

Oration for Professor Janet Holmes
To be held at 3pm on Tuesday 16 July 2019
by Dr Stephanie Schnurr

Chancellor

It is my great pleasure to welcome an internationally acclaimed scholar in the field of sociolinguistics, whose work will be familiar to many of our linguists graduating today. I am delighted to introduce our honorary graduand:

PROFESSOR JANET HOLMES.

Janet Holmes is currently an Emeritus Professor of Linguistics at Victoria University of Wellington. Her pioneering research in sociolinguistics – the study of the interaction between language and society – includes language and gender, cross-cultural communication, and, perhaps most importantly, the use of language in the workplace. Over the last ten years alone, Janet has published nine books and around 90 chapters and articles. She is also the author of one of the most widely used textbooks in sociolinguistics, which is now in its fifth edition. But Janet is not only an outstanding academic, she is also a role model, an inspiration, and a constant source of support for so many of her former students and colleagues, some of whom are sitting here today.

Janet is the leading scholar in Workplace Discourse Analysis, a field of study that developed in the 1970s. She was amongst the first to address the interpersonal aspect of interaction in the workplace, exploring how people talk to one another at work. She is currently working with skilled migrants to identify the communication issues they encounter and the attitudinal challenges they face at work. This has generated material applicable to workplaces outside New Zealand with cultural and linguistic diversity.

Janet once explained that she became interested in exploring language in the workplace from a desire to do ‘something that would have value in the real world, from other people’s point of view’. From this came the Language in the Workplace Project, which has taken Janet and her team into businesses and government departments in New Zealand, exploring the ways in which people use language at work. Through active collaborations, the impact of their work has been visible in the rest of the world.

Janet has also made an immense contribution to the development of sociolinguistics as an academic discipline. She was among the first to adopt a more dynamic approach to the study of gender and language, and her work has had a significant methodological impact on the development of the field. The ‘hands-off’ recording of interaction has been adopted by scholars across the world, and is currently used by many of our own Bachelors, Masters and PhD students.

But Janet is not only an outstanding scholar. She has also always been very generous in sharing both her expertise and her time with her students and colleagues. She has helped organise events in international conferences which are inclusive and supportive of new ideas and directions. And she has mentored and supported – and continues to do so – myself and many colleagues and PhD students here at Warwick, where from 2010 to 2018 she was an Honorary Professor in the Centre for Applied Linguistics.

Janet is also an Officer of the New Zealand Order of Merit, a Fellow of the Royal Society of New Zealand, and an honorary member of the Linguistics Society of America. She is a rare example of a scholar who has contributed to a paradigm shift in her discipline and has stayed at the forefront of developments in her field. While at the same time being a wonderful teacher, PhD supervisor, mentor, role model and inspiration.

We are delighted to welcome her back to Warwick today.

Chancellor, in the name of the Senate, I present to you for admission to the degree of Doctor of Letters, *honoris causa*, PROFESSOR JANET HOLMES.

595 words