in the way because they make us listen only to the people who work in the one that we're comfortable with?

Roger Shuy:

I think it's dangerous to say any particular theory is "the one" or that there is one on the horizon that is "the one" [laughs]. The thing that has struck me most is that the beneficial changes in linguistics that I have seen during my career have been its expansion beyond the sentence [laughs] to where we began thinking about units larger than that and meaning beyond literal meaning. So if we say discourse analysis and pragmatics, and I know I'm going to offend by leaving something out here, I think those are the directions that have made application easier. I remember working with a psychiatrist in New York City on schizophrenic patients and all I could work with was phonology and syntax, and it didn't help much because the patients' syntax was pretty good! [Laughter.] I didn't have the tools yet, and now we have the tools. I can now say something to him; unfortunately, it's way too late. And the other thing that I think is that many of the applied areas don't necessarily need the most powerful theory. Maybe the theory can be too powerful to be

helpful sometimes, and I don't mean to disparage theory in that, but I do see the useful things that we find in applied areas a whole lot like the old structural notions. In a way, they're kind of, you squint at the grammar and see the patterns, you know, you don't get the little details that are so powerful and important. I'm not demeaning those details, I'm not demeaning the theory, but I'm not at all sure that a powerful theory is always the most useful thing for an applied problem.

Shirley Brice Heath:

My answer is somewhat different because I'm a linguistic anthropologist. I would say that the theories probably since 1950 that have had the most effect—particularly on the issue of learning from infancy up through retirement—have been both ecological and ideological. These are the ones that have lasted and have been the most generative. From the work of George Herbert Mead to that of Gregory Bateson to Bakhtin to Vygotsky, the most beneficial theories have been the ones that are most generative, in large part because they are the ones that give us the greatest binding power across disciplines. They put the burden on us to be sure that if we're going to work with these theories, we can also attend to issues of motivation. We have to be willing to delve into experimental work to understand notions of motivation without just turning to common sense notions.

Barbara Bokhour:

We've been talking a lot about looking at discourse and looking at language and having impact on some institutional practice. And the question is, and I think anybody can answer, how do we take into account institutional framing and ideologies when we look at these language practices themselves, in order to then maybe reflect back to the institution in terms of what's going on, and how institutional ideologies may impact practice?

Lee Lubbers:

I would abstract totally from the institutions, and what I would look to constantly is the individual. I don't know if it has anything to do with your question, but it pops into my head at the moment: the thing I've learned here most of all, arriving here as a megalomaniacal technology freak, is that technology is not machines or wheels or cogs, it is energy of the individual. It is the, and I put it kind of funny, it's the "unleashed leashed" energy of the individual to achieve a good life and meaning in life. I'm really impressed with the kind of work that you people do in this area and that's why I conclude that language is the origin of our

understanding of ourselves through our different cultures and so forth. I won't belabor that; I think that's all I can say on the subject.

Allan Bell:

This is again probably not an answer but an observation. One thing that strikes me and I guess concerns me is the extent to which our work may serve, as it were, the "technologization of discourse." You can think of quite a number of areas of work, and the one that's had quite a lot of study recently, particularly by Deborah Cameron in the U.K., is telephone call centers where there is a high degree of prescription of language use by employees in order to achieve certain ends. That struck me that it's in fact the production of empathy that is wanted from telephone call center people, and I guess I have an ambivalent feeling about the extent to which applied linguistic expertise gets put to work in the production of empathy at least in certain contexts. I know that in my cultural background from New Zealand, empathy only works with the audience in so far as it is read as being kind of spontaneous and sincere. Therefore the production of empathy is almost a contradiction in terms, and so there's some kind of interesting ambivalences and almost ethical questions in there, I think, for which I have no answer to propose, just a question. Maybe others have answers.

Richard Frankel:

With respect to the issue of institutional contexts, and language and institutional contexts, I think we need to apply the same evidence base. In medicine, language is used very hierarchically. In aviation, language used to be used very hierarchically and people in the aviation industry realized at one point that it was causing planes to drop out of the sky and kill people. And so in the aviation context, a relationship-based communication system has been developed. It's called "cockpit-crew resource utilization management." And it has been shown definitively to reduce the number of accidents and incidents. So if you take two institutional contexts, one which is hierarchical and the other which is relationship-based, you can ask, "What happens when a mistake happens?" We know that physicians who make a mistake for which they're sued, twelve to eighteen months after the suit are at much higher risk for additional suits. Pilots and other crew members who are involved in accidents and incidents, twelve to eighteen months after the accident or incident are much less likely to be involved in additional accidents or incidents, and the question is why. In the aviation context, everybody has a vested interest in understanding what went wrong in the cockpit. It's that simple. It's everyone's interest; it's a collective interest. In medicine, we isolate

people, we blame them, we create a situation that is impossible for them, and the evidence is very clear that that negative response, institutionalized response, is reflected in increased risk for malpractice. So I think it's like any other scientific problem: what's the evidence that one institutionalized way of relating in discourse differs from another? You can use different outcome points, but I think the evidence is pretty clear.

Anne-Marie Currie:

Just a comment on points that have been raised from the panel. As a linguist who has taken advantage of the opportunity to enter technology, I wanted to address the point that was made that by entering technology, linguists are more removed from life-and-death issues. In my current work, we analyze medical record text, so even though I won't be meeting with patients directly, I'm actually helping to develop a tool that will effect change in doctors' practices because it allows for the access to information that may not have been there otherwise. So even though we're not directly working with patients, we still can directly effect change because we're directly working with the doctors, the physicians, and actually the institutions as well. The tool that I'm working with and helping to develop allows for outcome studies to be done, improving the quality of care by giving the information to the physician about the needs of follow-up care, identification of patients at risk, and the ability to identify patients that qualify for clinical trials, which is difficult to do. The other point I wanted to make relates to our discussion of the split between theoretical linguists and sociolinguists. I want to state that there is hope. The paper that I presented on linguistic approaches to the retrieval of medical information and medical record texts was a collaborative work by two linguists trained in theoretical syntax, a linguist trained in theoretical semantics, and me, a person trained in sociolinguistics. So I'd like to offer this as an illustration of what is beginning to happen more often. It's happening in technology and it's happening in the specific context that I'm working in that has a direct impact on people's lives. I just wanted to make that point.

Richard Frankel:

There are two comments that I want to make. Number one is I grew up in the 1960s and it was a time when it seemed like by understanding language, we could solve any problem in the world. And it's been a long time since 1968, and it's been a long time since I've been at a Round Table. But I think the comment that you just made is very much in point. I think there's tremendous hope; there's tremendous power and power to transform. The power is right here in this room; we don't have to look

to the studies that are out there. It's within us, and we've done a lot. We've acknowledged all of the people on the panel and all of the organizers. The only people we haven't acknowledged are you, the audience, so I want you to give yourselves a big hand because you've really carried this conference through.

Heidi Hamilton:

In closing, I want to say thank you so much, everybody, for being here. This is an exciting event. It was wonderful to see it all come together and to experience so much passion here. I also have great hope for linguistics in the future and I wish you all a very safe trip home.