Institution: University of Nottingham

Unit of Assessment: UoA 27 (English Language and Literature)

Title of case study: *Reducing inequalities through language: Influencing policies and changing communication practices to improve the lives of individuals and communities in the UK, Uganda and Kenya*

Period when the underpinning research was undertaken: 2003-2020

Details of staff conducting the underpinning research from the submitting unit:

Name(s):	Role(s) (e.g. job title):	Period(s) employed by submitting HEI:
Prof Louise Mullany Prof Kathryn Conklin Dr Fabio Parente	Professor of Sociolinguistics Professor of Psycholinguistics Teaching Associate; Assistant Professor in Psycholinguistics	01/01/2003 – 01/09/2005 – 03/01/2017 – 31/01/2018; 01/09/2018 – 31/01/2020

Period when the claimed impact occurred: 2014-2020

Is this case study continued from a case study submitted in 2014? N

1. Summary of the impact

Everyday discrimination is embedded in sociolinguistic communicative practices across public domains and spaces including the law, politics, education, workplaces and on the street. Research in the School of English has addressed these inequalities based on gender, ethnicity and educational attainment levels in the UK and internationally in Uganda and Kenya. It has: i) informed policy changes and public debate to improve the law and combat misogyny/gender hate crime in the UK; ii) increased the capacity of NGOs and charities to address gender inequality and improve the life chances of women and girls in Uganda and Kenya; iii) improved workplaces by enhancing professional communication around the world; iv) protected disadvantaged individuals and enhanced company-client relations by improving the readability of insurance documents in the UK. This work has transformed for the better the everyday lives of those at risk and discriminated against in the UK and in Uganda and Kenya.

2. Underpinning research

The applied linguistics research of Mullany, Conklin and Parente has underpinned collaborative partnerships with stakeholders from the private sector, the third sector and international organisations. Their work has identified and analysed discriminatory practices and failures of communication in workplaces and public life, and they have discovered and implemented practical ways to empower organisations and individuals to bring about socio-cultural change.

Mullany's research demonstrates that bias and harassment give rise to disadvantage on the grounds of gender, ethnicity and social class: because of ingrained linguistic stereotypes and prejudice in workplaces (**1**, **2**); through powerful language stereotypes that dictate sex-role stereotyping and legitimise linguistic violence in communities (**3**); and through the language of street harassment (**4**). Her work finds that this disadvantage can be countered by using an applied linguistic approach to bring about policy and social changes (**2**, **3**, **4**).

In 2016, Nottinghamshire Police became the first Force in the world to bring in a policy on misogyny as a hate crime. During 2017-18, Mullany, in collaboration with Trickett (Nottingham Trent University), undertook an innovative, interdisciplinary evaluation of the policy (supported by **F3**), examining its language politics and analysing the experiences of police, victims and the general public to understand the implications of the policy. Drawing on Mullany's expertise on sociolinguistic aspects of workplace prejudice (**1**) and the vulnerability of women and girls in public spaces (**2**), their report was published by Nottingham Women's Centre (July 2018) and as a 2020 book chapter (**4**). Their findings on the widespread nature of misogyny hate crime, its serious impact on victims, and the overwhelming public support for Nottinghamshire's policy, led them to conclude that a national roll-out of the policy was needed. The research also found that under-reporting of misogyny hate crime is linked to misunderstanding of the word '*misogyny*'; Mullany and Trickett argued therefore that the policy wording needed to be changed from '*misogyny*' to '*gender*' (**4**, **p. 266**), to make gender-based hate crimes more recognisable to the public and to encourage increased reporting of such offences.

Mullany's analysis (with Lumala, Moi University, Kenya) of life narratives (2017-2019) from women and girls in Kenya, Uganda, Ethopia and Mauritius (including farmers, rural and urban market traders, politicians, lawyers, NGO leaders and UN women officials) has highlighted damaging socio-cultural discourses and language practices that hold back vulnerable and under-

privileged people. These include miscommunication around women's health and well-being, limited access to education due to gender discrimination, and the proliferation of gender-based violence and forced marriage (**3**). Mullany's work, focusing on stories of career development as tools of inspiration and mentorship, shows how narratives of personal and professional success in the face of adversity, can be used to counter these disadvantages and empower oppressed voices, including women in forced marriages and those denied education (**3**).

Mullany's sociolinguistic research identified key communication strategies (e.g. speech acts) used in workplaces (**1**). Producing innovative datasets of real-life workplace communications (2003-2008; 2014-2019), she demonstrated how linguistic bias and discrimination disadvantage women (**1**, **3**) and other groups with protected characteristics including ethnicity and religion (**5**) in career opportunities, promotions and rewards. Mullany addressed these disadvantages by developing new frameworks for inclusive communication based on politeness theory, leading to more effective leadership styles (**1**, **3**), decision-making practices and team dynamics (**2**).

Research by Conklin and Parente with Hyde (Law, UoN) assessed the utility of reading scores in determining whether 'terms and conditions' are expressed in plain and intelligible language (**6**). It concluded that their use should be supplemented with other ways of evaluating how consumers read: eye-tracking readers' eye movements while they read terms and conditions, along with comprehension questionnaires (**6**). This work enabled a collaboration with a leading UK law firm, Browne Jacobson LLP, starting in 2016, to improve the drafting of insurance contracts, an area of significant concern for this sector in view of the regulatory onus on insurers to comply with readability requirements for the benefit of all consumers.

3. References to the research
Outputs:
1) **Mullany, L.**, (2007). *Gendered Discourse in the Professional Workplace*. Palgrave. ISBN 9781403986207.
2) **Mullany, L.** and Mills, S., (2011). *Language, Gender and Feminism: Theory, Methodology and Practice*. Routledge. ISBN 9780415485951.
3) Lumala, M. P. and **Mullany, L.**, (2020). Language, Gender and Leadership: Narratives of East African Professionals. In: **L. Mullany,** ed. *Professional Communication: Consultancy, Advocacy, Activism*. Palgrave. pp. 65–88. ISBN 978-3-030-41667-6 [drawing on a collection of life history narratives published online and in print as a resource for NGOs, charities educators and other end-users: **Mullany, L.** et al., eds. (2019). *The Voices of Women in Africa*. University of Nottingham, 17pp.].
4) **Mullany, L.** and Trickett, L., (2020). The Language of Misogyny Hate Crime: Policy, Politics and Policing. In: **L. Mullany,** ed. *Professional Communication: Consultancy, Advocacy, Activism*. Palgrave. pp. 249–272. ISBN 978-3-030-41667-6 [based on a 66-page research report produced for the Police and Crime Commissioner: **Mullany, L.** and Trickett, L. (2018). *Misogyny Hate Crime: A Research Evaluation*. Nottingham Women's Centre].
5) **Mullany, L.** and Yoong, M. (2016). Language, Gender and Leadership Identities in Political Life. In: S. Preece, ed. *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Identity*. Routledge. pp. 428–442. ISBN 9781138774728.
6) **Conklin, K.**, Hyde, R. and **Parente, F.**, (2019). The Concept of Transparency in the Consumer Rights Act: A Role for Reading Scores?. *Legal Studies*. 39(3), 378–97. DOI: 10.1017/lst.2018.25.

Grants:
F1) European Regional Development Fund, 'Linguistic Profiling for Professionals' (2016-2019), project value £482,000, ERDF income £241,000, **Mullany PI**, 08R16P00053. Part of 20.1 million cross-institutional *Enabling Innovation*, with UoN, NTU and the University of Derby.
F2) AHRC, Global Challenges Research Fund, 'Language, Gender and Leadership Network', (2017-2019), £48,702, **Mullany PI**, with M. Lumala (Co-I, Moi University, Kenya), AH/R004439/1.
F3) Nottinghamshire Police and Crime Commissioner Award, Nottingham Women's Centre Funding, 'Evaluating misogyny hate crime' (2017-2018), £2,156, **Mullany** and L. Trickett (Nottingham Law School, NTU), **Joint PIs**. SfW2017/18.

4. Details of the impact
Research by Mullany, Conklin and Parente has helped to address inequality and bring about positive social change in the UK, Uganda and Kenya by improving communicative practices in

politics, the law, workplaces, and education. Their work has transformed policy and practice and improved the lives of individuals and communities, with the following key impacts:

i) Informing policy changes and public debate to improve the law and combat misogyny/gender hate crime in the UK

Mullany and Trickett's research on the language of misogyny (**4**, **F3**) strengthened a national campaign to '*make misogyny a hate crime*' (**a**), led by grassroots organisations including Citizens UK and the Fawcett Society, and public figures including Stella Creasy MP and Sue Fish OBE QPM, retired Chief Constable of Nottinghamshire Police. Creasy notes that Mullany and Trickett's research (**4**) '*shed light on the intersectional nature of hostility towards women from black and ethnic minority (BME) backgrounds*', and that their recommendation that '*intersectionality should be at the heart of misogyny hate crime policy'* was a '*key part of how we have conceptualised misogyny as a hate crime during our campaign*' (**a**). Providing systematic evidence of the linguistic nature, type and intensity of street harassment, violence and discrimination in public spheres (**4**), Mullany and Trickett's '*research [was] pivotal*', Fish confirms*, 'in persuading other police forces to adopt misogyny/gender as a hate crime and influencing parliamentary debate (the Voyeurism Bill), which led directly to the Law Commission being tasked with reviewing all hate crime, including adopting gender/sex as a hate crime*' (**b**). The research (**4**) was also '*shared with the Women and Equalities Committee [and cited in] their inquiry into sexual harassment in 2018, which resulted in increased pressure to address reform of hate crime laws*' (**b**; **c**, **p. 29**, **note 134**).

   Mullany and Trickett's research (**4**) subsequently fed into the Law Commission's Hate Crime Review (2019-20) and '*is cited several times in [their] consultation paper on hate crime laws (2020)*' (**d**; see **e**, **pp. 231, 261, 275, 276**). The Law Commission confirms that Mullany and Trickett's work '*assisted our research into the possibility of making "sex or gender" a protected characteristic in hate crime laws*' (**d**). In providing '*quantitative insight into the numbers of women reporting misogyny hate crimes in Nottinghamshire*' and '*demonstrat[ing] that the change in recording practices of misogyny hate crimes did not overstretch the resources of Nottinghamshire police*', Mullany and Trickett's work '*increased [the Law Commission's] understanding of the scale of reporting*' and '*possible resource implications*' of '*a wider roll-out of the policy*' (**d**). Mullany and Trickett's recommendation that the policy's wording be changed from 'misogyny' to 'gender' (**4**, **p. 266**) also '*informed [the Law Commission's] provisional conclusion that it would not be appropriate to include the term "misogyny" in hate crime laws*' (**d**); their Consultation Paper recommends the use of '*gender or sex*', rather than the '*too academic and inaccessible*' term '*misogyny*' (**e**, **pp. 273, 276**). The (Covid-delayed) consultation period closed in December 2020; results are expected in 2021. The policy of recording hate crime based on sex will be extended to all police forces in 2021 (House of Lords announcement 17 March 2021).

   Mullany and Trickett's work (**4**) gained extensive national media coverage (up to 90,702,052 article views in UK, US, and Switzerland, **f**), raising public awareness of misogyny hate crime, and '*enhanced the national debate by providing a robust and credible evidence base of the difference the policy of misogyny as a hate crime has made*' (**b**). Fish, Chief Constable of Nottinghamshire Police in 2015-2017, comments: '*the research has been pivotal in persuading other police forces to adopt misogyny/gender as a hate crime*' (**b**). Five other forces (North Yorkshire, Northamptonshire, Avon and Somerset, Devon and Cornwall, and Surrey) have now adopted the policy (**b**), enabling women to report incidents safely, with assurance that they will be taken seriously. As Fish testifies, '*[t]he research continues to inform the national campaign to make misogyny/gender a hate crime and to gain new advocates and supporters*', providing '*the vital research base to enable cultural change*' (**b**).

ii) Increasing the capacity of NGOs and charities to address gender inequality and improve the life chances of women and girls in Uganda and Kenya

Research from Mullany's AHRC-GCRF-funded 'Language, Gender and Leadership Network' (**F2**) has benefitted NGOs and charities in Uganda and Kenya, providing them with resources for role modelling/mentorship and educational training to work towards the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goal 5, Gender Equality. Based on empirical research data, a website for (auto)biographical narratives and a short story book (*The Voices of Women Leaders in Africa*) both focus on women who overcame gender-based adversity to succeed and become

established professionals in their societies (**3**, **g**). East African NGOs and charities (9 in all) including the Institute for Social Transformation (Uganda and Kenya), Raising Teenagers Uganda, Teach for Uganda, and The Mustard Seed Project (Uganda), have worked with businesses, schools and community groups, using the resources as key information tools to implement their policies and practices to address gender inequality (**g**).

Raising Teenagers Uganda, an NGO dedicated to '*eradicating early and forced marriage and keeping girls in education*', confirm that Lumala and Mullany's work has '*positively impacted the lives of over 20,000 [girls,] their families and their communities*' in Kampala and urban and rural regions across Uganda (**h1**). The '*innovative research-based training materials*' (**3**) have provided the NGO with '*a wide range of role models and figures of inspiration*', which they have used as '*tools to inspire girls and to persuade their families and communities that it is a girl's human right to be fully educated and to be allowed to achieve their true career potential*' (**h1**). Through foregrounding '*women who have succeeded in becoming leaders, often in the face of adversity*', the research has enhanced delivery of the NGO's '*mission*' to educate communities about '*the value of keeping girls in school and ensuring that they are not subject to the horrors of forced or early marriage*', assisting in their '*fight against gender inequality in East Africa*' (**h1**).

The resources (**3**) have enabled The Mustard Seed Project to change '*the lives of 550 women and girls in various Ugandan communities*': the '*research has profoundly influenced our activity, shaped our approach to […] addressing gender inequality in Uganda, and provided us with specific ideas to increase our capacity to provide on-the-ground support, language and leadership training opportunities and increase the skills-base in a geographical area where women face severe barriers to equality*' (**h2**). Lumala and Mullany's research (**3**) increased the charity's understanding of the '*importance of women and girls developing group identities and collaborative leadership styles based around collective gendered activities*', leading the charity to '*set up […] girls' football teams based at their schools to keep them in education systems for as long as possible*', which have '*benefited more than 70 young women*' (**h2**). The research also highlighted that '*menstruation was a significant issue keeping young women out of school, alongside gender-based violence in shared toilet facilities*' (**3**), leading the charity to build a new women-only toilet block at Tisai Island School, and set up a new training initiative to teach 300 women and girls from the Tisai Island community to make '*reusable, period-proof underwear*' (**h2**). Since 2019, these activities '*increased regular [school] attendance for over 200 young women and girls*' (**h2**). The charity reports that '*the research has increased our capacity to deliver on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals 2030 of gender equality, improving health and well-being and working to eradicate poverty*', and is '*having a really positive effect on our organisation and on the lives of the hundreds of women we support in rural Uganda*' (**h2**).

In Kenya, the life-history narratives (**3**) have empowered female NGO leaders in their '*fight for gender equality*': '*the stories […] not only broaden my perceptions […] about gender issues but also made me so courageous and strong towards […] promotion of girl child welfare and strengthened me to help fight against harmful traditional practices*' (**3**, **p. 85**; **g**). Although Covid-19 halted work in Kenya with the published resources (**3**), activism inspired by the narratives has resulted in increased employment of female teachers, distribution of sanitary products in schools, and training to promote female education in Kenyan communities (**3**, **pp. 83-5**; **g**).

iii) Improving workplace culture and experience by enhancing professional communication around the world

Professionals regionally and world-wide reported benefits to their ability to negotiate workplace cultures gained from workshops and consultancies based on Mullany's analysis (**1**, **2**, **5**) of social and professional identities and communicative styles in workplaces and public spheres. In the East Midlands, 30 research-based communication strategy consultancies, and 14 workshops on language and gender, leadership and organisational change with 240 representatives of SMEs, public sector organisations and businesses, enabled participants to build research-informed innovation into their communication strategies (**i**). Participants report that the activities '*helped us to move towards clearer and more effective communications with our customers*'; and '*opened a new world for me in the way I communicate my messages to the business world*' (**i**).

The MOOC 'How to Read Your Boss' was delivered to 46,413 people in 130 countries in 2014-18, ranking in the top 10 of worldwide MOOCs in October 2014 (**j**). Beneficial change was effected in workplace communication by participants learning to recognise sub-conscious

language behaviour: '*When I started the course I was unemployed. This week, I secured a job. I have been reflecting heavily on the interview process and comparing it with previous interviews, taking into account some of the things learnt on this course [...] I am certainly going to take away elements of what I have learned [...] and put them into practise in my new role*' (**j**). MOOC participants credit the course with changing their outlook and making a positive difference to their lives: '*Definitely saw the difference when I learned how to read my boss, my colleagues and myself than before. It's like seeing the world and my workplace from a different perspective*' (**j**).

iv) Protecting disadvantaged individuals and enhancing company-client relations by improving readability of insurance documents in the UK

Complex legal documents commonly pose readability challenges for non-specialists, creating barriers between law firms and their clients and increasing risk by placing clients in a vulnerable position. Research by Conklin et al. (**6**) underpinned their collaboration with the leading law firm Browne Jacobson LLP (2016 –) to improve the drafting of insurance contracts to reduce levels of incomprehension. The firm notes that the work by Conklin et al. '*made us aware of the large proportion (approximately 87%) of the UK adult population that struggles to read and understand insurance policy documents, and [...] the resultant need for clearer policy wording in the insurance market to protect these vulnerable individuals*' (**k**). As a result of the research, the firm changed the way it drafted legal documents; the research '*enabled us to: 1) better understand the reasons behind client incomprehension; 2) improve the quality of our drafting skills to enhance readability and reduce levels of incomprehension; and 3) develop best practice for drafting policies across the industry*' (**k**). This changed practice improved client experience and reduced risk and vulnerability: the firm '*used the research to reduce the reading age of a policy by more than 10 years, so that the percentage of the UK adult population that could meaningfully understand it increased by 75.6%, from 13.4% to 89%. That means that an extra 40.4 million people in the UK could read and understand the policy due to the improvements brought about by the research. Such a result provides protection for disadvantaged groups and individuals in the UK insurance market, and opportunities for improved company-client relations*' (**k**). The research also improved the law firm's standing and reputation in their field: '*the specialist services we are able to provide through our partnership with the University has proven to be a real USP in the insurance market. In November 2020, we were proud to be shortlisted for Legal Business Partner of the Year in the Insurance Times awards, which was followed shortly with a shortlisting for the British Insurance Awards. The release of the academic report [6] has significantly cemented our reputation as market-leaders in the sector for policy drafting advice and has played a key role in a number of new client wins*' (**k**).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact

a) Letter from Stella Creasy MP regarding the influence of Mullany and Trickett's research in parliamentary debates and policy discussions.

b) Letter from Susannah Fish OBE, QPM, retired Chief Constable, Nottinghamshire Police, regarding the benefits of Mullany and Trickett's misogyny hate crime research

c) *Sexual Harassment of Women and Girls in Public Places* (HC 701), House of Commons Women and Equalities Committee Sixth Report of Session 2017–19, 23 October 2018.

d) Letter from The Law Commission regarding the influence of Mullany and Trickett's research in their Hate Crime Review.

e) *Hate Crime Laws: A Consultation Paper*. Law Commission Consultation Paper 250, 23 September 2020.

f) Media reach report for Mullany and Trickett evaluation report (2018).

g) Dossier for LGL Network: narrative resources URLs; LGL Network organisations; testimonials from NGO leaders in Kenya, quoted in Lumala and Mullany (2020).

h) Two letters from organisations in Uganda regarding improved capacity to address gender inequality: **h1)** Letter from Raising Teenagers Uganda; **h2)** Letter from The Mustard Seed Project (Uganda).

i) Summary report for ERDF workshops/consultancies: key statistics and participant feedback.

j) Dossier of 'How to Read Your Boss' MOOC statistics and feedback: global course ranking; course metrics; selected participant comments.

k) Letter from Browne Jacobson LLP regarding improvements to insurance contract readability.