



The “Living with Uncertainty” Project

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Arts & Humanities
Research Council



Living with Uncertainty: Metaphor and the Dynamics of Empathy in Discourse

- Research Fellowship in “Ideas and Beliefs”
- funded by ESRC and AHRC as part of the RCUK Global Uncertainties Programme
- www.globaluncertainties.org
- The Fellowships will investigate how notions of security and insecurity develop in individuals, communities, organisations, institutions, nation states and international domains.



Why empathy?

- Societies are increasingly mobile and transient.
- People are faced with a need to understand others who they may find, not only very different from themselves, but also sometimes holding attitudes and beliefs which may be difficult to accept.
- Empathy as understanding of others, across differences.
- Positive empathy opens up possibilities for alternative responses to uncertainty than apathy, hardening of attitudes, or violence.



Why metaphor?

- Empathy happens through language: people talking, the rhetoric of politicians, the news media, popular fiction, song...
- Metaphor analysis offers a powerful method to investigate the dynamics of ideas, attitudes and values in language.



Uses of the research

- How official communication, media discourse and fiction contribute to fostering empathy.
- How positive relations between social groups in times of uncertainty can be developed.



Components of the project

- A theory of empathy in discourse.
- Empirical investigation of empathy in different types of discourse and contexts.
- Extending metaphor analysis as a method for social sciences research.



People in the project

- Researchers
 - Principal Investigator: Prof Lynne Cameron
 - Research associate, Year 1: Dr Robert Maslen
 - PhD student: tbc
- Collaborators
 - Dr Bruna Seu, Birkbeck College
 - Professors Jennifer Mason and Carol Smart, University of Manchester
 - Dr Ana Cristina Macedo and colleagues from the Federal University of Ceará, the State University of Ceará in Fortaleza, and Universidade de Caxias do Sul, Brazil
 - Dr David Ritchie, Portland State University
- The Empathy Network
 - Potential research users: academic and non-academic
 - UK and European



The rest of the morning

10.45 – 11.45 ‘Talking towards Empathy’
Jo Berry and Patrick Magee

11.45 – 12.00 *Coffee*

12.00 - 13.00 ‘Metaphor and Empathy’
Lynne Cameron