

ABSTRACT

‘MIGHT BE WORTH GETTING IT DONE THEN’: DIRECTIVES IN A NEW ZEALAND FACTORY

T. Pascal Brown

This thesis is a sociolinguistic study of workplace language within a New Zealand tanning factory where many tasks are conducted through talk-in-interaction. The manifest function of workplace talk is to further the aims of the organisation through communication among the manager, supervisors, administration staff and shop-floor employees. The factory work is managed partly through on-going workplace talk. One specific strategy for getting things done at work is by using ‘directives’, which are the focus of this study. A corpus of everyday interaction in the factory was recorded, and from this 259 directives were identified. Using previous typologies as a starting point, the directives were first categorised by syntactic form, and then a range of modifying devices which increased or decreased their strength or force were identified and described. The analysis then goes on to consider the relationship between the form and strength of the directives on the one hand, and aspects of the social context and participant relationships, including power, status and social distance in the factory, on the other hand. The results indicate that overall imperative forms were more frequently used than declarative and interrogative forms, and that structural variants within these three categories were only marginally different from those identified in other typologies. The selection of a particular form of directive in the workplace appears to be sensitive to factors such as relative power and status, relative age, the degree of familiarity between the speaker and hearer, and the social setting of the interaction. Finally, the thesis provides some discussion of ways in which the findings and transcriptions can be used to assist speakers of English as a

Second or Other Language (ESOL), and their teachers, to help interpret the social significance of directives in the context of work. Suggestions are made for possible further studies in this area.