The transformation of things: the impact of language and context on symptoms, meaning and (even) disciplines

This talk will focus on the ways in which language and context can shape our experiences across a number of different health domains. Primarily it will explore the extent to which physical symptoms including hunger and pain can be changed by how language is used and the context in which they are experienced. Next it will examine how individual words used in the interaction between health professional and patient can influence the patient’s model of illness and the meaning they associate with their condition. Finally, the talk will examine how the language used by academic research can shape the ways in we make sense of health, and understand the individuals that we study. Overall it is concluded that our health experiences from symptoms to cognitions are transformed through language and context and that even the essence of who and what we study is shaped by the ways in which it is described.

After completing her PhD at the Institute of Psychiatry in 1990 Jane Ogden lectured first at Middlesex University then Kings College London. She joined the University of Surrey as Professor in Health Psychology in 2005 where she teaches psychology, medical, vet, nutrition and dietician students to think more psychologically about health. Her research focuses on eating behaviour and obesity management, symptom perception, aspects of women’s health and communication. She has published 6 books including Health Psychology: a textbook which is now in its 5th edition and has been translated into 6 languages, the Psychology of Eating which is in its 2nd edition and has been translated into 3 languages and The Good Parenting Food Guide which is aimed at a lay audience. She has also published over 170 papers including several theoretical critiques and debates and is a regular contributor to the media writing a regular column for The Conversation.