

[海外の動向]

Studies in Pragmatics in New Zealand: Victoria University of Wellington

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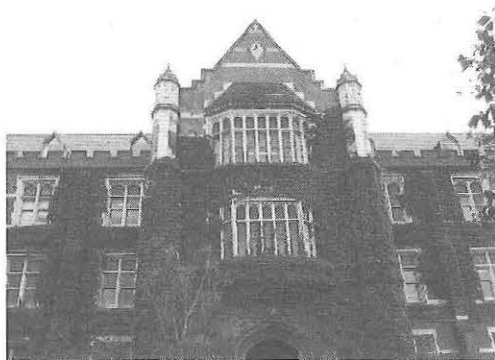
There is ongoing pragmatic research underway at Victoria University of Wellington, which I was lucky enough to be part of during my sabbatical in the 2006 academic year. In this report, I introduce the university and in particular the Language in the Workplace Project, which has researched many areas of relevance to pragmatic scholars. Then I focus on politeness in the workplace, one of their most recent research areas, because it corresponds to my personal research interest.



Wellington Cable Car

1. Victoria University of Wellington and Linguistic Research¹⁾

Victoria University of Wellington is placed in the centre of Wellington, the capital of New Zealand, which is located in the North Island and about one hour flight from Auckland and also from Christchurch. It is a harbour city surrounded with mountains. The Kelburn Campus, where the linguistics department is housed, is located on one such mountain. The scenery from the library is magnificent, but at the same



The Hunter Building

time, going to school means going up hill.

This university was founded in 1897, the year of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee celebrations, and named in her honour. About 20,400 students are enrolled and 17% of them are international students. There are four campuses and eight faculties including Toi huarewa (Maori Studies). The School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies (henceforth SLALS) falls within the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences.

SLALS offers a variety of programmes in Linguistics and Applied Linguistics at both undergraduate and postgraduate levels. It also includes the English Language Institute, the Deaf Studies Research Unit, and the New Zealand Dictionary Centre. The English Language Institute teaches students from 120 countries in its English language courses and in its teacher education programmes. The Deaf Studies Research Unit undertakes research about deaf people and their language in New Zealand. The New Zealand Dictionary Centre, which is a joint project with Oxford University Press, plays an important role in New Zealand lexicography, researching aspects of language in New Zealand.

Interchanges with foreign researchers as well as domestic researchers are active and SLALS offers seminars every Friday afternoon, which cover a wide range of linguistic and applied linguistic topics such as pragmatics, morphology, syntax, language learning, oceanic languages, and so on. In September of 2006, Professor David Crystal of the University of North Wales delivered a series of three public lectures on the English language and its future.

There are four professors in SLALS. Prof. Graeme Kennedy, Emeritus Professor of Applied Linguistics, researches second language acquisition theory, the corpus-based description of English, pedagogical grammar, and Deaf Studies, including New Zealand Sign Language lexicography. Prof. Paul Nation, a second Professor of Applied Linguistics, focuses on vocabulary learning. His current research project is a computerised test of vocabulary size, which is planned to be used with native speakers and with non-native speakers of English. Prof. Laurie Bauer, Professor of Linguistics, teaches theoretical and descriptive linguistics. His research interests are morphology, focusing on word-formation, and the description of international varieties of English, with particular reference to New Zealand English. Prof. Janet Holmes, Professor of Linguistics, teaches sociolinguistics courses, specialising in language in the workplace, New Zealand English, and language and gender issues. She was Director of the project which produced the Wellington Corpus of Spoken New Zealand English, and is currently Director of the Language in the Workplace Project.

2. The Language in the Workplace Project (LWP)²⁾

Researchers from the Language in the Workplace Project (henceforth LWP) have been studying workplace communication since 1996 under the direction of Professor Janet Holmes. The aims of the projects are to (1) identify distinctive features of workplace talk in different workplaces, (2) identify communication strategies of effective communicators in the organisation, (3) explore the implications of the findings for workplace relationships in order to provide useful input to human resource and professional development programmes, and (4) explore cultural differences in workplace communication patterns.



Members of the LWP Team at Launch of *Gendered Talk at Work*

So far, the LWP team has collected approximately 1,500 interactions, involving a total of about 500 people, from office workers in government departments and commercial organisations, from factory workers, and from various small businesses. The majority of these recordings are 10-20 minutes in length, though some are 20 seconds, and others are several hours long.

In terms of data collection, volunteers in each organisation record everyday work-related interactions, meetings and discussions. The LWP team has also collected telephone calls and social conversations, and videotaped a number of larger, more formal meetings from most workplaces.

The project team has analysed many aspects of authentic workplace interaction including how workers use language to get things done at work, how they prevent misunderstandings, and how they use humour and small talk to form and maintain good relationships with their colleagues. I will introduce the areas they have focused on to date. (Relevant publications are collected and categorised by research topic at the end of this report.)

2.1. Gender

The existing research on gendered speech has focused on examining distinctive or stereotypical features of male and female communication. In order to test whether the

stereotypes actually correspond to the workplace reality, the LWP team has studied speech of both male and female managers to see whether there were systematic differences between them. This research has revealed that variation within the same gender is not so different from that in the different genders, and the differences between male and female managing styles are more delicate than the existing research suggested.

2. 2. Humour

In terms of humour, the following issues have been explored: Is there a place for humour in the workplace? What kind of humour occurs in different workplaces and why do workers use it? When and where is humour most likely to occur?

This research has shown that, although what is found funny may not differ at work or home, motivations behind making jokes may be distinctive in the workplace. One of the findings is that humour functions as social cohesion in the workplace, increasing feelings of solidarity or collegiality between co-workers. On the other hand, humour by superiors can function to soften directives or criticisms superficially, forcing subordinates to follow them, and conversely humour can be used to challenge superiors.

2. 3. Small Talk

The LWP team has explored the function, distribution, and role of small talk in the workplace. This research shows that small talk is an essential part of workplace interaction, helping to smooth interpersonal relationships. It also shows that small talk is located on a continuum between core business talk, or transactional talk, and phatic communion, although interactions may move back and forth between these two extremes.

2. 4. Meetings

Meetings are one of the most common and important interaction types in workplace settings. The LWP team has carried out in-depth studies of meetings in different types of organisations to identify meeting structure, the way decision-making and problem-solving are negotiated, and the role of the meeting chair.

2. 5. Directives

Research by members of the LWP team has indicated that giving directives in workplaces is more complicated than it might seem and that many different linguistic strategies, such as employing hedges and operating modals, are used when giving directives.

The strategies are affected by a variety of contextual factors including, for example, power relationships between hearers and speakers, and the degree of impositions of the task.

2. 6. Management

Language is affected by power relations at work. In other words, linguistic strategies can serve to express power relationships between co-workers. The LWP team has examined those discourse strategies managers employ to express their superior power relationship over their subordinates, how they use language strategically to keep team members on target and encourage a productive environment, and what leadership is.

2. 7. Workplace Culture

Language plays an important role in the culture of the workplace. Workplace culture could be paraphrased as a particular workplace environment including not only the way of working but also the way of using language. Drawing on a communities of practice framework, the LWP team has attempted to shed light on patterns of workplace interaction in each community of practice. Making use of language appropriately according to shared patterns in the community of practice is indispensable to becoming a member of it. This research has focused on identifying those shared interactional practices which indicate that people belong to the group, including the extent to which they are core or peripheral members, by analysing group members' interaction. These interactional practices include building an understanding of the attitudes, beliefs, values and social norms.

2. 8. Cross-Cultural Pragmatics

The project team has focused on particular speech acts such as complaining, refusing a request or disagreeing in the workplace, and explored what effect cultural backgrounds have on the performance and interpretation of these speech acts. By investigating whether different cultural backgrounds have different styles of interaction, this study has researched the implications for communication in multicultural workplaces.

2. 9. Applied Linguistics

The LWP team has tried to use their research outcomes for practical applications for improving workplace language for speakers of English as a second language or as a foreign language.

2. 10. Other Research Areas

Other areas of current research include, for example, the investigation of how narratives, or workplace anecdotes, are used to construct a professional image (Holmes 2005d; Holmes and Marra 2005b), how email contributes to this process (Waldvogel 2005; Wallace 2000), and what causes miscommunication in the workplace (Stubbe forthcoming).

3. Politeness in the Workplace Discourse

Politeness is one of the primary themes that the LWP team has been exploring recently and it has been my research theme during my sabbatical in New Zealand. In workplace discourse, where transactional efficiency is required in order to achieve a task, their analysis of the vast corpus of workplace interaction has revealed that “most workplace interactions provide evidence of mutual respect and concern for the feeling or face needs of others, that is, of politeness” (Holmes & Stubbe 2003: 5).

In terms of politeness theory, until the 1990s, Brown & Levinson’s (1987) approach was widely accepted as providing the most comprehensive and influential framework, but this has been dramatically changing this century. Eelen (2001), Watts (2003), and Mills (2003) implement a radically new approach incorporating social-theoretical insights, locating politeness in a theory of social practice. The common views of this new approach are, for example, that, (1) politeness involves situated judgement, (2) no linguistic expressions are intrinsically (im)polite, and (3) politeness is negotiated dynamically and discursively.

Along with this new approach, members of LWP (including Stephanie Schnurr now of Hong Kong University) have carried out detailed studies of the real world use of language, attempting to see how language functions as a social process. This research explores the issue of what it means to be polite in workplace discourse. Adopting a social constructionist approach, where the dynamic nature of interaction and the constantly changing social identities are emphasised, they have proposed a new approach to politeness, drawing on the theory of “relational practice” (see Holmes & Schnurr 2005).

Relational Practice, or RP, is a term associated with Fletcher’s (1999) work: “RP is a way of working that reflects a relational logic of effectiveness and requires a number of relational skills such as empathy, mutuality, reciprocity, and a sensitivity to emotional contexts”(1999: 84). Drawing on interviews, observations, and shadowing of target work-

ers, Fletcher categorises RP into four categories: “preserving”, “mutual empowerment”, “self-achieving”, and “creating team” (1999:48). Holmes and Marra (2004) point out that “the first two are somewhat more oriented to transactional or organisational objectives, and the second two to personal and interpersonal goals” (2004: 380).

The results from the LWP data analysis indicate that Fletcher’s four categories of RP are not mutually exclusive and they are often difficult to differentiate. Any utterance serves multiple functions. They argue that RP has three crucial components: (1) RP is oriented to the (positive and negative) face needs of others; (2) RP serves to advance the primary objectives of the workplace; (3) RP practices at work are regarded as dispensable, irrelevant, or peripheral (Holmes and Marra 2004: 378).

Using a social constructionist approach, the LWP team analyse the data produced by particular communities of practice. The concept of “communities of practice” derives from Wenger’s (1998) work and is defined as “an aggregate of people who, united by a common enterprise, develop and share ways of doing things, ways of talking, beliefs, and values - in short, practice” (Eckert and McConnell 1999: 186). The crucial dimensions of communities of practice are “mutual engagement” (i.e. ongoing regular interaction), “joint enterprise” (i.e. common goal), and “shared repertoire” (i.e. a set of linguistic resources common and understood among group members) (Wenger 1998: 73).

Applying these three dimensions to the workplace, the LWP team identify communities of practice in each workplace and analyse interaction focusing on the verbal behaviours or linguistic strategies in terms of RP. They point out that strategies of RP vary in each community of practice as well as in different workplace situations and interactions within a community of practice.

However, the analysis within the communities of practice approach does not focus only on each community of practice. It also “provides a means of linking micro-level linguistic processes with the macro-level patterns” (Holmes 2003b: 90). Analysing a wide range of workplace discourse, the LWP team have found workplace anecdotes, small talk, and humour are typical examples of RP in the workplace.

This new approach to politeness is still in its infancy. It is anticipated that further research will be conducted using the framework of RP not only to explore the various ways of accomplishing RP in different communities of practices, but also to expand them into contrastive study.

4. Conclusion

By analysing a wide range of authentic workplace interactions, the LWP team has explored various aspects of discourse in the workplace. It has analysed the data by drawing on several theoretical models, including critical discourse analysis, politeness theory, social constructionism, communities of practice, and conversation analysis. Their analyses consistently emphasise the dynamic and discursive aspects of interaction and constantly changing social identities in ongoing interaction. It should be stressed that LWP has advanced a multidisciplinary approach to workplace discourse, attempting to describe “what is really going on”. This project is in progress and it will continue to contribute to the field of pragmatics.

Notes

- 1) The general information about Victoria University is based on its web site, <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/annualreports/2005/about/about.html>, and that of the School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies is based on its web site, <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/lals>.
- 2) This section is a summary of the LWP web site, but any mistakes or errors are my own. For more detailed information, see <http://www.vuw.ac.nz/lals/lwp>.

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