

Language Practices in Australian Healthcare: The Unexamined Frontline of Medical Receptionists

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Rates of immigration to Australia have been increasing over the last twenty-five years, and more than 30% of current Australian residents were born overseas. Greater migration has brought increased linguistic diversity, and nearly 1 in 4 Australian households now uses a language other than English. Against this background, this study investigates the processes of language service provision for limited English proficiency (LEP) patients in English-language Australian medical institutions. This overall research problem is addressed through an institutional sociolinguistic ethnography investigating the relationship between the Australian language policies and guides around when an LEP patient should receive access to language support and actual practices of multilingual service provision at a medical institution in the greater Sydney area. Data collection involves policy audits, participant observation, and semi-structured interviews with healthcare receptionists and hospital admission teams. Findings shed light on the ways in which language policy is or is not operationalised in medical administrative processes, a crucial yet often overlooked component of a patient's healthcare experience. Results may be used to inform language policies and procedures that can be easily integrated into both administrative teams' and healthcare providers' workflows in order to improve healthcare provision for LEP patients. This work will reflect Macquarie University's future-shaping research Priority 1: "Healthy People" by investigating practices that shape the healthcare experiences of the local community.