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Researching Workplace Discourse: A Review

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Language in the Workplace
Occasional Papers

This series of occasional papers is aimed at providing a wide range of information about the way language is used in the New Zealand workplace. The first paper outlines the aims and scope of the core project, the Wellington Language in the Workplace Project, and describes the approach adopted by the project team in collecting and analysing workplace data. The second describes the methodology adopted to collect workplace interaction, and its developments and adaptations to the very different demands of disparate workplaces. Subsequent papers provide more detailed analyses of particular aspects of workplace interaction as well as descriptions of methodologies for researching workplace communication.

These include:

- an analysis of varied ways people get things done at work, or the forms which directives take in different New Zealand workplaces
- an exploration of the functions of humour in workplace interaction
- an analysis of the structure of formal meetings in relation to the way decisions are reached
- an examination of the varied literature on the role of e-mail at work
- an analysis of problem-solving discourse

The series is available in full text at this website: http://www.wgtn.ac.nz/lals

The core research team currently includes Professor Meredith Marra (Director), Emeritus Professor Janet Holmes (Associate Director), Dr Bernadette Vine (Corpus Manager), and a number of Research Associates. We would like to express our appreciation to all those who allowed their workplace interactions to be recorded and the Research Assistants who transcribed the data.

A shorter version of this paper will appear in Ken Hyland, Brian Paltridge and Lillian Wong (eds) *The Companion to Discourse Analysis.* London. 2nd edition. 2021.

Abstract

Research on workplace discourse has increased considerably in the last two decades with developments in theoretical approaches, methodologies, analytical approaches, and the types of discourse which have attracted attention. This chapter aims to indicate something of the breadth, as well as the fascination, of research in this area. Current research analyses discourse in many different types of workplace contexts, as well as a variety of aspects of workplace interaction, including meeting talk, the role of humour, narrative, and small talk alongside transactional discourse, the construction of professional, ethnic and gender identities in the workplace, and the contribution of digital communication in workplace interaction. Following a case study illustrating some of these points, the chapter ends with a brief consideration of future directions, such as the growth of research on workplace transitions, multilingual communities, and digital workplace communication, as well as increasing cooperation and consultation with practitioners.

Introduction[1]

Research on workplace discourse has increased considerably in the last two decades. This chapter is necessarily selective, though hopefully it indicates something of the breadth, as well as the fascination, of current research on workplace discourse.

Early research focused on doctor-patient interaction, and legal language, especially courtroom discourse, and these remain areas of interest for many researchers (see Halkowski this volume; Olsson this volume). But the scope of workplace discourse research has broadened considerably and now encompasses many different institutional and non-institutional contexts, as well as a range of aspects of interaction, such as the construction of professional identities, including leadership identities, features of interaction in meetings, the role of humour, small talk, and narrative at work, and the contribution of digital communication to workplace interaction.

While recognising that much valuable work has been undertaken on written discourse in workplace contexts (e.g. Gunnarsson 2009), this chapter focuses on talk at work. The next section provides an overview and discussion of a selection of current qualitative research on spoken workplace discourse (for quantitative approaches, see e.g. Pickering, Friginal and Staples 2016). Some of the concepts discussed are illustrated in the third section with a brief sample study drawn from the corpus of the Wellington Language in the Workplace Project (LWP). The chapter ends with reflections on future directions for the analysis of workplace discourse.

Current research on spoken workplace discourse

Following a brief note on methodology, I discuss examples of workplace discourse research organised into three broad categories: firstly, different types of workplace interaction, secondly, two broad sociolinguistic dimensions of analysis – power and solidarity; and thirdly, two areas of social variation – gender and ethnicity in the workplace.

Methodology

While ethnographic approaches involving participant observation and interviews often provide supplementary data, the prevailing data collection methodology in workplace discourse research involves recording naturally occurring talk in ‘authentic’ situations. Early researchers, using a predominantly CA approach to analysis, audio-recorded relatively formal interactions such as job interviews, interactions between health professionals and clients, and service encounters (e.g. Drew and Heritage 1992). Others focused on collecting audio- and sometimes video-recordings of workplace meetings (e.g. Boden 1994; Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris 1996). Gradually, the scope of recording expanded, and Clyne (1994) describes a project where factory workers from diverse ethnolinguistic backgrounds carried microphones to record their everyday workplace talk. This methodology has since been expanded and adapted for a wide range of different workplaces (Holmes and Stubbe 2015), and is currently the predominant approach used in collecting workplace interaction (e.g. Vine 2018).

In terms of analysis, current research exemplifies a variety of approaches to analysing workplace discourse, ranging from qualitative ethnographic and interactional sociolinguistics approaches, through micro-level description of the details of talk provided by CA approaches and multimodal analysis (e.g. Mondada 2014; Norris 2011) to the politically-motivated framework adopted by Critical Discourse Analysts (CDA), and the more quantitative approach of corpus analysts (e.g. Pickering, Friginal and Staples 2016). Some of these are discussed in greater detail elsewhere in this volume. This chapter concentrates instead on giving readers a sense of the range of contexts and the dimensions of analysis that qualitative researchers in workplace discourse have found useful. One distinction which has proved valuable is the distinction between the transactional (or referential) dimension and the relational (or interpersonal or affective) dimension of meaning in talk. Analysts emphasise the fact that the distinction is simply a useful heuristic tool, since every interaction has elements of both dimensions of meaning. In current research, the distinction facilitates the analysis of the complexities of a wide range of different kinds of workplace interaction, such as small and large meeting discourse and talk in service encounters, as well as the construction of aspects of social identity, such as gender, ethnic and professional identity, including leadership and expert identity. Some of this complexity will emerge in the discussion which follows.

Different types of talk at work

In this section, research on workplace interaction in different social and cultural settings is discussed. The main focus is on meetings, probably the most extensive area of workplace discourse analysis, followed by a brief discussion of research on service encounters and other occupational genres.

White collar professionals spend a very large proportion of their time in **meetings**. Different studies (involving different methods of calculation) indicate that meetings occupy anything between 25 and 80 per cent of the work time of the white-collar workforce. It is not surprising, then, that discourse analysts have devoted a good deal of attention to meeting talk, examining the discursive strategies used in the management of meetings (e.g. Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris 1996), and the complexities of how things get accomplished interactionally through meeting talk (e.g. Firth 1995; Sarangi and Roberts 1999; Geyer 2008), including multimodal communication (e.g. Svennevig 2012). More specifically, those using a CA approach have identified patterns which help define a meeting, such as the structure of the opening and closing phases and the distribution of turns (Boden 1994; Mirivel and Tracy 2005), while others have discussed discursive ways in which topics are demarcated in meetings (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris 1996; Svennevig 2012). More recently, Angouri and Mondada (2017) revisited issues of definition, as well as exploring the complexities which characterise intercultural meeting talk (see also Angouri 2018; Schnurr and Zayts 2017).

Research by the LWP team notes that conventions for formal meeting openings and closings often differ for different cultural groups, and this may influence workplace meeting norms, as was evident in the Māori workplaces researched (Holmes, Marra and Schnurr 2008). Researchers analysing the discourse patterns in meetings between Chinese and British business people (Spencer-Oatey and Xing 2003), between Chinese and English-speaking Westerners (Bilbow 1998) and between Japanese and American business people (Yamada 1997) have similarly identified culturally significant contrasting patterns in appropriate ways of interacting in such meetings. For example, Chinese business meetings generally maintain a relatively high level of formality and the opportunity to deliver a formal speech stating one's position is considered very important, and a sign of respect. By contrast, Western business meetings often favour informality; indeed 'dispensing with formalities' is regarded positively as a sign of good rapport. Such differences can result in offence in intercultural meetings, and they led to a significant communication break-down in the case study documented by Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2003).

The importance of the relational dimension in meeting talk has been given explicit attention by some discourse analysts (e.g. Holmes and Stubbe 2015; Koester 2006; Mullany 2007; and see Mirivel and Fuller 2018). In many socio-cultural contexts, for example, meeting openings tend to be preceded by solidarity-building social talk as people wait for the meeting participants to assemble (e.g. Mirivel and Tracy 2005). But more subtly, relational aspects of interaction are often pervasively evident throughout meeting talk on predominantly transactional issues, as Geyer (2008) illustrates in her detailed analysis of facework in six teacher meetings in Japanese secondary schools. Adopting a dynamic post-modern approach, she conceptualises 'face' as a 'speaker's interactional social image' (2008 :6), and examines how 'an interlocutor ascribes and is ascribed multiple discursive and social identities which in turn can invoke multiple faces' (2008: 6-7).

Meetings are also sites for constructing and enacting facets of professional identity. While there is some research on aspects of professional identity in meetings between just two or three participants (e.g. Vine 2004; Koester 2006), most analyses focus on relatively large group meetings (e.g. Kim and Angouri 2019). In such contexts, the role of the meeting chair provides many opportunities for asserting status and 'doing power', since the chair has the right to declare the meeting open, to move discussion to new agenda items, to summarise progress, to ratify decisions, and to close the meeting (e.g. Bilbow 1998; Holmes and Stubbe 2015; but see Halvorsen and Sarangi 2015 for a nuanced analysis of decision-making as a joint production based on organisational role-responsibility and expertise).

Discourse analysts have also examined features of **service encounters** involving different interactional contexts, ranging from corner shops, through bookshops and hair salons, to supermarkets, tourism, and including telephone transactions (see Félix-Brasdefer 2018). Research has focused on the structure and dynamics of service transactions, including the role of small talk, humour, and other politeness devices, and the discourse analysis sometimes involves consideration of the skilful use of more than one language to accomplish interactional goals in service encounters (e.g. Kuiper 2009). The ways in which discourse is used to construct and negotiate different aspects of social identity by participants has also been analysed in this context. In Galicia, for instance, Prego-Vazquez (2007) describes how customers switch between Spanish and colloquial and dialectal Galician in order to negotiate professional and personal identities in interaction with borough officials concerned with water and sewage treatment services.

There is a small body of research which focuses on specialised **occupational genres**, such as the discourse of auctioneers, sportscasters, and weather forecasters. The structural features of airline pilot talk (Nevile 2007) have also been studied, including how these contribute to the construction of complex occupational identities (Ashcraft 2007), and multifaceted practices, as does research into medical areas such as genetic counselling (Zayts 2018), nursing (Lazzaro-Salazar 2016, 2017, Lazzaro-Salazar and Walton in press) and eldercare (Karlsson and Nickolaidou 2013).

Finally, in this brief review, workplace interactions between American and Japanese workers in car-manufacturing factories were studied by Sunaoshi (2005), with a focus on how workers from different cultural backgrounds negotiated through to understanding. There is also considerable work by interactional sociolinguists on intercultural communication, focusing especially on the significance for migrants of miscommunication in crucial work settings such as job and promotion interviews (e.g. Campbell and Roberts 2007; Zhu 2018).

Power and solidarity in workplace interaction

These two dimensions of analysis provide a framework for considering many aspects of workplace interaction, including how people perform leadership at work, and the role of humour and narrative in workplace interaction.

There is a huge literature on **leadership**, but the ‘turn to discourse’ in this area has been relatively recent. Earlier research used questionnaire and interview data rather than examining how leaders actually talk at work. According to one study, leaders spend on average ‘between 62% and 89% of their time in face-to-face communication’, and ‘between one-third and two-thirds of their time communicating with their subordinates’ in the workplace (Gardner, Callan and Terry 1996: 153), and a more recent analysis indicated that CEOs spend up to 50 per cent of their week in meetings (Perlow, Noonan Hadley and Eun 2017); hence a focus on their workplace talk seems well justified.

The research of the LWP team has been seminal in this area (see publications on webpage: www.vuw.ac.nz/lals/lwp). Our detailed discourse analyses support claims by leadership scholars that effective leadership talk demonstrates a range of diverse competencies, including transactional skills oriented to achieving workplace objectives, and relational skills which take account of interpersonal aspects of communication, such as establishing rapport with colleagues, and nurturing collegiality among team members. Social constructionist approaches thus emphasise the complexities and ambiguities associated with accomplishing leadership, as well as the importance of discourse in managing meaning (e.g. Wodak, Kwon and Clarke 2011; Aritz et al. 2017).

Current theories of leadership highlight the importance of assertiveness and authority, qualities normatively associated with masculine styles of interaction, as well as relational skills, attributes normatively associated with more feminine interactional styles. Thus both women and men must negotiate a complex path through the social expectations which surround the leadership role to construct a satisfactory identity in their specific communities of practice (Baxter 2015; Holmes 2006; 2017; Schnurr 2009). In this process, effective leaders draw from a wide and varied discursive repertoire, selecting appropriate strategies in response to particular interactional contexts. Using a feminist post-structuralist theoretical perspective to analyse her data, Baxter (2010) argues that effective leaders need to juggle between different and competing subject positions in order to fulfil a range of business goals, and that female leaders have added demands in order to sustain a credible set of professional identities. Gender in workplace discourse research is discussed further below.

Research on speech functions such as directives also involves consideration of the power dimension in workplace discourse analysis (see Saito and Minegishi Cook 2018). Good management entails getting people to do things at work. Vine (2004) examines the range of ways in which directives are expressed in the interactions of four senior employees in a government department. She demonstrates, in particular, that the force of any directive, and especially its interpersonal or relational impact, is greatly influenced by its precise discursive positioning in a specific social context, with the relevant context sometimes extending over several meetings. Similar conclusions have resulted from the analysis of workplace disagreement, conflict and negotiation (e.g. Richards 2006; Geyer 2008; Koester 2018). A related strand of speech function research has focused on the challenges for those from other cultures in appropriately expressing problematic or challenging speech acts such as refusals and complaints, especially when these are directed upwards to those in positions of greater power (e.g. Clyne 1994, Riddiford and Holmes 2015).

Turning to the solidarity dimension, **humour** has attracted a good deal of attention from workplace discourse analysts (see Schnurr 2009; Mak 2018 for useful reviews).

Early research in this area often argued that workplace humour benefited employment relationships by increasing job satisfaction, creativity, and even productivity. In contexts as diverse as hospitals paramedical departments, hotel kitchens, and police departments, humour was shown to have beneficial effects. An interesting study of the use of humour by Indonesian female and male managers to enhance collegiality shows how discourse analysis can provide insights into economic and social change (Petraki and Ramayanti 2018).

Looking at the ‘darker side’ of workplace humour, others argued that it could be used manipulatively, as a control mechanism for example, by the chair in white-collar business meetings (e.g. Mullany 2007), or by the management in a factory to encourage conformity to group norms. Alternatively, humour can be construed as a strategy for expressing resistance. In a white-collar, commercial context, Rodrigues and Collinson (1995) demonstrated that Telecom employees in Brazil used humour (and particularly cartoons) not only as a safety valve for channelling emotions and expressing dissatisfaction, but also as a weapon of contestation and a means to effect change.

Humour has also been considered as a distinguishing component of workplace culture (e.g. Holmes and Stubbe 2015; Schnurr 2009). To a greater or lesser extent, every organisation develops a distinct workplace culture, and particular workplace teams can often be described as distinctive communities of practice, with particular ways of doing things and systems of shared understandings within an organisation. Humour frequently plays a part in this process. IT companies, for instance, are often characterised by a distinctively masculine, contestive and challenging style of interactive humour (Plester 2016). In British academic and research team contexts, Richards (2006) illustrates a more affiliative and collaborative style of humour in meetings, contrasting with more contestive styles in other communities of practice and in less formal contexts. Others have examined how workplace leaders and their team members use humour to collaborate in constructing not only a particular type of workplace culture, but also a leadership style appropriate to their particular community of practice (e.g. Holmes and Marra 2006; Schnurr 2009).

Research on workplace **narratives** has similarly examined their contribution to the construction of complex professional identities (e.g. Mullany 2006; Ladegaard 2018; Clifton, Schnurr and Van De Mieroop 2020). While most researchers have focused on the construction of workplace identities through individual's narratives, some have shown how groups (often jointly) use stories to construct themselves as a productive and professional team, or a competitive squad, as a 'family business' or a streamlined organisation (eg. Richards 2006). Conversely, like humour, narrative provides a subtle means of contesting or subverting the prevailing organisational ethos or workplace culture, through stories which present an alternative reality. And workplace stories also provide a means of constructing the professional identities of others as effective or inadequate, competent or incompetent team members.

Narrative can also make an important contribution to gendered discourse, reinforcing stereotypical constructs of masculinity, such as hierarchy, structure, dominance, competitiveness, aggression and goal-oriented action, or normatively feminine dimensions such as egalitarianism, collaboration and cooperation (Holmes 2006; Baxter 2010). A rare foray into a blue-collar work context, for instance, demonstrated how three white, working class, male builders constructed their professional identities through collaborative narratives while travelling in a truck between different building sites (Baxter and Wallace 2009). The next section focuses explicitly on gender and ethnicity in workplace discourse.

Gender and ethnicity in the workplace

As the discussion above suggests, sociocultural norms inevitably influence workplace interaction, whether individuals conform to them or contest them. The gender order (Eckert and McConnell-Ginet 2013) and the culture order (Holmes 2018), for example, hegemonically prescribe socially and culturally appropriate behaviour, including linguistic behaviour. This may take the form of expectations about which language is regarded as appropriate in particular types of interaction, such as service encounters or formal meetings, or whether women or men are regarded as most suitable representatives of a company in interactions with clients or as spokesperson for a group (Holmes 2020). In workplaces where Māori ways of doing things are respected, formal meetings typically open with a Māori *karakia*, usually in the form of a ‘prayer’ or traditional chant, and clients often expect a Māori rather than a Pākehā[2] negotiator (Holmes, Marra and Vine 2011).

The challenges faced in constructing an appropriate **gender** identity while enacting one’s workplace role may involve conflicting sets of norms for speaking, and the pervasive power of gender norms is particularly evident when the spotlight is turned on those contesting them in some way (Holmes 2020). So, for example, the policewomen observed and interviewed by McElhinny (1995) commented that they deliberately repressed any emotional (normatively feminine) response when dealing with stressed citizens, and assumed a demeanour they considered appropriate to their professional role.

There is also research which indicates the extent to which discourse contributes to the construction of gendered workplaces. Many occupations such as IT and engineering (and their corresponding workplaces) are still male-dominated, while areas such as education, care-giving and nursing tend to employ more women, with consequences for the discursive norms constructed in these areas, and the challenges faced by men in such professions (McDowell 2018; Holmes, Vine and Marra 2020). Focusing on a non-Western cultural and linguistic context, Philips (2007) describes the ways in which a Tongan women’s work group producing decorated bark cloth, a ‘quintessentially female work activity’ (2007: 67), engage in discourse activities which richly enact diverse aspects of Tongan gender ideology. The women’s place in Tongan society as well as within a global economy is thus constructed and reinforced both through their work and their talk.

Few studies have explicitly focused on **ethnicity** as a component in workplace discourse and this is an area which may be expected to develop in future research. Approaching ethnicity within a constructionist framework involves regarding it as a dynamic and active process enacted in ongoing interaction, and ethnic boundaries as negotiated by individuals and groups in response to their evolving social roles and circumstances. While researchers in non-Western societies have undertaken valuable research within such a framework, especially on the discourse of women at work (e.g. Philips 2007), there is little on the relevance of ethnicity in Western work contexts. The LWP team has undertaken work in this area in the New Zealand context using the concept of the ethnicised workplace or community of practice (Holmes, Marra and Schnurr 2008; Holmes, Marra and Vine 2011): a place where ethnicity acts as a taken-for-granted backdrop, crucial for interpreting everyday communication, and where ethnic values underpin the norms which influence the way people interact and construct different aspects of their identity, including their ethnicity. Ethnicity permeates workplace communication in such organisations. This is illustrated in the sample study in the next section which brings together a number of the concepts explored in the preceding sections.

A sample study

This section provides a brief case study of Daniel, the CEO of Kiwi Consultations, an ‘ethnicised community of practice’, a Māori workplace with transactional goals related to producing good quality policy advice, and explicitly committed to furthering Māori objectives and promoting Māori values. The study illustrates the concepts and dimensions of analysis introduced in the previous discussion including meeting discourse, transactional and relational dimensions of analysis, power and solidarity, and the relevance of gender and ethnicity in the analysis of workplace discourse. Daniel provides an interesting contrast to Quentin, the Māori leader used as a case study in my contribution to the previous edition of this collection. Although their leadership style has a number of features in common, Quentin’s style is more traditional, while Daniel is what could be designated a ‘contemporary’ Māori leader who has integrated knowledge of Western commercial and economic imperatives gained from a US business degree with deeply rooted experience in Māoridom and immersion in contexts where Māori language and values were predominant.

Both leaders open larger meetings involving senior staff with a formal Māori *mihi* (greeting or welcome) in the form of a karakia, but Quentin also uses a karakia to begin even small team meetings. The components of these karakia derive from the much more elaborate and formal rituals of encounter on the marae (the traditional Māori meeting space). They include, for instance, reference to the specific people present, as well as to team members who are sick, and to any recent deaths in the family of employees. In one meeting opening, for example (analysed in detail in Holmes, Marra and Vine 2011: 73-74), Daniel mentions the recent death of the sister of one of the members of the organisation. Thus, like Quentin, Daniel typically enacts leadership in a way that is consistent with traditional Māori cultural values such as spirituality, respect for the dead, and concern for family and relationships, whilst also being responsive to dynamic aspects of the context such as precisely who is present, where the meeting is taking place, and the specific purpose of the meeting.

However, Quentin and Daniel contrast in other ways, such as their self-presentation, and their styles of humour, and perhaps most interestingly in the way they respond to Pākehā dominant norms with their underlying assumptions about the normativity of Western ways of doing things. I will illustrate these points with a brief analysis of some aspects of Daniel's leadership style.

In interviews Daniel portrays himself as a tough, decisive leader who does not tolerate time-wasting or excessive power plays (see Holmes, Marra and Vine 2011: 140-141). He describes how, when appointed as CEO, he re-structured and pared down a top-heavy senior management team to create a much smaller *elite group*, and then proceeded to dramatically change the prevailing inefficient ways of interacting between the Board and the management team. In face-to-face interaction with his team members, however, he constructs a much more tolerant and informal leadership identity. He uses swear words relatively freely, and the informal tag *eh* (strongly associated initially with Māori males (Bell 2000; Meyerhoff 1994; Vine and Marsden 2016) occurs frequently in his speech as illustrated in Excerpt 1.

Excerpt 1: Daniel is talking to his Human Resources Manager, Caleb, in a regular weekly mentoring meeting.

1.	Dan:	but it also an indication
2.		that you don't have to wear ties here any more eh
3.		you don't have to but don't wear rags [laughs]
4.		[laughs] you know
5.		here are what you can wear eh ….
6.		I don't wear ties any more
7.		I'm *hōhā* ['fed up'] with it eh um
8.		and so nobody else feels they have to wear them either eh

Daniel here expresses his preference for a more casual style of dress, and emphasises this attitude by his use of the casual tag *eh* (lines 2, 5, 7, 8) as well as the informal Māori word *hōhā*. This tag indexes solidarity and mateship and is consistent with the egalitarian ethos which is so pervasive in New Zealand society (e.g. Holmes, Marra and Vine 2012) as well as emphasising Daniel's identity as a good (Kiwi/New Zealand) bloke (Holmes 2017).

Frequent use of witty humour is another feature of Daniel's informal style of interaction with his staff as illustrated in Excerpt 2.

Excerpt 2: Daniel is discussing with his Finance Manager, Frank, the naïve belief of one of their staff that if he aims to become a manager he won't need to devote much time to developing his writing skills.

1	Daniel:	yeah you have to show people
2		that you know what you're doing
3		before they'll let you stop [laughs] + mm

Daniel's witty aphorism succinctly captures an interesting distilment of his experience as CEO. He identifies an apparent illogicality: typically one must demonstrate certain skills before being appointed to a position, but once in the position, ironically, those skills may no longer be required. The example illustrates how workplace humour may simultaneously address both relational and transactional goals; Daniel makes a serious point in an amusing way.

Even in large meetings, Daniel uses humour to manage with a light hand, though the humour is often contestive and challenging, with a great deal of teasing and jocular abuse as illustrated in Excerpt 3 from a senior management meeting.

Excerpt 3: During a senior management meeting, Hinerau's mobile rings with a loud musical tone.

1	Hinerau:	oh sorry

2 Daniel: well turn it up
3 Hinerau: [indignantly]: sorry:
[Hinerau leaves the room to answer the call]

Daniel here comments on the disruptive noise created by Hinerau's cell phone by sarcastically suggesting she increase the noise. In another instance he skilfully combines self-mockery and jocular insult in a comment to Hari that he should accompany Daniel to a formal meeting with an external group: *so I don't look like the dumbest guy there.* And the reporting style of Steve, a Pākehā accountant, is the butt of this quip from another meeting: *Catherine will get everyone back awake after Steve's had a go on the accounting side.* Daniel's humour is a distinctive aspect of the relaxed informal leadership style which he deliberately nurtures.

Another aspect of Daniel's leadership style is his commitment to trusting those he has appointed to management roles to do their jobs without constant monitoring and reporting. He makes this approach explicit in a mentoring session with Caleb (Excerpt 4).

Excerpt 4: Caleb, a manager within the company is asking Daniel for information about the Executive Management Team (EMT).

1. Daniel: um we've got really bright people we've got very capable people
2. on our EMT um + …
3. so I I try to trust people and and I you know
4. give everyone the benefit of the doubt when you're dealing with them
5. and and try and give them an opportunity to show their their their worth
6. their value and you try and engender that in everybody else as well

Daniel provides here a detailed account of his management style, including the reasons for the approach he uses, which is basically one of trusting his team to do their jobs, and he also describes the processes he follows to help them achieve their goals (not included for reasons of length). He outlines a very positive managerial style based on trust and appreciation, including giving people *the benefit of the doubt* (line 4) and *an opportunity to show their their their worth* (line 5).

Finally, it is interesting to note that Daniel also embodies a relatively new self-confidence among Māori in challenging Pākehā values and expectations and culturally insensitive norms (Holmes, Vine and Marra 2020). A humorous excerpt (analysed in Holmes, Marra and Vine 2011: 102-103), shows Māori members of Kiwi Consultations, encouraged by Daniel, poking fun at Pākehā who in the current political climate see strategic advantage in getting on-side with Māori, and specifically with their new Māori neighbours in well-to-do suburbs. As one of the group wittily remarks, *Māori is the new black eh?* (Holmes, Marra and Vine 2011: 103), a comment that humorously signals awareness of the increased respect for Māori ways of doing things which has developed in New Zealand society over the last few decades.

In sum, Daniel uses his extensive discursive skills to achieve his organisation's transactional goals while attending to relational aspects of interaction, playing down hierarchy through humour and an informal but thoughtfully grounded trust-based approach to interactions with members of his management team. In the process, he constructs a contemporary hybridised ethnic identity, deftly walking the line between the demands of the Pākehā culture order and those of the Māori culture order. Daniel thus provides an example of a successful professional negotiating a complex identity in a multicultural world.

Future directions in workplace discourse research

As indicated in the previous sections, the analysis of workplace discourse has developed considerably in terms of theoretical frameworks, data collection sites, methodology, and approaches to analysis, over the last thirty years. In this section, given space restrictions, I identify just a few areas where further developments seem likely.

Dynamic constructionist approaches now represent the dominant paradigm in workplace discourse research and, unsurprisingly, compatible concepts have developed to accommodate them. For example, since Lave and Wenger's (1991) introduction of the concept of the community of practice (CofP) in their seminal study of the active, situated way that apprentices learn their trade in workplace contexts, the concept has gained considerable traction in workplace discourse research. Researchers have broadened the focus to a wide range of workplaces, including hospitals, classrooms, eldercare facilities, commercial teams, government departments, and building sites. The concept will undoubtedly continue to be debated, developed and adapted to research in new workplaces in the future.[3]

Transitions and boundary marking are further concepts proving fruitful in this area. The LWP team has focused attention, for instance, on employees at the margins of workplace communities, whether positioned there voluntarily or involuntarily, examining their trajectories to and from linguistic, geographical, and spatial centres to multiple peripheries (e.g. Angouri, Marra and Holmes 2017), and the discursive barriers that may keep them there, rather than assisting them to integrate and develop a sense of 'belonging' (Kirilova and Angouri 2018).

In terms of workplace sites, expansion to more blue-collar worksites seems desirable. They present a challenge since they tend to be noisy and often uncomfortable places for academics, but there is a woeful lack of research on the interactional norms of both unskilled labourers and skilled workers such as plumbers, painters, electricians and builders (but see Theodoropoulou 2019). Moreover, the definition of what counts as a workplace would benefit from further reflection, perhaps expanding to encompass more mobile sites such as the workspaces of professional sports teams (Wilson 2020), take-away vans, and travelling salespeople.

Research on the use of digital resources at work is another growth area. Email has displaced fax for sending documents, and applications such as Google Docs and Dropbox now facilitate faster joint production of documents. Linguistic and discursive features of email, texting, Facebook and tweeting have attracted analytic attention, with the dangers of tweeting, posting or responding too hastily noted by a number of researchers (e.g. Edelson et al. 2015; Girginova 2015: 400). Online chat rooms, blogs, and call centre discourse (e.g. Hui 2018; Lockwood et al. 2008) have also been the focus of discourse analysis, and these areas of research will inevitably expand (e.g. Darics and Gatti 2019).

Corpus analysis as valuable background for more detailed qualitative analysis seems certain to increase with the expansion of corpora and development of sophisticated analytical tools. Multilingual workplaces also seem likely to attract increasing attention, along with concomitant issues such as intercultural communication, code-switching or translanguaging, and the challenge of studying mobile workforces (e.g. Chui, Liu and Mak 2016).

As noted in the methodology section, multimodal approaches are steadily increasing, with CA researchers currently making greatest use of them (e.g. Mondada 2014; Clifton et al. 2018). As technology improves, such approaches seem destined to become standard. Relatedly, interdisciplinary teams are likely to burgeon as the expertise required for data collection and analysis become more specialised.

Finally, the relationship between researchers and practitioners has become much more integrated over the last decade with a range of models of engagement and expertise-sharing developing (see Mullany 2020), an aspect very compatible with the increasing evidence of critical and self-reflexive approaches, and attention to metapragmatic information and the ideologies to which this provides access (Holmes, Vine and Marra 2020; Marra and Dawson forthcoming). This seems an appropriate place to finish, since the rationale for the very earliest analyses of workplace discourse (Clyne 1994; Gumperz, Jupp and Roberts 1979) was to inform materials designed to improve the effectiveness of workplace communication.

Key Readings

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Transcription conventions

[laughs] : :	Paralinguistic features and other information in square brackets, colons indicate start/finish
+	Pause of up to one second
… …	Section of transcript omitted

All names, including names of organisations, are pseudonyms.

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[2] Pākehā is a New Zealand word of Māori origin for a person of European origin.

[3] King (2019) provides a review of the development of the CofP concept and discussion of debates around its scope and use in workplace discourse studies. See Moore (2006), Holmes and Stubbe (2015) and Vine (2018) for a range of workplace research using the concept.