

VICTORIA  
UNIVERSITY OF  
WELLINGTON

*Te Whare Wananga  
o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui*



*Greetings from the  
Careers Advisory Service of  
Victoria University*

*Career View is published by the  
Careers Advisory Service to provide  
information on careers and  
employment to students, graduates  
and friends in the community.*

*Topics cover a wide range of areas  
from information on how degrees  
and courses relate to employment  
opportunities, to life/work planning,  
graduate destination information  
and current issues or material  
relevant to the employment scene.*

*In this issue of Career View we look  
at the fascinating area of Linguistics -  
why people choose to study it and  
the range of skills it develops.  
We also profile four recent graduates  
who write for us about their work.*

# Career View

ISSUE NO 13 • NOVEMBER 1998

## Linguistics

What is the difference between a dialect and a language? Why do the terms mama, papa, nana, dada appear in the 'baby talk' of so many languages? Do women and men speak differently? What goes on in an individual's mind when they make speech errors such as saying 'tips of the slongue' for 'slip of the tongue'? The study of Linguistics offers answers to such questions and supplies the tools to explore the structure of language and how it is used, in a scientific way. If you have an interest in language and enjoy logical, analytical reasoning and debate, or if you are interested in what language tells us about people and society, then you will probably enjoy studying Linguistics. Linguistics graduates are interested in all kinds of fascinating issues. What are the problems and possibilities in getting computers to 'understand' speech? Which sounds do babies learn first? Can the Maori language survive? What are the implications for a country's education system if there is no one language that is a first language for all its pupils? What can a person's speech reveal about their social background?

### Why study Linguistics

Speaking to graduates of linguistics the reason most typically given for studying Linguistics is that it is a fascinating, stimulating and useful subject that is very much about people. Linguistics complements many other areas of study like Education, Psychology, Social Science, Mathematics, Computer Science, Music, Philosophy, Business, and of course, Languages.

### What Skills Does the Study of Linguistics Teach?

The graduate of Linguistics has skills and knowledge that may be used in many fields.

#### • Research and Project Management Skills

Graduates have skills in the collection,

interpretation and presentation of raw data and data from other sources, including electronic databases. They are able to offer a well-researched, considered opinion on topics relating to Linguistics and are able to debate issues in this and related fields with confidence. Projects completed during the degree encourage the development of project design, co-ordination and management, and evaluation and presentation skills.

#### • Oral and Written Communication Skills

The course develops excellence in written communication. Students prepare critical reviews and present data in tables, graphs and reports. Graduates develop an exceptionally high degree of accuracy skills, attention to detail particularly with reference to listening, reading and

writing, sensitivity to the ways in which written and verbal information is communicated and the relationship between spoken and written language and an awareness of how gender, culture and other issues can and do affect language.

Exceptional oral communication skills are developed through a number of strategies, for example, interviews with subjects where natural speech must be encouraged in order to understand the technicalities of spoken language. Students develop and practice interviewing skills, they learn how to structure an interview, how to establish rapport, as well as how to record and evaluate an interview through the use of linguistic tools and questionnaires.

#### • **Ethics, Tolerance and Interpersonal Skills**

The Linguistics graduate develops keen social and political awareness and the ability and willingness to behave in a way that demonstrates an understanding of politeness and cross-cultural, cross-language and cross-gender communications. They are also expected to accept others' opinions, values and attitudes in a professional, objective way.

### *Where do Linguistics Graduates Work?*

#### • **Education**

Many graduates of Linguistics become educators. Whilst the majority of graduates find work as teachers within the primary and secondary sectors, others work in tertiary or adult education as tutors and lecturers. There are limited research opportunities available, for those interested in working in areas like language policy, sign language, lip-reading and the acquisition of second language skills by children with learning disabilities. In a survey of Linguistics graduates undertaken by the School of Linguistics, skills and knowledge identified as being most useful for entry into this field were phonetics, language change and language learning processes.

• **TESOL** (Teaching of English to Speakers of Other Languages)  
Linguistics graduates move easily into

careers involving TESOL and into language development roles. There are many opportunities in these areas. Related to these are careers in speech and voice training, where there are two distinctive areas - performance arts and therapeutic work, similar to that offered by speech therapists. Opportunities in this field are relatively limited.

#### • **Training**

Training for the workplace is another area in which linguists are able to exploit their considerable versatility. Many organisations employ professional trainers to develop their staff's skills, including communication abilities, or to help resolve work problems. These can range from training employees in strategies for dealing with verbal abuse from clients (particularly valuable in the medical, social and protective services sectors) to designing training programmes for individual employees.

#### • **Research and Administration**

Many Linguistics graduates find work in the Ministry of Education, usually in research, policy analysis, or advisory positions. There is a steady demand for well-qualified graduates who demonstrate enthusiasm for their subject. Contract work is often the way in, with opportunities for more interesting, responsible and long-term work offered to those who prove themselves. Some graduates find work in educational institutions, including universities in New Zealand and overseas. Linguistics graduates are also to be found in a number of government departments in a range of administrative roles.

#### • **Information Technology and Computer Science**

There is strong demand for graduates able to offer Linguistics with Computer Science or related degrees. Programming language, natural language acquisition, artificial intelligence and computer applications are all extremely advantageous areas to pursue, providing an excellent basis for a career in Computing and Information Technology. Graduates have found work in programming, systems analysis and training and new job

roles are emerging within this exciting and buoyant industry.

#### • **Library and Information Management**

Excellence in communications is critical to business success. The Linguistics graduate has a role to play, with the necessary skills to assess, evaluate and advise on the effectiveness of business communications at all levels including communications in the global environment. Workplace interpersonal and electronic communications are potential growth areas in which the Linguistics graduate has the opportunity to make a valuable contribution.

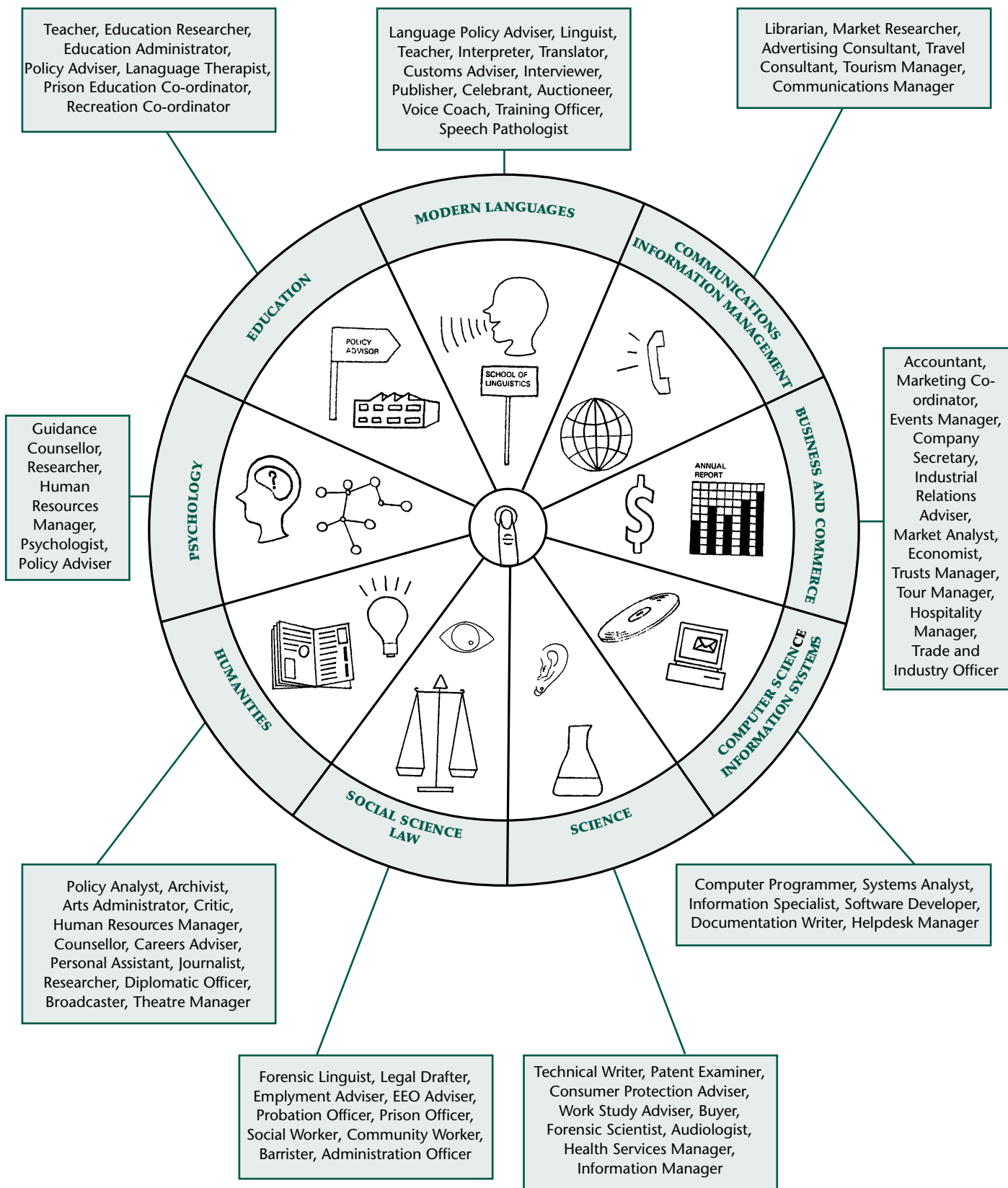
Linguistics graduates are employed in a number of government departments and in large organisations where information and communications specialists are required. The Government Communications Security Bureau, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Parliamentary Select Committee, National Library of NZ, Shell Company of Australia, Transalta NZ Ltd have all employed Linguistics graduates in this role.

The Linguistics graduate is comfortable using research tools and has gained an understanding of information management issues. Many major topics in Linguistics are discussed and debated on an international, global basis, and the Linguistics graduate will have become familiar with some of the technology that facilitates this.

#### • **Advertising, Marketing, Market Research and Public Relations**

Experience gained interviewing subjects and accurately recording speech and conversation provide a useful foundation for these careers, as will skills gained in analysing the relationship between written and spoken language, and the ability to use language accurately and persuasively. Linguistics is a very people oriented subject and experience in observing and even predicting how language may be used or interpreted in various contexts, has particular relevance to jobs in these fields.

# LINGUISTICS WHEEL



### • Media, Journalism and Publishing

A degree in Linguistics is an excellent basis for many careers in which accomplished written and verbal communication skills are required. Linguistics graduates are often employed in compiling, writing, editing and publishing dictionaries, encyclopedias, grammars and other language reference materials. With the huge expansion of electronic media in New Zealand and overseas, there are good opportunities for Linguistics graduates. An Honours degree or conjoint degree may be required for many of these positions.

### • Interpreting and Translating

The combination of Linguistics and a modern language can lead to employment in interpretation and translation. Most work initially through an agency but there are opportunities to freelance for those with experience. To succeed in this area graduates must have excellent language skills, be able to use industry and business specific vocabularies, and have high levels of accuracy and reliability. It may take some years to become established in this work. An Honours or higher degree and membership of the NZ Association of Interpreters and Translators is usually required.

### What else can a Linguistics Graduate do?

A number of Linguistics graduates are employed in positions where they may not directly use their special knowledge and skills. Many employers recruit graduates from a wide range of disciplines, interested in generic, transferable skills rather than subject-specific ones.

Many intending students make decisions about their course of study based upon employment opportunities at the end of their degree. It is equally important to study the subject at university that truly inspires you and for which you have real enthusiasm. A combination of vocational and academic subjects may lead to a more balanced degree. Double majors and degrees are popular for this reason. The Linguistics Wheel shows just how

versatile a degree in Linguistics can be and indicates some of the jobs anyone interested in Linguistics may wish to explore. Access to some of these occupations would involve a double major or double degree, plus post-graduate degree study.

## Graduate Profiles

### Maria Aptekar Part-time Editor, Brooker's Ltd



Maria discovered her love of Linguistics entirely by accident. She came to Victoria University to

study modern European Languages, an interesting choice of subject given that her strongest subjects at school were Mathematics and Science. Part way through her degree, Maria opted for Linguistics papers to complete her major course of study. She had taken two Linguistics courses earlier and enjoyed them. It was at this stage that she discovered her passion for Linguistics.

"I loved it. The people who teach it are approachable and know their subject. People often say to me, so you're studying Linguistics, where's that going to take you? I continue to study Linguistics out of interest and actually feel that my options are more open than they would have been, had I studied a more obviously vocational subject. I could teach ESOL (English as a Second Language), I could enter mainstream teaching, become an academic or explore a number of other interests that I have like travel and tourism. I really enjoy the mystique attached to saying I studied Linguistics - it's a good conversation starter. People always want to know what Linguistics is."

Of all the papers Maria studied during her Linguistics degree, Phonology was the one that she enjoyed most. "I found it really interesting looking at speech sounds

and what sounds make up a language. It's useful to have studied at least one language (a prerequisite to do the course), but you are often looking at languages that very few people in the world speak, like Eskimo or Swahili where you'll be analysing the sounds, not trying to learn the language! People have said to me, you're a linguist, you must speak lots of languages...this degree is not about learning other languages. It's incredible but there are more than 6,000 languages in the world - Linguistics potentially gives you access to all of them."

There are cross-overs and overlaps between all sorts of subjects that make the study of Linguistics a rich experience. For example, papers like Psycholinguistics bring together Linguistics and Psychological theories. Maria has recently become interested in forensic applications of Linguistics. In Forensic Phonetics (auditory analysis), the skills of the phonetics expert combined with computer analysis of acoustics are used to help identify police suspects based on voice recordings. A forensic linguist looks in more detail at speech patterns, use of language, sentence construction etc. After completing her Bachelor's degree (BA), Maria found temporary work as a Research Assistant, and was then offered her current part-time position at Brooker's Ltd, legal publishers. She enjoys the work and is presently formatting legal cases for addition to the Law Database that is one of Brooker's major products. Skills developed during her degree of particular use in this role are attention to detail, research and editing skills (spelling and grammar) and experience in working to deadlines. Editing is one of the job areas that Maria is particularly interested in. Although a legal background is usually required for permanent editing positions in legal publishing, Maria says that she is building up a good knowledge base as a result of her current part time position. "I did a basic commercial law course recently and information that I came across as part of my job at Brooker's is now falling into place."

Maria will be completing a second degree in Tourism at Victoria (BTSM) at the end of next year and is considering teaching overseas.

### **Nichola Kim** *Systems Engineer/Programmer, EDS*



Nicola is currently working at EDS as a Systems Engineer/Programmer. She majored in Linguistics and Operations

Research at Victoria University, graduating in 1996. Nicola has studied Japanese language as well as a variety of science papers such as Computer Science, Operations Research, Mathematics, Statistics and Physics.

"I wanted a career in the Information Technology (IT) field as information has become more than a tool for doing a specific job. We are only just beginning to explore the applications and potential of IT. I enjoy my job as I am working in a global service company where we use information and technology to achieve remarkable results in ways that have a positive impact on people.

As English is my second language, learning English was an interesting part of my life. I studied Linguistics because I have always enjoyed learning other languages and about other cultures. The knowledge I gained from studying Linguistics complements the computer skills that are necessary for my current job as a computer programmer. I think that Linguistics and computers are closely related, as Linguistics provides a theoretical basis for practical applications. Nowadays, language processing such as automatic translation, speech synthesis and recognition are done using computers. Having studied Linguistics I find that I have a real advantage in being able to understand the potential and challenges for programme design in this area.

To stand out as a good programmer in the programming and development areas of the IT industry, you need to be creative, have good problem solving and analytical skills, and be able to think logically. Studying Linguistics provided me with the skills that I need to be a good programmer. For example, learning the sentence patterns of language helped me to understand the basis of syntactic structure of computer programming language. Semantic processing methods are based on mathematical logic and are also used in Computer Science. The creativity of linguistic knowledge helped me in designing programs and databases.

I particularly enjoyed the Sociolinguistics and Language in Use papers. The skills I developed, how to communicate effectively and how to achieve optimal interaction with people, are useful in my job. I work in a team environment where it is important to maintain a professional relationship with team members and with clients. I also learned to prioritise and manage my time effectively. The workload of essays and assignments I did in Linguistics helped to prepare me for the volume of documentation I now deal with.

I love my job. It's challenging. It gives me plenty of new things to learn as the technology changes all the time. I enjoy working with people. It provides me with opportunities to excel both financially and intellectually."

### **Maurice Walker** *Researcher, Ministry for Education*



Maurice majored in Linguistics and Education for his BA and then went on to complete an Honours Degree in

Education in 1996. He had previously taken an introductory Linguistics paper at Canterbury University in 1988, while studying part-time, as an attempt to improve his language

skills. Maurice found Linguistics such a fascinating subject that when he returned from abroad he decided to complete a BA majoring in Linguistics.

"I had originally planned to teach English as a Second Language, which would offer the chance to meet a lot of interesting people. I substituted some of my Linguistics papers for Education ones to help this along.

While studying Linguistics, I particularly enjoyed the papers I took in language learning processes, sociolinguistics and linguistic description. They were all very different which was very refreshing.

At the time I was at Victoria University, students majoring in Linguistics had to complete at least 12 credits in a language other than English (now 36 points). I was interested in the theories and research of language usage in general and was at first somewhat reluctant to meet this requirement. But I decided to take the two introductory courses in te reo Maori and enjoyed it tremendously. Not only was the linguistic experience valuable but the courses attracted a wide range of people, and it was a strongly supportive learning environment and used 'best practice' for the teaching of second languages.

Having finished my BA, I went on to complete a BA in Education. I now work as a researcher for the Ministry of Education, undertaking international comparative studies. While what I learned is not central to my job, there are a lot of skills and knowledge that I use peripherally. For example, it is important to be informed about research and theories in the field of bilingual education when discussing immersion and bilingual schooling, or when looking at the implications for assessing students from non-English speaking backgrounds. Also in many of the Linguistics courses I had the chance to design and undertake small research projects, enhancing my general social science research skills which I now use every day."

**Karen Thomas**  
*Teacher of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL) and Remedial Learners English, Raumati College*



Karen discovered Linguistics when she returned to university after several years of working overseas.

“Living and working in Japan made me really explore the concept of language and communication. Working with non-native speakers of English at various levels, was a constant learning experience. I was introduced to the art of understanding what is meant, without necessarily understanding what has been said!

I decided to study Linguistics because to me it seemed to make sense, that a thorough understanding of the structure and working of language would be helpful - if not essential - for teaching English and ESOL which is what I wanted to do. I found that throughout completing my degree, studying at teacher training college and working part-time at a government ministry, linguistic skills and knowledge have been invaluable. I feel that my perception and understanding of meaning - overt and subtle - in all forms of communication has been enhanced and my ability to clearly and concisely express ideas and opinions has been sharpened.

In Linguistics, we often studied aspects of language learning and teaching that I had been exposed to while in Japan. As a language learner in a foreign language environment, you are constantly trying to make sense of what you see and hear. It was

really helpful returning to University and studying Linguistics as it provided a theoretical framework for the informal knowledge and conclusions I had reached in Japan. A particularly enjoyable course, ‘Historical Linguistics’ examined how and why language changes - the sounds, words, meaning and grammatical rules - it was fascinating! Studying semantics was some of the most interesting and useful work I have done at University. It has proved to be really valuable when interacting with people from different cultures where it is necessary to be aware of and understand different perspectives. This has been useful for understanding the difficulties faced by ESOL learners in N.Z. Now in my work as an ESOL teacher, I constantly apply knowledge gained during Linguistic study. It is particularly useful when talking about the sounds of English or other languages and the shape and make-up of words and the meanings of words.

### *Linguistics Courses at Victoria University*

Linguistics can be taken as the major subject of a BA (Bachelor of Arts) degree or combined with other subjects such as Philosophy, Computer Science, Anthropology, Psychology, Education, English Language, Music, languages, and many more. Linguistics can also form part of a double degree such as BA/LLB (Bachelor of Laws), BA/BSc (Bachelor of Science) or BA/BCA (Bachelor of Commerce and Administration).

Linguistics courses begin at 200-level. The only prerequisite is 36 points in any subject. The introductory course, LING 211, includes the study of phonetics (the sounds of human languages), phonology (the sound systems), morphology (the structure of words), syntax (the structure of sentences) and semantics (the study of meaning). There are also more advanced courses in each of these areas.

Sociolinguistics explores the way language is used in social contexts, in everyday conversation, and in multilingual communities. The sociolinguistics course (LING 221) can also be taken by any student who has completed 36 points in any subject, as can Language and Education (LING 222) a course examining the value of linguistics for educators. There are many more courses in linguistics including courses on New Zealand English (LING 322), on the use of language in interpersonal communication (LING 321), on language variation (LING 324), on the way first and second languages are learned (LING 223), and on the ways in which we process and produce language (LING 323).

If you major in Linguistics you can continue on to Honours level with your studies. At postgraduate level, an MA by coursework or by thesis is available, and beyond that qualified students may undertake a PhD thesis.

The Wellington Corpora of New Zealand English, the Deaf Studies Research Unit, and the New Zealand Dictionary Centre are based at Victoria University, providing plenty of opportunities for graduate study.

Victoria University has on its staff a number of internationally respected researchers in linguistics so this is an opportunity to learn about linguistics from leaders in the field.

This year, working as an ESOL/RLE (Remedial Learners English) teacher at a multi-cultural secondary school in Wellington, I am teaching students from a wide variety of backgrounds and educational experiences. ESOL students are constantly trying to make links between their languages and English and I feel that knowledge of the structure of languages helps me to help them make these links. When teaching RLE students, linguistic knowledge is useful to help identify areas of difficulty and to devise strategies to overcome these difficulties.

#### *Special thanks to:*

*Prof Janet Holmes and academic staff of the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies (Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Victoria University), Maria Aptekar, Nicola Kim, Maurice Walker, Karen Thomas and all the other people who contributed to this publication.*

*Career View is published by the  
 Careers Advisory Service  
 Victoria University of Wellington  
 Te Whare Wananga o te Upoko o te Ika a Maui  
 PO Box 600, Wellington  
 Tel: 0-4-471 5390 or 0-4-471 5393  
 Fax: 0-4-495 5234  
 ISSN 1172-4315*