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## ABSTRACT

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For organisations, the meeting is an important communicative forum where many decisions are made. Using a dataset of 12 meetings drawn from Victoria University's Language in the Workplace Project, this thesis adopts a broad Critical Discourse Analysis approach, whereby issues of power asymmetry are highlighted, in order to investigate the way meeting participants reach decisions in New Zealand business meetings.

The decisions in the dataset range from the very simple to the very complex, but share some common features. In particular, analysis of the structure of the decisions suggests a three-part model (raising issues, proposing solutions and ratifying the decision) where boundaries are marked by linguistic and pragmatic features, including discourse markers,

pauses, humour and transition relevance places labelled here as “response positions”.

The meeting chair plays a central role in negotiating the progression of the three structural steps, notably dominating the first and last by employing various discourse strategies which draw on the power assigned to them by their status. Variation occurs at the middle stage of a decision where participants put forward potential options for the group to consider. The findings support a power-based typology for decisions according to how the acceptable solution is reached: While the unmarked case is a solution proposed by the chair or manager ie those with “legitimate power” (French and Raven 1959), there are also times when other participants use their expertise to influence the group, as well as examples where precedent or procedure allow any participant to enact the step.

For workplace practitioners, the published information which is readily available to them is generally not based on systematic data analysis such as is in this thesis. Models in textbooks and those taught in courses to both native and non-native speakers alike tend to be prescriptive and linear rather than descriptive and cyclical, and most noticeably the power exercised by the high status members of the team is generally underestimated. The data analysis presented, therefore, has many potential applications for workplace communication practitioners.