

PLENARY A

Prof. Alexandre Duchene, University of Fribourg, Switzerland

Friday, September 25, 2026, 8.30 - 10.00

“Lost in Understanding: Why Bureaucratic Texts Fail Their Readers”



Abstract

Bureaucratic texts do not simply describe the state: they *script* citizens' lives. They allocate rights and obligations, impose deadlines, suspend benefits, demand action, and define who is recognized, eligible, compliant, late, absent, employable, disabled, or undocumented. A letter from a social insurance office, a migration authority, or a tax administration is never just informative. It is performative: it reorganizes trajectories, reshapes possibilities, and compels people to act — often under conditions of uncertainty. Yet despite their profound consequences, administrative letters are often experienced as difficult to interpret, or fundamentally opaque.

Based on ethnographic research on administrative literacy in multilingual Switzerland, this keynote examines why administrative letters so often fail to produce understanding, despite increasing institutional efforts toward linguistic simplification and “plain language.” The talk argues that the meaning of administrative letters emerges through a broader interpretive *infrastructure* that exceeds the visible text.

Readers encounter these letters through a *pre-text*: prior experiences with institutions, unequal familiarity with administrative habitus, emotional states, linguistic repertoires, and earlier encounters with official writing. Further, every administrative letter contains an *infra-text* — a hidden script composed of procedural logics, institutional assumptions, legal frameworks, temporal expectations, and tacit norms of conduct. But administrative letters are also embedded within an *inter-text*: a chain of prior and subsequent documents, forms, legal references, templates, notifications, databases, and institutional exchanges that readers are implicitly - and sometimes explicitly - expected to identify, connect and acknowledge. Meaning then continues to emerge through a *post-text*: the explanations, translations, interpretations, and negotiations that occur after reading, often involving relatives, NGOs, social workers, or official and informal intermediaries.

Administrative letters govern not only through what they state, but through the interpretive labor they impose on readers. Failed understanding is not merely a side effect of difficult language; it emerges from the gap between what the state presupposes readers already know and the fragmented textual worlds through which citizens actually navigate administrative life. Through ethnographic analysis drawn from social insurance correspondence, this keynote explores how administrative letters govern everyday life by requiring citizens to reconstruct the complex rules, references, and textual chains through which they themselves are being governed.

Alexandre Duchène is Full Professor in the Sociology of Language. His research is situated at the interface between linguistics and social science and is concerned with the role of language in the production of differences and social inequalities. He is a member of the board of directors of the [Institute of Multilingualism](#) and Head of the research group [Language and social inequalities](#). He is the General Editor of the [International Journal of the Sociology of Language](#) and a member of numerous editorial boards of international journals.

THE CANDLIN LECTURE

Professor Claire Kramsch, University of California at Berkeley, USA

Saturday, September 26, 2026, 8.30- 10.00

Namm Building, 10th Floor, Room:

“Making Applied Linguistics Matter in the Age of A.I.”



ABSTRACT

When Chris Candlin and Srikant Sarangi titled their editorial for the first issue of *Applied Linguistics* in 1980 “Making applied linguistics matter”, they were responding to the challenges presented by the new communication technologies and their implications for the teaching and learning of foreign languages. At stake was the ability for language learners to achieve a communicative competence that approximated that of the native speaker in the real-world outside the classroom. Since then, globalization, the advent of the internet, the spread of English as a global language and the general weakening of boundaries of all sorts (e.g., geographical, epistemological, disciplinary, genre and gender related) have broadened the professional areas in which applied linguistics matters.

Today, professional practice in applied linguistics faces an inordinately more complex challenge, that is both political and technological.

1) *The current political landscape in the U.S.* Under the pervasive influence of an autocratic populist regime aided by social media in a market economy, calm, ethical professionalism has very often given way to transactional self-promotion; professional diplomats and generals have given way to real estate deal makers and reality TV wars. Even in applied linguistics some researchers display the performance of social justice without necessarily taking professional action.

2) *A.I. and professional practice.* A.I. is permeating all domains of life but none more pervasively than the professional practice of language use. How is Open A.I. changing the very meaning of “professional”? How does the way we even think and talk about chatbots challenge the way applied linguists think and talk about language, discourse, morality and identity?

This paper will attempt to stake out these challenges and their implications for the field of applied linguistics in an era of artificial intelligence.

BIO NOTE

Claire Kramsch, born and educated in France, came to the U.S in the sixties where she taught German language and literature at M.I.T for 25 years. In 1990 she moved to the University of California at Berkeley where she taught German and applied linguistics on the undergraduate and graduate levels until 2015. She is now UC Berkeley Emerita Professor of German and Education. She has written extensively on language, discourse, culture, multilingualism and symbolic power. She is in particular the author of *Interaction et discours dans la classe de langue* (Hatier, 1984), *Context and culture in language teaching* (OUP, 1993), *Language and culture* (OUP, 1998), *The multilingual subject* (OUP, 2009), *The multilingual instructor* (with Lihua Zhang, OUP 2018) and *Language as symbolic power* (CUP, 2021). She is the co-editor of the edited volumes *The multilingual challenge* (with Ulrike Jessner, 2015) and *Decolonizing applied linguistics research in Latin America* (with Harold Castena Pena and Paola Gamboa, 2024). She is with Zhu Hua co-editor of the series Key Topics in Applied Linguistics (CUP) and Language and intercultural communication (Routledge). She is the past president of the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAA) and the International Association of Applied Linguistics (AILA).

PLENARY B

Professor Tammy Gales, Hofstra University, New York City, USA

Sunday, September 27, 2026, 12 noon - 1.00 p.m.

“The Promises and Perils of AI-Generated Police Reports”



Police reports are a cornerstone of the criminal justice system. They are the official record of an event, documenting the date, time, location, and participants involved; they serve as a reference point for further investigation; and they become vital narratives in court proceedings. Thus, their composition plays a seminal role in the work of police officers. Recently, however, some jurisdictions have transferred that responsibility to an AI-assisted tool. Working from the audio recordings captured by body-worn cameras, the tool first generates a transcript and then drafts a police report, all within minutes. Despite “human-in-the-loop” safety protocols built into the tool, there are many documented ways for problems to arise within the resulting reports. For instance, researchers have found that transcripts produced by talk to text programs—such as those relied upon by this report-writing software—can be fraught with errors due to ambient noise, non-standard language use, and overlapping speech, among other variables (Ferguson, 2024). Additionally, while steps have been taken to reduce

overt racism in AI-generated texts, covert racism remains (Hofmann et al., 2024). Finally, while chatbots have the capacity to process transparent pragmatic meaning (e.g., canonical apologies), they still have difficulties with non-canonical forms (Yu et al., 2024). This talk documents instances of such problems through an analysis of approximately 30 police reports generated by this tool and presents additional concerns raised in supplemental user feedback. Current collaborative efforts with law enforcement that promote a more cautious approach to using AI in police reporting are underway.

Bio Note

Tammy Gales is a Professor of Linguistics and the Director of Research at the Institute for Forensic Linguistics, Threat Assessment, and Strategic Analysis at Hofstra University, New York. She is the President of the International Association for Forensic and Legal Linguistics (IAFL), is co-editor (with Tim Grant) of the Elements in Forensic Linguistics series from Cambridge University Press, and is on the editorial boards of the journals *Applied Corpus Linguistics* and *Language and Law / Linguagem e Direito*.

Gales’ research interests cross the boundaries of forensic linguistics and language and the law, with a primary focus on threatening communications and the use of corpus linguistics in statutory interpretation. Recent publications include *The Interpretation of Statutes Over Time* (with Kevin Tobia, and Larry Solan, forthcoming) and *Speaking of Crime: The Language of Criminal Justice*, 2nd ed. (with Larry Solan and Peter Tiersma, 2025). She has trained law enforcement agents from agencies across Canada and the U.S. and regularly applies her work to criminal and civil cases.