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*Te Whare Wānanga
o te Ūpoko o te Ika a Māui*



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Edited by Meredith Marra

**School of Linguistics and Applied Language Studies
Victoria University of Wellington
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Wellington
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Editorial

This issue of *Wellington Working Papers in Linguistics* showcases postgraduate research in the area of workplace discourse.

In 1996, the Wellington Language in the Workplace project team began investigating effective workplace communication in New Zealand workplaces using authentic interactions recorded in a small group of New Zealand organizations. At the time there was a scattering of researchers who had dipped into the area, most notably Michael Clyne and his work on intercultural communication in Australia, and Celia Roberts whose work investigated discrimination in job interviews in the UK.

More than a decade later, workplace communication has made a mark for itself within sociolinguistics and has become a research strength at Victoria. The contributors to this issue are all actively involved in investigations of workplace communication, drawing on a range of techniques and analytic frameworks. The papers in this issue comprise reports of research in the area, including the role of humour in business meetings across cultures (Murata), the influence of language policy on practice in multilingual banks (Kingsley) and the influence of context on organizational knowledge creation (Fletcher). To ground this work within the field, the two final papers provide a description of methodology for data collection (de Bres) and a review of relevant literature in the important and growing area of politeness and workplace communication (Lazzaro Salazar).

As a workplace communication researcher, I join the contributors in acknowledging my colleagues (past and present) in workplace discourse at Victoria: Janet Holmes, Maria Stubbe and Bernadette Vine. The research reported here owes much to the pioneering work carried out by the team from the outset of the Language in the Workplace project.

Meredith Marra

Laughter in Japanese business meetings — a relational perspective

Kazuyo Murata

In her PhD research, Kazuyo Murata compares the discourse of meetings recorded in a New Zealand and a Japanese workplace. As well as applying discourse analytic techniques to this data, she has also interviewed Japanese business people and collected their perceptions and reactions to New Zealand meeting behaviours. In this paper, based on a presentation at the 21st JASS (Japanese Association of Sociolinguistic Sciences) Conference, Murata describes the functions of laughter as a relational aspect of workplace talk and illustrates a distinctive function found in her Japanese data.

Abstract

An increasingly globalised world has placed added emphasis on the importance of intercultural business communication. Taking a relational perspective, the paper describes the analysis of laughter in Japanese business meetings. The social functions of the laughter identified within a dataset of naturally occurring meetings differ from those reported in investigations of workplace talk in English language settings. Following research by Hayakawa (2003), the paper describes and illustrates two categories of laughter found in the Japanese data, *Laughter1* and *Laughter2*. The two types are differentiated according to whether or not there is amusement associated with the laughter, described by Glenn (2003) as a requirement for laughter in his English conversational data. Understanding this important difference, i.e. that laughter can occur without amusement in Japanese interactions for the purposes of restoring balance and easing tension, has the potential to explain and reduce intercultural misunderstanding.

Introduction¹

In a time of increased globalisation and growing opportunities for international business negotiations, workplace communication has drawn the attention of scholars from various approaches, including (within linguistics) conversational analysis, pragmatics, discourse analysis, and applied linguistics (Harris and Bargiela-Chiappini 1997). However, to date most of these studies address interactions conducted in English and there is only limited

research on business interaction in other languages, and only a handful which focus specifically on Japanese interactions (e.g. Yamada 1997, Kondo 2007).

One of the stereotypical features of Japanese interaction from an outsider's perspective is the frequent and often unexplained presence of laughter; non-native speakers of Japanese often comment that they are unable to understand why Japanese people laugh in non-humorous contexts. In earlier research (Murata 2005) I argued that in the context of intercultural interaction some of this laughter results in misunderstanding. In the high stakes environment of the business meeting, this potential for miscommunication has serious consequences. As a paralinguistic feature which conveys a speaker's attitude and which influences interpersonal relationships between speakers and hearers, laughter in the Japanese business meeting is an important focus for analysis. This article reports an analysis of Japanese business meetings employing a relational, or politeness, framework to shed light on the role of the laughter. I will identify different kinds of laughter, describe their distribution, and analyse the discourse functions of laughter with special reference to laughter which is not associated with humour or amusement.

Laughter from a relational point of view

Like workplace communication, laughter has been investigated within various disciplines, notably physiology and psychology, and in most studies it has been addressed as a physical phenomenon (Glenn 2003, Hayakawa 2003), with the issue of "why people laugh" being explored from philosophical perspectives. Three major theories of humour provide possible answers to this question: firstly superiority theory deriving from the work of the philosophers Plato and Aristotle (and more recently Hobbes); secondly incongruity theory deriving from the work of Kant and Schopenhauer; and thirdly relief theory associated with Freud (Morreall 1983). These major theories of humour are largely concerned with the causes of laughter; they treat laughter as a passive phenomenon, i.e. as a response to a stimulus. However, as Osborne and Chapman (1977) and Brown, Brown, and Ramos (1981) contend, laughter occurs more often when people are together, and is most fruitfully studied in terms of its functions in interaction.

From a discourse analysis point of view, conversation analysts (e.g. Jefferson 1979, Jefferson, Sacks, and Schegloff 1987) have typically studied laughter through detailed description of conversations and focus mainly on its sequence organization in interaction. For example, Jefferson (1979) regards laughter as comprising an invitation and acceptance/declining sequence, pointing out that “laughter can be managed as a sequence in which speaker of an utterance invites recipient to laugh and accepts that invitation” (1979: 93). However, laughter is not only a constituent of a conversational sequence but also a component of participants’ communicative behaviours, serving particular discourse functions in interaction. It is therefore sensible to study laughter from a relational point of view, by considering its functions and motivations.

There is some previous research which examines the social aspect of laughter, from a sociological perspective (e.g. Hertzler 1970) and ethological perspective (e.g. Provine 2000). It is generally accepted that laughter serves an affiliative function. Amongst research on laughter from a relational perspective, the most recent comprehensive sociolinguistic studies are Glenn (2003) and Hayakawa (2003). Interestingly for my own contrastive study, Glenn (2003) focuses on the production and interpretation of laughter in English interactions while Hayakawa (2003) examines laughter in Japanese interactions.

Glenn (2003) uses a conversation analysis framework to analyse laughter in English conversational data. He approaches laughter as “intentional social action” (2003:32) and his focus is “on what people display to each other and accomplish in and through their laughter” (2003:33). Within this work he identifies two categories of laughter: the major category is labelled shared laughter, or *laughing with*, which is important as a means of showing affiliation with others. The second kind of laughter is labelled *laughing at*, which refers to laughter which may not be shared among the interactants. Glenn suggests that *laughing at* may be used to indicate disaffiliation. It is marked by four characteristics: (1) a laughable referent that designates someone co-present as the butt of the humour; (2) a first laugh by someone else; (3) a second laugh produced by someone else or non-occurrence of laughter and (4) continued talk on topic (Glenn 2003: 165).

Showing that the shift from *laughing with* to *laughing at* and vice versa often occurs dynamically in interaction, he emphasises that it is important to analyse laughter discursively.

Hayakawa (2003) analyses laughter in Japanese natural conversational data, and suggests that laughter displays speakers' cooperative orientations towards the conversation-in-progress and contributes to its smooth development. She categorises laughter into the following three kinds: (1) *joyful laughter* indicating identification with the in-group (laughter for promoting conversation); (2) *balancing laughter* for easing tension; and (3) *laughter as a cover-up*. In describing these categories Hayakawa argues that joyful laughter occurs among intimates and indicates that the speaker and the hearer are members of the same in-group. In these situations the speaker expects hearers to share what he or she thinks is funny and enjoyable. The atmosphere among the participants reflects enjoyment, even if the speakers do not necessarily say anything funny, and she argues that the ensuing laughter promotes conversations. Balancing laughter, by contrast, "is used to keep a balance in one's mind when what one is about to say or do is likely to take the conversation in a direction which will impact negatively on the sense of cooperation between the participants" (Hayakawa 2003: 328). This laughter occurs "when one reveals something in one's field that one does not want to be seen clearly, such as embarrassment or shame" (Hayakawa 2003: 229). It also occurs when "one gets into the listener's field and asks something, or requests something" (Hayakawa 2003: 229). The third category, laughter as a cover-up, is laughter which is used by a speaker to maintain his or her turn in order to make the conversation more cooperative. It is used as an avoidance mechanism when speakers don't want to answer or reveal their opinions. Though there are different functions for each category, Hayakawa concludes that "in all cases the goal is to strengthen the unity within a group of participants" (2003: 327).

Glenn (2003) and Hayakawa (2003) agree that laughter plays an important role in the creation and maintenance of interpersonal relationships. However, differences are apparent in the interpretation of the social meaning of the laughter in the English data analyzed by Glenn (2003) and the Japanese data analyzed by Hayakawa (2003). Glenn's

main focus is laughter which is associated with things which are laughable or funny, while Hayakawa's main focus is laughter which does not indicate amusement or humour.

Both of these researchers focus on conversations between native speakers. What happens, then, in intercultural interaction? Murata (2005) analysed intercultural conversations adopting Hayakawa's (2003) categories. The conversations were conducted in English between Americans and Japanese on their first encounter. The study also included follow-up interviews to ask participants about their impressions. The results indicated interesting differences in the distribution of the occurrences of laughter between the American and the Japanese participants. While the Americans laughed only at comments which were obviously intended to be funny, the Japanese not only laughed at humorous comments but also at more general and neutral comments. The Americans did not seem to know how to interpret the Japanese laughter where it did not reflect amusement, and this caused misunderstanding between the Americans and the Japanese (Murata 2005: 122). From the analysis of these intercultural conversations, and the follow-up interviews, it appears that Japanese laughter, like American laughter, may indicate amusement or enjoyment. However, it was also evident that, unlike American laughter, Japanese laughter may have an additional social meaning. This is one prominent feature of Japanese laughter. Though Hayakawa (2003) classified Japanese laughter into the three categories, category (2) and (3) share the same characteristic that both kinds of laughter do not function to indicate amusement.

In the following sections, laughter in authentic Japanese business meetings recorded as part of my PhD research will be examined in response to the following two questions:

- (1) Is there laughter which is not associated with amusement or enjoyment?
- (2) What are the relational functions of laughter in Japanese business meetings?

Analytic framework

Drawing on data from the Wellington Language in the Workplace Project, Holmes and Stubbe (2003: 5) point out that "most workplace interactions provide evidence of mutual respect and concern for the feeling or face needs of others, that is, of politeness", though,

in the workplace discourse, transactional efficiency is also required in order to achieve a task. Holmes and Marra (2004) and Holmes and Schnurr (2005) examined the issue of what it means to be polite in workplace discourse and found that *relational practice* (hereafter RP), which derives from Fletcher's (1999) work, is a useful term for discussing politeness in the workplace. RP has the following three crucial components:

- (1) RP is oriented to the (positive and negative) face need 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, Holmes and Schnurr 2005:125)

RP is manifest as discursive strategies negotiated among interactants and emphasises the dynamic aspects of interaction. Analysing RP thus requires detailed linguistic analysis taking the ongoing process of interaction into consideration. RP is thus an appropriate framework for the present study which comprises workplace interactions and takes an interpersonal perspective.

Methods

The data analysed in this paper consists of three business meetings conducted in Japanese in the city of Osaka. There were 16 participants in one meeting and 5 participants in each of the other two meetings. The first meeting was video-recorded and the other two meetings were audio recorded, with a total recording time of approximately 200 minutes. All the meetings took place in an IT (Information Technology) company. In the first meeting, members of the sales team presented their sales reports. In the second meeting, the participants discussed a seminar on a new product which was soon to be launched. In the third meeting, they discussed the new product. In analysing the data, triangulation was used in the form of follow-up interviews to assist in identifying participants' reasons for laughing.

As noted above, one distinctive characteristic of Japanese laughter seems to be that it is not necessarily associated with amusement. Consequently, in this article laughter is

classified in two distinct categories²: *Laughter1* which indicates enjoyment and *Laughter2* which does not indicate enjoyment.

Laughter1: Amused Laughter

Laughter1 was found in the following two patterns:

- (a) (often humorous) statements + laughter by the speaker → other participants' laughter (one member or multiple members)
- (b) (often humorous) statements → other participants' laughter (one member or multiple members)

With respect to the distribution of Laughter1, there were differences between the large meeting, where there were 16 participants, and the small meetings, where there were 5 participants. In the large meeting, Laughter1 was often observed at points of digression. In the small meetings, on the other hand, Laughter1 was interwoven with the meeting topics. The following is an example of Laughter1.

Example 1

1. T: 9がね東京やから
I'm going to Tokyo on the 9th
2. Y: ああ, そうか
Oh, I see
3. T: うーん. 東京まで見に来てもらってもええぞ
Well, would you like to come to Tokyo to see my presentation?
4. 全員: [笑]
Others: [**laughter**]
5. M: 宇和島まで
To Uwajima
6. T: また宇和島
Uwajima again

7. 全員: [笑]

Others: [laughter]

8. T: 俺ら東京と宇和島か.

We are going to Tokyo and Uwajima

9. A: 東京と宇和島.

Tokyo and Uwajima

10. M: 一緒ですね.

The same places as usual

11. T: 一緒や.

Yes, the same places as usual

[省略:20 秒間] [20 seconds removed]

12. M: 20 日の取締役会以降の. 20 日って何時に飛行機取れましたっけ? あの.

After the board of directors on the 20th, which airplane did you take? Well

13. T: んー.

Well

14. M: 土日も//働くんで\

On Saturday and Sunday //we work\

15. T: /土日も働くからなあ\\

/We work on Saturday and Sunday\\

16. 全員: [笑]

Others: [laughter]

In example 1, none of the utterances is particularly funny or humorous, but the atmosphere reflects enjoyment among the participants. T and M are talking about how busy they are, saying that they have to work weekends and complaining about frequent business trips. Busyness is often a topic of small talk in workplace interactions (Holmes 2000a: 130), a topic that participants can share and enjoy the relaxed atmosphere. In this way, Laughter₁ serves to construct and maintain solidarity and harmony among the meeting members.

Laughter2: Non-humorous Laughter

Laughter2 was observed in the following two patterns:

- (a) (non-humorous) statements + laughter by the speaker (in most cases)
- (b) (non-humorous) statements + laughter by the speaker → other participants' laughter (one member or multiple members)

One prominent characteristic of Laughter2 is that speakers are typically the initiators of the laughter. In most cases, hearers did not respond to the speakers' laughter, although there were some isolated cases where hearers did respond with laughter. In the discussion below the occurrence of Laughter2 is explored further.

Making requests

Laughter2 was used when speakers asked other participants for favours. In these cases, speakers employed laughter in or after their utterances.

Example 2

1. T: ()を含めての対応だとは思うんですけども。ま、それで、逆に、あの
お手伝いというか、何をしたいんかということと、その環境会計のどの部
分をおりこんでくれ、ていう話を聞かせていただければ
I think that we should address it including (). I was wondering if you
could let me know what the client wants and what aspect of the corporate
environment accounting they corporate with
2. N: (2.0) [メモを取っている] はい
(2.0) [taking memo] Yes
3. T: 少し、あの、考えることも可能かと思えます
I think I would be able to advise your client
4. N: はい。そこをポイントに次回アポイントをとれたらヒアリングを//やりたいと思
います
OK. I'll ask my client about those points when I make an appointment
with them.

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5. T: //はい\\
Yes.
6. N: えっと、またご相談させて頂くと思いますんで// [笑] \よろしく願いいたします。
Well, I think I will ask you about it // [laughs] \ If it is alright with you
7. T: / [笑]\\ はい。ちょっとお時間ください。これは即答なかなか
/ [laughs]\\ \ Well, give me time, please. I'm afraid I can't answer quickly

In the 6th utterance of example 2, N, a sales person, is asking T, a business consultant, to give advice about his client. While there are many ways of interpreting this utterance in order to find it humorous, intonation suggests that this is not meant to be a humorous comment, nor is humour intended in the response in utterance 7.

Showing reluctance to agree to a request or to accept advice

In utterance 7 after being asked to help, T laughs and shows his unwillingness to comply by explicitly saying so. Laughter2 was frequently observed when participants indicated that they would not be accepting advice as shown by the following short utterance:

Example 3

1. N: はい, すんません[笑]
Okay. I'm sorry [laughs]

Before this utterance, the CEO reprimanded salesperson N and said that he should have persuaded his client to buy not only one type of product but other products too. In the example N replies *okay* to show agreement with the CEO's advice and then apologises with laughter to the CEO because he did not mention the other products, i.e. he did not follow his advice.

Disagreeing

When expressing opposing viewpoints, speakers also employed Laughter2.

Example 4

1. K: いや, J取締役自身もわかってないんちゃうの()
Well, director J himself doesn't understand (), does he?
2. A: いや, そう, 初めはそう思ってたんですけど, あのお, ね, 一緒に[笑]行って, 接待した時に, もともと彼がずっと昔のシステムから(関与)してるんですよ. ずーっと. あながち, まあ, あの
Well, no, I thought so at first, but, well, when I went together [laughs] and invited him for dinner. He has been involved in the system for a long time... for a long time, So, well...

In example 4, A, a business director, disagrees with K, the CEO, who has a bad impression of J. The laughter seems to function to ease the discomfort which arises from disagreeing with a superior.

Criticising

Laughter₂ was also employed when speakers made negative comments.

Example 5

1. S: ちょっと今窓口になっている xxx 室のマネージャーなんですけども, その人が xxx のことわかってないというか, なんか, ちょっと中途半端な状況で, H 社長と一緒に行ってもらったんですが, なんか会話もとんちんかんな状況になっているという[笑]
Regarding the manager in xxx department who is in charge, he does not understand it, well, actually, it's a half-hearted situation. CEO H came along with me, but the conversation was irrelevant [laughs]
2. 複数の参加者: [笑]
Several others: [laughter]

In example 5 the salesperson S is criticising the manager at his client company. In this instance, S's use of laughter to ease the tension caused by this overt criticism is answered with reciprocated laughter from many of his colleagues.

Unwilling to express something which is not good for the business goal

Laughter was similarly observed in the face threatening situation of having to report lack of success in selling products.

Example 6

1. K: もう今後、赤字()部門だったオンライン事業は撤退というところで、プラスの見込める、えー、コミュニティーサイトの運営企画と、あとは受託開発というところに絞って、やっていくというところなので、まあ、今期なんとかプラスに持ち直したいというような状況の会社で、えー、であります [笑]

They are going to give up their online business which is affected by the deficit and focus on planning and managing the community website and on developing products by commissioning. Well, this company is in a situation where they have to hope that the management condition will improve this term [laughs]

2. N: [笑]
[laughter]

In example 6, salesperson K is reporting his sales result. K's client company has a deficit problem and cannot afford to buy the product which K is attempting to sell them. Here he reports that the client is unlikely to buy the product regardless of his sales efforts and adds laughter. His laughter is echoed by one other participant.

Conducting greetings

In contrast to the examples above, Laughter₂ was also found in greeting situations. In the following example, laughter occurs when T and A meet for the first time in the day.

Example 7

1. T: あ, こんにちは. 先日はどうもありがとうございました.
Hi, thank you for cooperating last time
2. A: 今, ちょっと
Well, now we are
3. T: 今, ミーティング中なんですね.
Now you are having an informal meeting, aren't you?
4. A: いやあー [笑]
Yeah [laughs]
5. T: [笑]
[laughter]

It is interesting to note that all the situations illustrating Laughter₂ other than example 7 occur in contexts clearly associated with some tension. More specifically, making requests, showing reluctance to agree to a request or to accept advice, disagreeing, and criticising are all instances of what Brown and Levinson's (1987) call "face threatening acts". It seems that speakers employ laughter as a softener, a device to mitigate threats to face.³

Focusing on example 6, for instance, K appears to be unwilling to express something which is not consistent with the company's business goals. In terms of RP one could argue that because the workplace imperative is to achieve transactional objectives, in this case, to sell the company's products, reporting bad sales results is inconsistent with this objective and appears to make the reporter feel uncomfortable. This may then account for the fact that the reporter employs laughter in order to reduce this tension. In example 7, we find a situation which would not (from a Western point of view) typically be considered a face threatening activity. Interestingly for these participants it seems that laughter functions as an icebreaker when people meet for the first time on a day. In all these cases, Laughter₂ serves to oil the wheels and help sustain good relationships among the meeting participants by easing various kinds of tension.

Discussion

The results of this analysis are consistent with the analysis in Murata (2005) in that not only was Laughter1 identified, i.e., laughter which indicates amusement or enjoyment, but also Laughter2 which arises independently of humour. Laughter1 and Laughter2 seem to have diverse functions. The analysis indicates that Laughter1 serves to sustain and enhance solidarity by signalling amusement and humour, as has similarly been reported in Glenn's (2003) English language interactions and as found in the New Zealand meetings in my dataset. Laughter2, on the other hand, seems to serve to defuse tension, acting as a softener or mitigator of potential face threat. By including laughter after statements which could cause tension among the meeting members, the speakers mitigate face threat and thereby reduce the level of tension. Laughter1 and Laughter2 also differ in their distribution. In examples of Laughter1 it is frequently others who initiate laughter rather than the instigator of the humorous sequence. In situations of Laughter2, by contrast, it is the speaker who laughs with no response from the hearers. In all contexts, it is evident that both Laughter1 and Laughter2 play an important role in constructing and maintaining relationships among the meeting members in Japanese meetings.

I am not claiming that the use of laughter to ease tension is unique to the Japanese context. In English interaction, there are also cases where laughter occurs in situations of discomfort, embarrassment, and anxiety. Emerson (1969), Regan (1990), and Mallet and A'Hern (1996) examine laughter in medical situations and suggest that laughter mitigates people's anxiety in difficult situations. However, in contrast to Laughter2 as described here, in most of the cases, patients talk in a more or less humorous tone. In Jefferson's (1984) investigation of laughter in troubles-talk, she found that a trouble-teller produced laughter following an utterance, and then the trouble-recipient produced an explicitly serious response. It seems that this laughter corresponds to Laughter2. Jefferson's explanation of the motivation behind the laughter in trouble-telling is quite different. She claims that by laughing a trouble-teller is exhibiting "trouble-resistive" behaviour, i.e. "he is in good spirits, and in a position to take the trouble lightly" (Jefferson 1984: 351). This motivation does not correspond with Laughter2 in the Japanese data. The situations

where Laughter₂ occurs are not limited to trouble-telling but cover a wider range, and Laughter₂ was salient in the data.

Conclusion

Analysing laughter from a relational perspective reinforces two important insights. The first is in terms of an approach to discourse. “[L]aughter is *indexical*” (Jefferson, Sacks, and Schegloff 1977: 12), and it is important to analyse the wider discourse context in order to identify a referent to which the laughter refers, an argument supported by a relational approach. As Spencer-Oatey (2000), Mills (2003), and Watts (2003) point out, analysis from politeness perspectives should pay attention to discourse and the dynamic aspects of interaction.

The second insight arising from this study concerns listeners’ perceptions. Some politeness researchers (e.g. Spencer-Oatey 2000, Mills 2003) highlight the importance of including participants’ perspectives in the data analysis. Interpretations of politeness, or RP in this article, deeply depend on consideration of the assessment by hearers. Especially in business discourse, laughter can often only be interpreted by participants (workers) who belong to the particular department or section, or communities of practice (Holmes 2000b). Consequently, where possible, follow-up interviews with participants are helpful and important in analysing the data.

It is evident from the analysis presented above that laughter serves not only as a hearer’s perceptive or reactive token but also as a speaker’s relational practice strategy in order to manage human relationships. However, research on laughter from this perspective is still its infancy. Further research is clearly needed. The next stage of this research, will explore who initiates laughter and who responds to the laughter, paying careful attention to the social relationships among the participants. A subsequent stage of the research will involve a contrastive study of laughter in Japanese business meetings and in New Zealand business meetings using English.

Notes

1. I wish to thank those who allowed their business meetings to be recorded, and members of Language in the Workplace to allow me to analyse their valuable data. I would also like to thank Janet Holmes, Meredith Marra, and Rebecca Adams for their valuable advice and comments.

2. Adopting Hayakawa’s (2003) categories, there was no occurrence of category (C).

3. In Brown and Levinson’s (1987) politeness theory, they use “face” to refer to basic and universal human desires as they pertain to social interaction. “Face” consists of two specific kinds of desires: the desire not to be imposed on and to have freedom of action (negative face), and the desire to be accepted, liked, and understood by others (positive face) (1987: 13). They work on the assumption speakers employ various politeness strategies in order to save hearers’ face.

Transcription conventions

[laughs]	Paralinguistic features, descriptive information
(3.0)	Pause of special number of seconds
...// \...	Simultaneous speech; interrupted (overlapped) speech
.../ \\\	interrupting (overlapping) speech
(hello)	Transcribers’ best guess at an unclear utterance
()	Indecipherable speech
?	Rising or question intonation

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Explicit language policy and language practices in multilingual banks in Luxembourg

Leilarna Kingsley

Linguists typically take a macro-level approach to language policy and planning by focussing on issues at a nation or state level. In her PhD research, Leilarna Kingsley is applying this approach at a micro level in her investigation of multilingual workplaces. This paper is based on a presentation in the workshop “Renegotiating language policies and practices: multilingual Luxembourg in later modernity” at Sociolinguistics Symposium 17.

Abstract

For decades the primary focus of language policy research has been large-scale activities by states and their agencies, with limited attention paid to small-scale policy activities. Addressing this gap, this paper describes research which investigates language policies in financial institutions in the multilingual context of Luxembourg, adopting and extending Shohamy's (2006) theoretical framework to the workplace context. This paper describes the extent to which Luxembourg banks make use of institutional mechanisms to manage social interaction, and examines their influence on practices. Multilingual financial institutions operate in the globalised context of international banking under strict banking secrecy laws and represent an interesting focal point for investigating explicit and implicit aspects of policy at a micro-level. The data includes interviews with managers in ten banks as well as questionnaires and focus-group discussions with employees. The reported language use practices of linguistically and culturally diverse workforces are investigated, alongside beliefs about policy and language use. The case studies provide insight into the complex nature of language policy and the processes and forces which operate in the micro setting of the workplace, thus contributing to research on micro dimensions of social life in the multilingual and international context of the state of Luxembourg.

Language policy in organisations

In recent years, international organisations and companies have increasingly adopted explicit policies regarding the use of official languages. A number of companies have opted for English as the official language of their organisations - ABB, Alcatel, Aventis, the former DaimlerChrysler Corp, EADS, Norvatis, Phillips, Siemens AG and Vivendi (Vollstedt 2002, Phillipson 2003, Truchot 2003). While research exploring the nature of English as a lingua franca is gradually accumulating (Siedlhofer 2004: 215), very few empirical studies investigate international workplaces or companies with a global focus (Hollqvist 1984, Gramkow Andersen 1993, Meeuwis 1994, Firth 1996, Vandermeeren, 1999, Nickerson, 1999, Vollstedt, 2002, Louhiala-Salminen, 2002, Kankaanranta, 2005, Louhiala-Salminen et al.,2005, Erling & Walton, 2007, , Rogerson-Revell 2007). The paucity of language policy research in the micro-setting of multilingual workplaces justifies further investigation, particularly in light of the move towards English as an official or corporate language in international companies worldwide.

As an international banking centre and a multilingual country, Luxembourg represents an exciting focus for investigating language policy in multilingual workplaces. Language policy and language use are salient issues for communication within these banks who typically have diverse workforces consisting of employees from multilingual Luxembourg, cross-border commuters from surrounding countries (France, Belgium and Germany), a variety of EU citizens and others from around the world. Language policy and use are equally relevant issues for communicating with international clients and with the banking community in Luxembourg, where French, German and Luxembourgish (*Lëtzebuergesch*) all play important roles in business communication. Moreover, empirical sociolinguistic research in Luxembourg is limited to a few monographs (Horner and Weber 2008:9), further justifying the need for sociolinguistic research in this uniquely multilingual and international country.

This paper will discuss the importance of top-down and bottom-up forces in an analysis of policy and practices. The data under investigation consists of two multilingual and international banks with explicit policies, pseudonymed Ivan and George, representing a

subset drawn from wider doctoral research. The paper will focus on a model proposed by Shohamy (2006) to show the relevance of this framework, largely based on the macro context of the state, in understanding the micro-setting of a financial institution.

Theoretical frameworks

At a time when no single comprehensive theoretical framework for language policy and planning (LPP) has been accepted (Cooper 1989, Kaplan and Baldauf 1997, Ricento 2006), Shohamy's (2006) framework makes a valuable contribution to the exploration of the complex relationship between policy, practices and beliefs. This framework draws on earlier work by Spolsky (2004: 5) which identifies "three components of the language policy of a speech community: its practices, its beliefs and any attempts to influence practices by any type of language intervention, planning or management". Both Spolsky and Shohamy address criticisms of early LPP work, that is, "the lack of attention paid to language practices and attitudes of communities affected by LPP" (Tollefson 2002: 419-420) and the lack of attention paid to the role of ideology in LPP (Ricento 2000, 2006). These frameworks extend language policy research to include not just overt aspects of language policy (language policy statements), but also covert aspects of language policy (the practices and beliefs of a community). This expanded view of language policy has been developed specifically due to the discrepancy between declared policies and de facto policies

Language policy research has often acknowledged the significant discrepancy that exists between formal policy statements and actual practices, and researchers have attempted to clarify the explicit and implicit dimensions of policy (Kaplan 1994, Schiffman 1996, Kaplan and Baldauf 1997, Spolsky and Shohamy 1999, Spolsky 2004, Baldauf 2005, Shohamy 2006). To date only limited research has investigated the effect of explicit policies on practices (Shohamy 2006: 61, 68). This indicates a need for further exploration, and research in a variety of contexts. The application and extension of Shohamy's (2006) framework to the workplace, the focus of my research, attempts to address this gap and in doing so addresses further criticisms of the exclusion of business enterprises and non-governmental organisations in the LPP equation (Tollefson, 2002: 419-420).

Research suggests that there are three main areas where language is explicitly considered by multilingual organisations, the working language, recruitment and language courses (Marschan et al. 1997, Marschan-Piekkari et al. 1999, Charles and Marschan-Piekkari 2002, Feely and Harzing 2003, Norisada 2005); these areas align with three “mechanisms” proposed by Shohamy, “rules and regulations”, “language testing” and “language education”. In the analysis presented below, these three mechanisms are used to investigate the relationship between language policy and practices in two international financial institutions.

Methodology and data

Since the 1960’s a number of methods have been used to investigate language policy and language use (Eastman 1983, Kaplan and Baldauf 1997, Baldauf 2002, Ricento 2006) and LPP is described as an interdisciplinary field involving a multi-method approach (Ricento 2006: 129). As a consequence, my research makes use of interviews and questionnaires as well as focus-group interviews/discussions to triangulate the findings. Strict banking secrecy laws restricted opportunities for data collection and so it is important to note that the analysis is based on managements’ and employees’ reported practices, rather than actual practices.

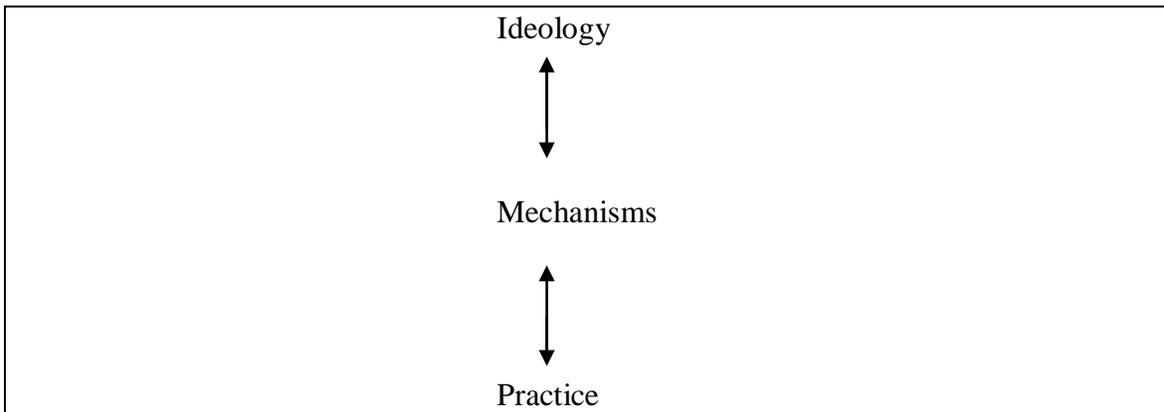
The research began with an exploratory stage of informal interviews with a range of bankers in Luxembourg. The first phase investigated top-down forces and involved interviews with management from ten banks in Luxembourg concerning issues related to language management. The second phase explored bottom-up forces and involved a more detailed investigation of reported language use practices and beliefs (questionnaires and focus group discussions) with employees from three banks. In each case the bank had a global focus and was categorized as international either because it had no national affiliation or because it was affiliated with countries other than Luxembourg, Belgium, France or Germany. The questionnaires provided information on general trends about language choice and use including frequency of the use of various languages, situations in which a particular language was chosen, and Likert-scale attitude statements about these languages. Following Baker (2006: 213), interviews and focus-group interviews

were also used as additional methods of investigating language attitudes and beliefs. Drawing on this wider data set, the discussion below reports on the findings from just two of the international banks, namely Bank George and Bank Ivan, using questionnaires, interviews and focus groups data.

Applying Shohamy's model

As described earlier, the analysis applies Shohamy's (2006) model for macro-institutions to the micro-institution of an individual bank, specifically illustrating the relationship between beliefs/ideology, mechanisms (or policy devices) and practices (see figure 1 below). This model will be used to explore the relationship between the working language of banks and other language-related policies, namely policies on recruitment and language courses.

Figure 1. The interplay of ideology, mechanisms and practices (after Shohamy 2006: 54)



Beliefs/Ideology

As can be seen in the model illustrated above, Shohamy links ideology with language beliefs, drawing on definitions from Spolsky's language policy framework (2006: 52). In Spolsky's (2004) work, the terms ideology and beliefs are used interchangeably, with ideology defined as "what people think should be done" in contrast to his description of policy as "what people should do" (see also Spolsky and Shohamy 1999: 39). Beliefs are considered to "both derive from and influence practices. They can be a basis for language management or a management policy can be intended to confirm or modify them" (2004: 14).

This focus on ideology was borne out in interviews with management who reported certain shared beliefs which to a large extent underlie the mechanisms used in both banks: firstly, a belief in the importance/predominance of English in the sphere of international banking; secondly, that English is considered the most useful language to use as a lingua franca for official purposes in the context of a financial institution with a multilingual and multicultural workforce; thirdly, that languages other than English are considered essential for communication with clients or customers. Despite these common beliefs, the actual mechanisms adopted varied between individual institutions due to decisions made about the most appropriate way to manage language issues at their particular bank, as illustrated below.

Mechanisms (Policy Devices)

(1) Rules and Regulations

The first category of mechanisms in Shohamy's framework is the rules and regulations that "make decisions regarding 'the official' languages that should be used in certain places and situations" (2006: 61). The formal policies on the official or working languages of financial institutions in this research are detailed below:

Table 1. Working language

Mechanism	International Bank George	Scandinavian Bank Ivan
<i>Regulation on working language</i>	Formal language policy (English)	Formal language policy (English)

As indicated in table 1, both Bank George and Ivan have formal policies stating that English is the working language of their financial institutions. These policies were formalised between 13-35 years ago and before the current management joined the institutions. Even though the original policy-makers are unknown to the researcher (and employees), the Deputy Director at Bank Ivan and the HR Manager at Bank George currently control the direction and management of the institutions, in particular in terms of Human Resources and language issues. Consequently, these formal policies regarding

English are ‘the explicit and observable effort by someone or some group that has or claims to have authority over the participants in the domain to modify their practices or beliefs’ (Spolsky 2007: 4). The purpose of these policies is to manage social interaction and language use within the bank. Managers from both banks believed that English was the most useful lingua franca for work-related communication in the context of multilingual and multicultural workplaces, and hence supported its position as the working language of the bank.

(2) *Language Testing (Recruitment)*

In Shohamy’s framework, language tests communicate the importance, status and value of certain languages over others (2006: 94-105). Similarly in the case of these banks, policies on the languages required and orally tested in the recruitment process indicate the importance, status and value given to languages within the financial institution by management. In educational institutions, Shohamy notes that testing also serves as a mechanism to ‘override and contradict existing policies’ (2006: 105) and similar forces operate in the context of the workplace. In banks, policy on the languages required and tested contradict already existing language policies, particularly that of the official working language of the financial institution. In the context of financial institutions, the language testing mechanism is more accurately reflected in the recruitment process. This recruitment mechanism includes language proficiency requirements and oral tests at the point of hiring new employees. The following table indicates the different manifestations of the recruitment mechanism for both banks:

Table 2. Recruitment

Mechanism	International Bank George	Scandinavian Bank Ivan
<i>Language proficiency for recruitment</i>	Appropriate level of English. Other languages as required	Fluency in English. And one other language.

As this table indicates, both banks require English and orally test for English language skills. Differences arise at the level of English required. At Bank George, recruits are

required to be able to function at the level of English appropriate for the position. This mechanism directly influences language use practices, since employees often have differing levels of fluency in English and as a result other languages are needed to communicate with colleagues. This recruitment mechanism works against and contradicts the bank's formal policy stipulating that English is the working language, simply because in practice not all employees have sufficient knowledge of English to use English as the working language.

At Bank Ivan, fluency in English is required and this policy is adhered to even in the face of difficulties faced in finding employees with the appropriate level of English. In practice, English is comprehensible to all employees because of this recruitment mechanism. In contrast to Bank George, this aspect of the mechanism supports the formal policy on the working language of the bank.

But this is not the end of the story: an underlying belief in the importance of the preferred language of the client in communication also significantly impacts on the mechanism of recruitment in these banks. As indicated in the table above, both banks clearly place some value on languages other than English. In the case of Bank George, applicants proficient in other languages are sought for special positions. At Bank Ivan, job applicants are required to have one other language deemed important and appropriate for their bank, such as Swedish, German or French. These requirements are largely related to client communication and communication within Luxembourg.

To summarise, in both banks the recruitment mechanisms communicate the value of languages other than English to employees and work against the monolingual formal policies of English as the working language. The recruitment mechanism shapes the composition of employees and the resulting linguistic repertoire of the workforce which in turn influences how languages are used in practice (see discussion of employees' language use practices below).

Both banks employ between 18 and 24 nationalities. Employees from Luxembourg, France, Belgium and Germany represent important portions of the banks; 77% of Bank George's total employees originate in these areas as do 38% of Bank Ivan's workforce. At Bank George, the remaining 23% are made up of 20 nationalities not associated with

German or French-speaking countries. At Bank Ivan, Swedish employees make up 25% of the bank and a further 37% of the bank's employees represent 13 different nationalities from European and beyond. The recruitment mechanism undoubtedly influences the diverse range of nationalities at the banks. In practice, it appears that nationals or native speakers of the languages associated with clients are employed. As a result across both banks, employees of the same nationality as the client are employed, creating groups or departments of nationalities to deal with particular clients. Reported practices indicate that groups of nationals within client-related departments frequently use their mother tongue in communication amongst themselves and clients; English is used as a lingua franca to communicate with groups outside their departments.

The implications of the recruitment mechanism indicate that this mechanism is the most influential mechanism for financial institutions in terms of contradicting existing policies on the working language and influencing language practices.

(3) Language Education (Language Courses)

In Shohamy's framework (2006: 76), Language Education Policy (LEP) refers to language policies about home languages ("mother tongues" as well as foreign and second languages) in educational institutions. The majority of financial institutions in this research provide language courses to their employees and they face familiar issues (eg. what languages to teach, how many hours of study, methods, materials etc). Policies on language courses in financial institutions are formulated to organise and manage employees' language learning behaviour and influence language use practices.

Although language courses do not have the same influence on language practices as the mechanism of recruitment, the importance of language courses cannot be underestimated. This mechanism assists in improving communication in languages within the bank in order to create the necessary linguistic skills to meet the needs of the organisation. Table 3 describes the mechanism of language courses for both banks:

Table 3. Language courses

Mechanism	International Bank George	Scandinavian Bank Ivan
<i>Language courses</i>	English and German. Other languages as required.	English

As indicated, both banks provide language courses in English indicating the perceived value and need for English language skills within these two different multilingual and multicultural financial institutions. Bank George provides language courses in two languages, English and German, and additional languages if required. Practices at Bank George suggest that some employees are hired without knowledge of German and/or French and others without fluency in English. As a consequence, these courses provide a means to improve employees' language skills in English, German, French and additional languages, thereby increasing the use of these languages in practices. This supports the recruitment mechanism by making English language courses available to those employees hired with limited proficiency in English. However, it is inconsistent with the explicit policy nominating English as the working language; if employees were to use English, then it would seem pointless to offer language courses in languages other than English.

In contrast, Bank Ivan only finances English language courses. English courses are deemed by management to support and be consistent with the formal language policy of the bank which stipulates English as the working language. This mechanism reflects management's belief that the use of English should be encouraged and emphasised as the working language of the institution. In practice, offering language courses in only one language, English, restricts employees from learning or improving their skills in languages other than English for work-related tasks or for rapport-building in communication with clients and colleagues.

In summary, the discussion above has highlighted the inconsistency found between the mechanisms of recruitment and language courses and the implications of these contradictory mechanisms on practices.

Language Practices

The mechanisms used by banks reflect top-down forces. In this section, the discussion turns to language use practices, bottom-up forces. Spolsky defines practices as “the observable behaviours and choices- what people actually do. They are the linguistic features chosen, the variety of languages used” (2007: 3). The tables below reveal that the employees at Banks Ivan and George report using a range of languages in communication between colleagues of different nationalities and different departments within the banks:

Table 4. Language practices at Bank George

Bank George, FG Participant	Department	1	2	3	4	5	6
GA	Management	E	E	EG	EG	EFG	EFG
GB	Purchasing	E	EF	EFG	EF	EF	EF
GC	IT	EF	EFGI	EF	EFGI	EFGI	EFGI
GD	P. Relations	EFG	EFG	EFG	EFG	EFG	EFG
GE	Insurance	E	E	E	EFG	EFGI	EFGIDu

Category Key: 1= written reports, 2=emails, 3=presentations, 4=meetings, 5= telephone calls, 6=informal communication

Language Key: E=English, F=French, G=German, L=Luxembourgish, Du.=Dutch, I=Italian, S=Swedish, D=Danish, Sp. =Spanish.

Table 5. Language practices at Bank Ivan

Bank Ivan FG Participant	Department	Situation 1	2	3	4	5	6
IA	Reception	E	SEG	E	EG	SEFGLD	SEFGLD
IB	Personnel	E	E	EFGL	EFGL	EFG	EFGL
ID	Personnel	E	SE	SE	SE	SE	SEF
IE	Management	E	SE	SE	SEF	SE	SEF
IC	Inst. Client	E	E	EF	SEFI Sp	SEFISp	SEFLISp
IF	Inst. Client	E	SE	SEF	SEF	SEF	SEF
IG	Priv. Client	SE	SEF	SE	SEF	SEF	SEF
IH	Priv. Client	EG	EG	EGL	EG	EG	EGL
II	Client Support	E	EFSp	EFGSp	E	EFGsp	EFGSp

These reported language use patterns in six categories of communication indicate that employees in both banks flexibly and strategically use a variety of languages in their workplaces, in conjunction with English, to meet their needs. Although English is the language most frequently used in all categories of communication (apart from informal communication), the number of other languages used and the frequency of use reported indicate that English is not the sole working language of the banks. In spoken communication in particular a range of languages other than English are used with clients and colleagues. French is a prominent spoken language in these banks and the sheer number of French speakers in international banks (originating from Luxembourg, France and Belgium) play a significant role in the language use practices.

Reported practices indicate a multilingual approach to communication with colleagues, while the formal policies on working languages at both Bank George and Ivan imply a monolingual approach to language use with colleagues. Employees across both banks exhibit positive attitudes and beliefs about multilingual communication within the bank, including the use of English as a common language. The following comments from participants highlight these positive beliefs and indicate the bottom-up beliefs underlying their multilingual language use.

Extract 1: Bank Ivan Focus-Group

Spanish employee: If I didn't know the person at all, my first word would be English by default, and then by the accent the other person has on their English, you quickly adapt to the language [Laughter from participants].

You can usually tell quite quickly the Swedish, French or German accent.

[Later in the discussion]

Icelandic employee: I think if you're able to speak that language, you talk that language.

If not, you go back to English. English is the middle language. If you're insecure in another language, the language the other person is speaking, then you would choose English.

Extract 2: Bank George Focus-Group

Dutch employee I don't think it really matters if you work with people who speak different levels of English/French. You'll find a way.

You move to whatever people feel more comfortable in.

[Later in the discussion]

Dutch employee I think that the mix of culture and language is what makes you more tolerant. It's the mixture that really makes you really flexible and tolerant.

In both extracts we see employees reporting positively on the benefits of having a language to fall back on, English by default, as expressed by the Spanish employee. In all three cases, however, English is not seen as the only language to be used, despite explicit policy.

The following key factors influence employees' reported linguistic choices and overall language practices and explain in broad terms the patterns in this complex multilingual environment. These factors provide some indication as to why in practice employees do not solely use English and instead use a range of languages in these banks.

Employees' linguistic repertoire is reported as the primary factor in language choice in these multilingual banks. As a result, the choice of language often depends on whether the interlocutors have the same or different linguistic repertoires. Furthermore, due to the widely differing linguistic repertoires of employees, the number of interlocutors involved in any spoken or written interaction has a significant impact on language choice. The more interlocutors join in a communicative event, the more constraints on the choice of language, and the more importance placed on the linguistic repertoire of the joining interlocutor. The following focus-group discussion extract with employees at Bank

George reveals how language choice is flexible and negotiated according to the linguistic repertoire of the interlocutors.

Extract 3: Bank George Focus-group

Moderator: *What about meetings with colleagues? Are there particular types of meetings where you would use French rather than English?*

Dutch employee: Well, internal meetings, if it's just, you know, direct colleagues within the unit and if they're French-speaking, then, yes, it'll be French.

Or with Germans, it might be German. If it's more like across unit or section, then it depends on who speaks what. There may be French speakers and German speakers but the meeting will go in English. It really depends of language skills of everybody.

Moderator: *So, how is the language decided, if you come to a meeting and?*

Dutch employee: We'll find out [laughter]

If somebody doesn't react to that [laughter]

French employee: Normally, the official language is English, but there is always room for flexibility. If there are only Germans in the room, then it'll be German, or only French, then there'll be a decision that we do it in French. That's it.

Dutch employee: Anyway, minutes are always taken in English.

Moderator: *So does the manager decide or the employees?*

French employee: It's the culture. It's a cultural decision

Dutch employee: It's the majority.

The linguistic repertoire of interlocutors is not the only factor taken into consideration in language use practices, however. The function of communication, or why participants are communicating, also contributes to participants' language choice and overall language use patterns. This function of communication includes the purpose of the interaction e.g. transactional (content-oriented) or relational (interpersonal) functions (Holmes 2005) and the topic of the interaction (personal or bank-related). The type of communication, or how participants communicate, can also influence participants' choice of language in the

workplace context. This includes the medium by which participants communicate (i.e. written reports, emails, presentations, meetings, telephone conversations and informal communication) and also the level of formality associated with the interaction.

In summary, language use practices indicate that English, French, German, and other European languages coexist in the two banks with formal policies. The interaction of top-down and bottom-up forces as discussed creates a multilingual work environment, where although English is named as the sole working language, a range of working languages are being used within the banks. The analysis gives us a much richer picture of the language use in these banks than either the explicit policy or reported practices alone.

Conclusion

Investigating policy, practices and beliefs using Shohamy's (2006) framework provides a better understanding of the interaction of top-down forces and their impact on practices. Mechanisms, as used by management, communicate to employees the value, status and importance of languages in these financial institutions and have a significant influence on practices. Language use practices reveal the bottom-up forces operating in the financial institutions where linguistically diverse employees work and thereby provide valuable insight into de facto policy. As the data here illustrates, the complex interaction of top-down and bottom-up forces can account for the lack of congruence between explicit policy and practices.

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Powerhouses of organizational knowledge creation: Communities of Practice or Micro-communities of Knowledge?

Jeannie Fletcher

Communication in organisations is of interest across a range disciplines. In her doctoral research, Jeannie Fletcher is taking a linguistic approach to the role of context in order to explicate and examine knowledge enabling environments, a focus normally confined to strategic management. In this paper she explores the influence and significance of the community to workplace communication.

Abstract

In the fields of workplace discourse and strategic management alike, the Communities of Practice (CofPs) approach has been applied to describe learning contexts in organizations. Wenger (1998) identifies their contribution to organizational learning as a key source of new organizational knowledge and in later work depicts CofPs as “the fountainhead of knowledge development and therefore the key to the challenge of the knowledge economy.” (Wenger 1999: 11). However, Von Krogh et al. (2000) in extending knowledge creation theory, identify different entities as the core sites of knowledge creation activity. They explicitly distinguish between Wenger’s notion of the community of practice and the entities they term “micro-communities of knowledge” (MCKs). This interdisciplinary investigation of an organizational knowledge enabling context in a small New Zealand based IT organization, finds communities that correspond with the more traditional notion of CofPs as well as the MCKs described by Von Krogh et al. (2000). The findings identify similarities and additional distinguishing features of these communities as well as outlining their respective contributions to the organization’s knowledge enabling context.

Introduction

Wenger (1998) identifies organizational communities of practice (CofPs) as key sites of organizational learning and in more recent work (1999: 11) as “the fountainhead of the knowledge economy”. In developing his social learning theory Wenger describes the learning that takes place in CofPs as the “interaction between competence and experience” (1998: 138) and CofPs as contexts that facilitate this interaction. This approach has similarly been applied in linguistic investigations of organisation talk where the focus is typically the way in which community members, through ongoing interaction, learn to use language in ways that demonstrate they are part of the group and in turn

contribute to the constantly changing repertoire of the group (e.g. Holmes and Stubbe 2003a, Holmes and Marra 2002). In CofPs newer members acquire knowledge through their participation in a regime of competence, and they may also have opportunities to engage with others in the exploration of radically new insights leading to the creation of new knowledge (Wenger 1998: 138).

The CofP framework became central in the adoption of Nonaka and Takeuchi's influential Knowledge Creation Theory (1995) which aimed to explicate the competitive advantage held by Japanese companies in terms of innovation. In extending Nonaka and Takeuchi's (1995) theory, strategic management researchers Von Krogh, Ichijo and Nonaka (2000) introduced the organizational micro-community of knowledge (MCK) as a distinct but related concept. They identify interactions in productive MCKs as *enabling contexts* in which key organizational knowledge creation processes are concentrated. They explicitly distinguish between their concept of MCKs and the more traditional notion of CofPs, noting that:

although our concept of *enabling context* may seem similar to the “community of practice” developed by other researchers (Lave & Wenger, 1991, Wenger, 1998), there are important differences. The membership of a community of practice is fairly stable, and it takes new members time to become full participants. But the many organizational members who interact in an enabling context come and go. Instead of being constrained by history, an enabling context has a here and now quality and it is this quality that can spark real innovations.

(Von Krogh et al. 2000: 180).

In this paper I explore these two concepts in interactions which occurred in two organizational communities. One can be described as a more traditional community of practice, and the other more closely resembles Von Krogh et al.'s “micro-community of knowledge”. The analyses provide insights into important differences between the two

types of community including: participants, setting, and goals, which are reflected in their rules of interaction and norms of interpretation.

Background to the paper

Here I present a small case study from broader ethnographic research that investigates the extent to which one organization meets Von Krogh et al.'s (2000) criteria for a knowledge enabling context. Using Wenger's (1998) approach, the organization was initially viewed as one community of practice, but preliminary analysis of the data collected during the ethnographic fieldwork showed that the organization was in fact made up of a collection of communities which could be separated into two distinct types: CofPs reflecting the specialist fields within the IT profession, and other communities distinct from the traditionally recognised CofPs, which satisfy Von Krogh et al.'s criteria for "micro-communities of knowledge".

The setting for the study is Phoenix (pseudonym), a small (less than 50 employees) New Zealand based company of IT professionals, recognised nationally and internationally as having an ongoing capacity for innovation, and, we can therefore argue, an effective knowledge enabling context. Interestingly, in this organization all members are intentionally located together in one large open plan office. There are three small additional offices available for meetings and these are available for general use via an online booking system. The partitions between the three offices can be removed and for small group meetings two offices are made into one. All three are made into "the big room" for the weekly company meeting as well as for social occasions.

Methodology

Fieldwork for the study took place between August 2003 and December 2004 and yielded a large volume and wide variety of data, including audio recorded meetings, a range of other naturally occurring spoken interactions, interviews, emails, observations, field notes, information from the company website, in-house reports and company documentation such as manuals and charts, with this rich dataset allowing for a thorough ethnographic picture of the workplace as support for the linguistic analysis.

Hymes' (1974) ethnography of SPEAKING framework was applied to describe the components of the interactions as the first step in data processing. This initial analysis suggested not just a number of CofPs but two distinct kinds of organizational communities, differing notably in terms of setting, participants and goals. Closer analysis of the interactions provided additional insights and identified further differences especially in relation to rules of interaction and norms of interpretation. The results were interpreted against the criterial characteristics outlined by Wenger (1998) and Von Krogh et al. (2000) respectively.

Communities of Practice

At Phoenix the “creatives”, the “techies”, the development and integration team, web developers etc., comprise distinct CofPs each satisfying Wenger's (1998) criteria of: *mutual engagement in a joint enterprise, using a shared repertoire of resources*. Within the large open plan office, members of each CofP have their desks grouped close together in what could be called their ‘home space’. For the most part CofP members work away at their task - often silently - for long periods of time. Face-to-face interaction is the most common and preferred form of interaction (as reported in interviews and observed during fieldwork), and this is mostly in dyads. In each CofP the most senior person is the core member and most experienced expert in that particular field, and in some cases this person is also one of the organization's (four) senior managers. The seniors work alongside the other members within the ‘home space’ of the community and their leadership is generally long term.

One of the distinctive features of a CofP and noted by Von Krogh et al. (2000) is that members have a history of engagement in their practice and that newer members learn knowledge that is embedded there. This aligns with Wenger's (1998) view i.e. that practice must be understood as a learning process characterised by the interplay of competence and experience. Wenger notes that sustained mutual engagement “connects participants in ways that can become deeper than more abstract similarities such as social categories” (1998: 76). He comments that “although members of CofPs may have their

fair share of disagreements, tensions and conflicts, they can become very tight nodes of interpersonal relationships. These connections create relations of mutual accountability that become integral to the practice” (1998:76).

Interactions in close collegial relationships often exhibit characteristics similar to those between very close friends or family members. Participants work alongside each other and often talk as they work. Periods of silence are not uncommon and sometimes a comment or request by one member appears to be ignored by the other. This way of interacting is perfectly acceptable in these well established relationships where the interlocutors seem to have a tacit understanding of each others’ intentions. The interaction in Example 1, presented as 1a and 1b, illustrates this kind of close collegial relationship and mutual accountability to the ongoing work of the community’s joint enterprise, in this case web site design.

The context of this interaction is a teaching/learning session in the community of web site developers. James, the core expert, and the less experienced Mitchell sit at their adjacent desks working at their computers. James is about to show Mitchell how to apply a recently released technology, and they each work separately on other tasks until James signals he is ready to begin.

Example 1a

- | | | |
|----|----------|---|
| 1 | James | oh right how about I start with showing you what we’ve got to the |
| 2 | | [then silence apart from clicking keyboard] |
| 3 | Mitchell | we’re gonna have four for play station tonight |
| 4 | | [more clicking keyboard and office background noise] |
| 5 | | its noisy eh? |
| 6 | James | yeah looks like we’re gonna have two conversations recorded |
| 7 | | [chuckles] + we should probably start |
| 8 | Mitchell | [clicking keyboard for 3 more minutes] |
| 9 | | Woosh |
| 10 | | [more clicking – 4 minutes] |

- 11 Mitchell all done
 12 [lines 13-17 are very quiet]
 13 James [very quietly] I have a REAL problem with people EXTRAPolating
 14 Mitchell what do you mean?
 15 James [James confides in Mitchell his concern about a negative comment
 16 someone has made about him (James) to a senior manager]
 17 Mitchell [Supportive tone] [voc]

In workplace talk the discourse marker *right* is frequently found in utterance initial position as a signal initiating the beginning of new business (Holmes & Stubbe 2003b, Marra 2003). James' use of pronouns (line 1) *right – how about I start with showing you* positions him as senior and his directive (framed as a suggestion) shows he is setting the agenda. Mitchell, however, instead of stopping what he is doing and complying with James' directive, (quickly) types on. As the second component of a minimally two part sequence, a refusal is a responsive speech act (Holmes 2004: 217) and by simply typing on, Mitchell withholds both a response and compliance with James' legitimate directive, a potentially strong dismissal of authority in any other community. The fact that James appears not to take offence suggests a solid, well established collegial relationship. This interpretation is supported by Holmes findings that “between New Zealand workers who know each other well and who work together regularly, refusals may be very direct even when directed at someone of higher status and power” (2004: 221). Typically where such face threatening acts are directed to a superior, they are followed by mitigation and that appears to be the case here. The rapid clicking of the keyboard (line 2) suggests that Mitchell is trying to complete his current task as fast as possible, a signal which is unlikely to be interpreted positively except in a close collegial relationship.

As the interaction continues, Mitchell then introduces a seemingly off-topic comment about his plans for the evening (line 3). Laver (1975, 1981) focused analytic attention on the positive relational value of this kind of phatic communion. He argued that phatic communion is generally avoided in transactional settings but that where it does occur it is indexical and uncertainty reducing. Mitchell's comment is both indexical, referring to

the evening's play station game, and relational, since *we* (including James) will participate in it. His tag question (line 5) on the background noise of the office not only keeps the talk going, but seeks to involve James. Although the question could suggest that Mitchell did not hear James' directive, this is unlikely given his subsequent efforts at mitigation. The strategic positioning of Mitchell's actions and comments - which focus on mutual interests and engagement - emphasise the sense of collegiality and downplay the status difference between novice and expert.

James acknowledges Mitchell's comments on these other topics with a chuckle but also notes that the interaction is being recorded *we're going to have two conversations recorded* (line 6). He also reiterates his directive (again as a suggestion) *we should probably start* (lines 7), in each case using the inclusive and collegial pronoun *we*. Mitchell continues to stall for time, clicking away even faster on the keyboard and again maintaining the interaction with a paralinguistic *whoosh* (line 9), possibly to signal his attempt to finish his task as quickly as possible. James makes no further comment and after a few more minutes Mitchell announces *all done* (line 11). Mitchell's delay in complying with James' reiterated directive could well be unacceptable outside the context of a collegial relationship that is both solid and well established. As they are sitting at adjacent desks James can also see that Mitchell is engaged in a work task. Further support for a well established collegiality is James' disclosure of a personal confidence (lines 13-17). The lowered tone and greatly reduced volume are prosodic features marking this section of the exchange as confidential, so only its general content is provided.

In example 1b, below, James again uses the discourse marker *right* to signal the shift to the business of the session.

Example 1b (continued from Example 1a)

- | | | |
|----|----------|--|
| 18 | James | right so I've set up a very basic uh web-site |
| 19 | Mitchell | is this to start is this to play with? |
| 20 | James | uh well this is just to start its just the project structure for these two |
| 21 | | these /two projects\ this is just TWO projects out of |

- 22 Mitchell /sure sure\
 23 James potentially three or/ four\
 24 Mitchell [respectfully and deferentially] /for sure for sure\
 25 James I did this more around a so that we can get something going now
 26 and b so that we can get the (auto-builder) going
 27 Mitchell so its all set up?
 28 James yep ++ so we've got a pretty good few links here on the barker-
 29 lewis site
 30 Mitchell yep
 31 James so we've got the build log viewer so but those two there are projects
 32 building
 33 Mitchell [respectfully and deferentially]yep yep

Mitchell shows (line 8) that he is keen to *play with* the basic set up James is working on (it is part of the challenging Barker-Lewis project of which James is part). James however, redirects attention to the core business of their community (lines 20, 21, 23) stating explicitly that the work they are engaged in applies to a number of projects for which they are creating sites, thus orienting to the ongoing work of their community as it applies to the longer term goals of Phoenix. As the session proceeds, Mitchell says little else, and apart from asking one question, makes supportive comments *sure sure* and *yep* - backchannels that signal ongoing attention to the task at hand. When James reiterates this focus on the general goals (line 23) explicitly stating a number of possibilities, Mitchell responds with *for sure for sure* indicating he accepts and understands what he has been taught.

The solid collegial relationships in this community have arisen from a history of mutual engagement over time. James and Mitchell are both website developers, passionately devoted to their specialty, and although their interaction style is informal, the senior's role is well established and he is accorded due deference. The example also provides a glimpse of a CofP as a learning environment, a "home for identities" (Wenger 1998: 252), a place where leadership is well established, and comprised of members with different

degrees of expertise in the same sub-field of IT. As well as meeting Wenger's criteria for a CofP this community is characterised by relatively stable membership, an inbound trajectory of identity leading from novice to expert, and an established collegiality between members arising from history of previous engagement, which differentiate it from Von Krogh et al.'s MCK, a cross-functional team with no previous history of engagement, as described in the next section.

Micro-communities of knowledge

In contrast with the CofP in Example 1, the community in Example 2 does meet Von Krogh et al.'s (2000) criteria for a micro-community of knowledge. The "Barker-Lewis" project team is made up of members from various communities of practice representing different functional areas.

As participants in a cross functional MCK – the project team, the members are removed from the familiarity of their CofP, with its established collegial relationships, and their status relative to other CofP members. In the MCK all members have relatively equal status under the direction of the project leader. As a team they must establish a level of collegiality that enables them to work together to achieve the project outcomes and outputs, within the constraints of the project brief, constraints which include a very short time span of twelve weeks. Whilst participating in the MCK, the members' time will be divided between meetings at Phoenix (like the one shown in the examples here) and at the client company, as well as some time each week being spent in their own CofP, during which they will continue to work on their contribution to the project.

This shift in interactional context, together with simultaneous membership in two different kinds of communities presents a range of challenges for MCK members' communicative competence. Their responses to some of these challenges can be seen in the interactions in the examples that follow, notably the ways in which the members begin to establish collegiality.

The members are all experts in their IT sub-fields, and so within the context of the project they have relatively equal status. Philip, the project leader - although not the most senior member (in terms of status within the organization) - is responsible for co-ordinating the project, keeping it on track and within the constraints of the project brief. Other team members include: David, the head of development and integration, who is also one of the organization's four senior managers; James, the senior web designer; Terry, a senior 'creative' and Theo, 'a techie'. In addition there are two other members who meet a further criterion mentioned by Von Krogh et al. (2000), i.e. members who come and go. These are, first, Michael, the managing director of Phoenix who designed the original system that is now to be revised by the project team. Although he is not at this meeting, his role is senior analyst for the project. The second member who will come and go throughout the project is Mitchell, who works with James in the web development CofP. Although not sufficiently experienced to be a core member of the team, he has offered himself as "dogsbody" (his term) so he can learn as much as possible about both this project and the application of the new technology. He will attend MCK (project team) meetings held at Phoenix (but not at the client site) and he will also learn from James within the context of the CofP, as James develops the website for the project.

As team members arrive to participate in the meeting, the first meeting of this project team, they seat themselves in a semicircle around one end of an oval table. Datashow equipment and a screen are set up at the front of the room. Philip has been standing near the door as people arrive, and as he turns to go to the front of the room to begin the presentation David comes in, sees Philip and quietly asks him a question about a key project date. David is one of the firm's four senior managers and the most senior person at the meeting.

Example 2a

- | | | |
|---|--------|--|
| 1 | David | the um the go live licenses will be march right? |
| 2 | Philip | there's no time frame other than other than an indication a strong |
| 3 | | indication that it's going to be march until michael confirms ... |
| 4 | | unsure as to the understanding ++ the client's understanding ++ that |

- 5 we will be going live on that date + so a bit of a heads up there+ the
6 framework will be finished done released the framework will be
7 final+ its important+ it IS important
8 [Philip moves to the front of the room to begin the presentation and
9 notices Mitchell is missing]
10 Philip [tersely] where's mitchell?
11 Terry he's playing games
12 Philip I'm I'm a bit disappointed in the lack of commitment
13 [general laughter]
14 Terry it's alright he's just in the middle of saving his location on the xbox
15 [more general laughter]
16 Terry obviously a very important point in the game
17 [more general chatter - about x-box]
18 Philip I'm ah I've just managed to get back into the role of the master
19 chief + after killing the heretic and his two little spawn hologram
20 things
21 Terry you only have to kill the heretic
22 Theo yes yeah + you just have to kill that one guy + you just have to
23 jump on and bash him
24 Terry it's pretty easy really
25 Philip yeah once you work out what you actually have to do.
26 [Mitchell arrives, closes the door and pulls a chair up to the table]
27 Philip [somewhat sarcastic tone]glad you could join us
28 [it's now around five minutes after meeting was scheduled to begin]
29 Terry what's all this garbage about having to save? ()
30 David well you have to save it quick otherwise it starts you at the
31 beginning /of\
32 Mitchell /I'm\ more worried about someone else just picking up my
33 character and you just don't want somebody () do you?

At one level, David's questioning of Philip at the beginning of the extract is a legitimate question and Philip appears to do his best to provide an answer. However at another level Philip's response (lines 2-5) could be seen as somewhat defensive and evasive suggesting he may have interpreted the question as a threat to his team leadership. Given this interpretation Philip appears to avoid answering the question, instead deferring to Michael's (the managing director) and the client's confirmation, thus simultaneously aligning himself with those who are 'in the know' and distancing David from that information. The sense of tension is added to by his emphasis on the significance of the project as he stresses *it is important, it IS important* - the repetition acting as an intensifier (lines 6-7).

David asks no more questions and goes to sit with the others. As Philip goes to the front of the room to begin the presentation he notices Mitchell hasn't arrived he asks rather tersely *where's Mitchell?* (line 10) Terry's response, *he's playing games*, makes light of Mitchell's absence and prompts general laughter. Humour often occurs at strategic points in workplace meetings (Holmes and Stubbe 2003b) and like phatic communion and small talk, it can defuse tension. Here it reduces the tension around Mitchell's lateness. The remark though is also rather provocative, especially given the sequence that follows. Although Philip needs to establish his leadership by calling the meeting to order, he somewhat hesitantly (by hedging as in line 19) joins in the exchange of talk about x-box. Terry and Theo collaborate in a subversively humorous exchange (21-25) inferring that Philip knows less about the game than the rest of them. This kind of jocular abuse is part of the Phoenix organizational culture and here it helps to establish group solidarity and maintain interaction. By 'needling' Philip, Theo and Terry draw attention away from Mitchell. However, when Mitchell arrives Terry changes his stance (footing in Goffman's sense) showing solidarity with Philip instead and challenging Mitchell with *what's all this garbage about having to save?* (line 29) David steps in to defend Mitchell, who begins to explain himself, but Philip interrupts (line 34) with *RIGHT* calling the meeting to order as seen in Example 2b which follows directly on from Example 2a.

In this example Philip smoothes the transition to the transactional business of the meeting with a slightly humorous Welcome to ‘Barker-Lewis 2’, ‘the Return’ (lines 36-37). He uses inclusive pronouns to position this group of diverse experts as one team working together to achieve ‘our three month mission’ He explicitly emphasises its importance, gives it a name and frames it as ‘cool’ and ‘exciting’ (line 43)

Example 2b (continued from Example 2a)

- 34 Philip RIGHT forgive the poor () documentation it’s still a work in progress
 35 but this will give us the general gist of what we’re doing here
 36 first of all WELCOME everyone to team barker-lewis YAY team
 37 barker-lewis dot net barker-lewis 2 the return return of the broker
 38 [general laughter]
 39 so our three month mission is stated up there [pointing to the slide]
 40 we’re gonna RECREATE THE PREMIUM FUNDING SYSTEM dot
 41 net two jumping the gun a little bit on dot net two by getting in early
 42 and releasing the application essentially a WEEK after the framework
 43 goes live + I understand that’ll be very cool for us very exciting
 44 Terry I just wondered briefly what’s the premium funding system
 45 Philip I’m going to show you very shortly um the program flow
 46 and user interface are to be consistent with their existing
 47 system ()
 48 over three HUNDRED thousand so um so a big question that THEY had
 49 to ask was do we want to spend this extra money?
 50 Terry hopefully returned in ease of maintainability in the future
 51 Philip the return on investment can be measured in a few ways but I’m not
 52 going into that right now if you want to know just come and ask me.
 53 Terry [very short] cool
 54 Philip um a lot of it’s sensitive information and that’s ANOTHER thing
 55 whatever we’re gonna talk about within this group and within phoenix
 56 ah is covered by the standard non-disclosure agreement we will be
 57 dealing with LIVE data during the development of this which is live

- 58 FINANCIAL data very sensitive to the over 100 companies that are in
 59 the system we'll be using THEIR LIVE DATA to test our calculations
 60 and to make sure everything balances as with the existing system so
 61 we're gonna find out how much some rather large companies in Europe
 62 and New Zealand are earning and of course that does NOT go um
 63 beyond Phoenix's four walls ... mister knight is the man what he says
 64 goes
- 65 Terry OR influence our share purchasing decisions.
 66 [general laughter]
- 67 Philip um + not too sure what the laws are on our share purchasing decisions.
 68 but can find out if you're interested.

This example illustrates some of the complex ways in which natural discourse operates simultaneously at a number of levels (Schiffrin 1994: 149). As the presentation proceeds, Philip moves quickly to assert his leadership, deferring questions until he is ready to answer (lines 45, 51-52), and pressing on with the serious business of describing *the mission* of the project (lines 39-43).

Throughout the presentation Phillip focuses on the project as the group's joint enterprise, as indicated particularly through his pronoun use. The purpose of the joint enterprise aligns primarily with the requirements of client's company (*mister knight is the man + what he says goes*) (line 63-64) and the constraints associated with their task including working with live data (line 57), sensitivity of the data (line 58), and the tight time frame.

In contrast with the CofP in Example 1, this community meets Von Krogh et al.'s (2000) criteria for a MCK: with members drawn from different CofPs it is cross-functional; some members (notably Michael and Mitchell) will come and go throughout the project; the newly formed team is "not constrained by a history of engagement" (2000: 180); and the numerous risks and constraints of the project including the tight time frame contribute to "a here and now quality" (2000: 180).

In terms of Hymes (1974) 'etic grid', aimed to describe the context within which the communication occurs, the ethnographic evidence also identified differences between the two communities in terms of **Setting**, **Participants** and **Ends**, and in the linguistic analysis these differences are reflected in the rules of interaction and **norms** of interpretation.

Table 1: Differences between three salient components in CofPs and MCKs

'SPEAKING' Components	Community of Practice (Web-site designers) Example 1	Micro-community of knowledge (Barker-Lewis project team) Example 2
Setting	The community's 'home-space' within the open plan office.	The Phoenix meeting room i.e. not within any one CofP.
Participants	Members have different degrees of expertise in a similar field. Leadership is well established Collegiality is well established Membership is generally long term.	Members have similar degrees of expertise in different fields. Leadership must be established. Collegiality must be developed. Membership is only for the life of the project.
Ends	Goals of the CofP are aligned with the long term objectives of Phoenix .	Goals of the MCK are aligned with the short term goals of the project brief ie external to any one CofP.
Act sequence	See linguistic analysis example 1	See linguistic analysis example 2
Key	Informal style Formal purpose	Semi-formal/formal style Formal purpose
Instrumentality	Face-to-face (dyad) Spoken <i>Plus</i>	Face-to-face (one-to-group) Spoken <i>Plus</i>

	Co-operative CMC (computer mediated communication)	CMC power point
Rules of interaction and	<p>Collegial relationship is established .</p> <p>Off-topic talk, small talk/phatic communion are acceptable.</p> <p>Quite long periods of silence are normal.</p> <p>FTAs are not uncommon even to superiors</p> <p>Face-to-face spoken interaction is the most common and preferred medium.</p>	<p>Project leader (PL) takes the initiative</p> <p>Presentation format gives (PL) the right to first turn and longest turns and the right to determine when questions will be accepted.</p> <p>Questions from group members are expected.</p> <p>PL has an obligation to articulate his preference for timing of questions/comments.</p> <p>PL must establish his leadership.</p> <p>MCK must help to establish solidarity and collegiality.</p> <p>MCK as a community interacts through meetings (face-to-face spoken), email, mob phone, MSN messenger.</p>
Norms of interpretation	<p>Refusals and unmitigated FTAs are tolerated even when directed at a senior.</p> <p>Questions are always answered immediately.</p>	<p>Taking PL's turn may cause offence.</p> <p>Questions from members are expected, as clarity and understanding of the project brief are essential for all participants.</p>
Genre	Learning/teaching	Meeting

Individually and in terms of relations among them, these components provide insights into differences in the nature and the alignment of the joint enterprise in which each community is engaged. The discussion that follows provides an overview of differences between the two communities and the implications for research in workplace discourse of

complexities arising from participants' multi-membership in these two fundamentally different interactional contexts.

Discussion

This discussion briefly outlines similarities between the two communities and then focuses on their differences at both macro-and micro-levels of analysis. The analyses provide support for the features described by both Wenger and Von Krogh and colleagues. The discussion identifies additional distinguishing features of each community and suggests inter-relationships between the two.

In both the CofP and the MCK it is clear that the members are mutually engaged in a joint enterprise, using a shared repertoire of resources including linguistic resources. However, in comparing the components of communication in each community, clear differences begin to emerge at the macro-level, for instance the difference between the goals (mnemonically *e*nds) of each community's joint enterprise, and more specifically the *alignment* of these goals. This difference broadly impacts other components in the grid such as *p*articipants and *s*etting. Furthermore the alignment, the purpose of each community's joint enterprise, conditions the discourse of each community, placing quite different demands on participants' communicative competence, and revealing the complexity of workplace discourse in these two fundamentally different workplace contexts.

Macro-level contrasts between the two communities

The goals of the CofP's joint enterprise (mnemonically *e*) align with its specialty practice and its contribution to the long term goals and objectives of Phoenix, a focus internal to the community and its relation to the organization. CofP members (mnemonically *p*) are all specialists in the same subfield of IT and in this sense they share a perspective. Members' identities are aligned in relation to each other on an inbound trajectory reflecting their relative degrees of expertise. This internal orientation to the ongoing development of depth and quality of the members' combined expertise in their sub-field of IT, forms what could be called a 'deep pool' of knowledge on which the organization

can draw for many different purposes over time. This long term, internal alignment is reflected in the setting for the CofPs day-to-day activities. Each CofP at Phoenix has its own home space within the open plan office with its own artefacts (such as furniture and equipment) and resources, and as a community it has an expected lifetime similar to that of the organization.

By contrast, the goals of the MCK's joint enterprise are aligned in a way which is external to any one CofP. In this case, the development of a new website and online funding system is governed by the project brief, which is largely influenced by and focused on the long term goals and objectives of the *client* company. Again this impacts on the components of **p**articipants and **s**etting. As the project requires input from a number of different fields of IT, the project team comprises a member from each of the appropriate CofPs one of whom is designated project leader. Group membership confers participants with an identity as diverse subject experts of relatively equal status with respect to each other, plus the project leader as co-ordinator. This configuration more closely resembles a group of diverse experts on a shared orbit around the central figure of the project leader. This diversity is reflected in the setting of the day-to-day work of the project team, which does not 'belong' in any one 'home space' in the general office, but rather alternates between the meeting room and the client site. On completion of the project the team will disband, so in this sense the MCK is a transient community which in contrast with the CofP has a relatively short-term life cycle (in this instance – 3 months).

These macro-level differences between the two communities are similarly reflected at the micro-level as participants orient to their different alignments in day-to-day interactions.

Micro-level differences between the two communities

At the micro-level, the linguistic analyses show how members of each community orient to these differences in alignment of the joint enterprise, through differences in **a**ct sequence, rules of interaction and **n**orms of interpretation. In the context of the CofP, the interaction in Example 1 shows that members orient to one another as close colleagues, for instance by using very direct conversational strategies, quite long periods of silence

and confidential exchanges. Minimalistic small talk - for instance *its noisy eh?*, *whoosh* and *all done*, embedded in Mitchell's clicking of the keyboard, effectively combines two modes of communication and keeps the interaction going whilst he completes one task before engaging with another. This together with Mitchell's comment *we're gonna have four for play station tonight* imparts what Coupland (2000) refers to as a sense of 'we-ness' consistent with a solid collegial relationship developed over time. Despite the delay in following a directive there is also evidence of Mitchell's deference towards James as he orients to James greater expertise once the teaching/learning session begins, conveying an overall sense of both friendship and respect as characteristic of this community. The relatively short turns, alternation of questions and answers and focus on the broader application of their outputs, contribute to a sense of the speciality practice in action consistent with the wider goals of the organisation.

Interaction in the MCK by contrast shows a sense of tension as the project leader begins to assert his position and other members from senior manager to 'dogsbody' begin to orient to each other in the project team. Collegiality can again be seen in this community, but here we see it beginning to be established. Early moves to achieve this are shown first through members' show of solidarity with Mitchell as a latecomer, and subsequently with Philip the project leader once Mitchell arrives. Here too small talk, together with humour, functions relationally to reduce tension and to assist members' expressions of solidarity. Throughout his presentation Philip orients to the external alignment of their work as a project team, emphasising the external constraints, and challenges of the client organization's project brief as well as a high level of external control (*mister knight is the man what he says goes*).

Conclusion

The analysis of interactions in these organizational communities suggests they are of two fundamentally different kinds. And although both kinds meet Wenger's criteria for a CofP, only the MCK meets Von Krogh et al.'s (2000) criteria of cross functional team with no prior history of engagement. But despite their distinctive characteristics the two types of community are both interdependent and interacting. As relatively stable long

term communities comprising multiple members of the same specialty, CofPs form deep pools of knowledge. The comparatively short lived / transient MCKs however, draw their members from each relevant CofP to assemble a team with substantial diversity in their fields of knowledge. This is essential to address the full spectrum of challenges arising from the demands of the project brief. So in a very real sense the strength of the MCK depends on the strength of the various CofPs. In addition the two communities are interacting in the sense that while engaged in the work of the MCK, members must reconcile their various perspectives to align with the demands and constraints of the project brief. Significantly, when the MCK disbands and the members return to their CofPs, their new or extended knowledge and experience acquired in the course of the project become part of the knowledge resources of the CofPs.

The interactions analysed here support Von Krogh et al.'s (2000) claim that what they refer to as MCKs are distinct from the CofPs described by Wenger (1998). However, as the MCKs depend on the CofPs for their members, this provides support for Wenger's claim that CofPs are 'the fountainhead of the knowledge development'. Furthermore MCKs provide members with valuable opportunities to both apply and challenge their expertise, thus providing a source of experience that can both expand knowledge and improve practice within the CofPs. This shift between the two contexts, together with participants' simultaneous membership of both, has a number of implications. For the members of these organizational communities it suggests a significant challenge to their communicative competence, arising from subtle shifts in organizational identity, power relationships, and alignment of their day-to-day work. For researchers in workplace communication, it suggests close investigation of the complexities arising from these shifts which impact on, for instance, the ways in which participants use discourse strategies to enact solidarity, power and identity. The evidence in this analysis shows that CofPs foster solid collegial relationships which together with their depth of knowledge suggest they contribute positively to the organization's knowledge enabling context.

Transcription Conventions

All names are pseudonyms

WELCOME TO	Capitals indicate emphatic stress
[general laughter]	Paralinguistic features in square brackets
+	Pause of up to one second
++	Two second pause
.../.....\...	Simultaneous speech
...	Some words omitted
(x-box)	Transcribers best guess at an unclear utterance
?	Rising or question intonation
[voc]	Untranscribable noises

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Using workplaces to research attitudes and behaviours towards the Māori language in Wellington

Julia de Bres

In this research report, Julia de Bres describes the methodology she used to collect data in Wellington workplaces. Within the discussion she describes her rationale for choosing the workplace as a site for investigation and discusses the logistics of researching in organisations. This data contributed to her PhD thesis entitled “Planning for Tolerability: Promoting positive attitudes and behaviours towards the Māori language among non-Māori New Zealanders”.

Abstract

This research report discusses the workplace-based methodological design and selected findings of my PhD research on the attitudes and behaviours of non-Māori New Zealanders towards the Māori language. A participant recruitment approach at nine white-collar workplaces in Wellington was used to attempt to access non-Māori participants with a range of attitudes towards the Māori language. Although this workplace-based design was mainly intended to facilitate access to a range of participants, the data collection also resulted in a number of findings relating to Māori language in the workplace in particular. This report discusses a selection of these findings, including the association between participants’ workplaces and their attitudes towards the Māori language, participants’ stated behaviours towards the Māori language at work (including pronunciation of Māori words, using Māori words and phrases, and responding to the use of Māori by others) and participants’ views on how their workplace environment constrains and/or fosters their Māori language use.

Introduction

My PhD research (de Bres 2008) investigated the effectiveness of promoting positive attitudes and behaviours towards the Māori language among non-Māori New Zealanders, as a contributing factor in Māori language regeneration. Among other aspects, the

research incorporated a data collection process using questionnaires and interviews with eighty non-Māori New Zealanders, investigating their attitudes towards the Māori language, their responses to current and recent Māori language planning initiatives targeted at them, and the role they saw for themselves in supporting Māori language regeneration. This research is located primarily within the fields of language attitudes and language planning, but it relates to research on language in the workplace at a methodological level, in that the data collection process was undertaken at nine white-collar workplaces in Wellington.

Rationale for workplace recruitment approach

I saw several advantages to using a workplace-based approach to participant recruitment, including the opportunity to gain access to a semi-random sample of participants and to benefit from formally facilitated communication with these participants (once official approval was obtained from the workplaces). I had also profited from experience working with the Language in the Workplace (LWP) team at Victoria University of Wellington, where I had gained useful methodological knowledge of how to work effectively with workplaces when undertaking linguistic research. The main basis for a workplace-based approach to recruitment in this instance, however, was my objective of recruiting participants with a wide range of attitudes towards the Māori language. It is very difficult to predict the attitudes of people one has not met, and although there is now a considerable body of research on the attitudes of non-Māori New Zealanders towards the Māori language (see Boyce 2005 for a useful survey), this research tells us little about which groups of New Zealanders hold particular attitudes¹. It seems reasonable to assume, however, that the nature of some workplace environments would suggest a prevalence of more positive attitudes towards the Māori language than others. The underlying assumption guiding my selection of workplaces was that the more directly an organisation's work related to Māori issues, the more likely employees would have positive attitudes towards the Māori language and, conversely, the less directly an organisation's work related to Māori issues, the less likely employees would have

positive attitudes towards the Māori language. This led me to select the following four ‘types’ of workplaces for recruiting participants:

- New Zealand public sector organisations with a focus specifically on issues relating to Māori, where the nature of the organisation’s work specifically predisposed it to fostering positive attitudes towards the Māori language (“public sector Māori organisations”);
- New Zealand public sector organisations without a focus specifically on issues relating to Māori, where the nature of the organisation’s work did not specifically predispose it to fostering positive attitudes towards the Māori language, but the organisation operated within a public sector context in which the government had assumed responsibilities to foster Māori language regeneration (“public sector general organisations”);
- New Zealand based private sector organisations without a focus specifically on issues relating to Māori, where the nature of the organisation’s work did not predispose it to fostering positive attitudes towards the Māori language, but the organisation operated solely within a New Zealand context (“private sector New Zealand organisations”); and
- International private sector organisations with a division in New Zealand, where the nature of the organisation’s work did not predispose it to fostering positive attitudes towards the Māori language, and the organisation’s focus was primarily external to New Zealand (“private sector international organisations”).

I planned to target two workplaces from each of these four categories, and hypothesised that employees at each workplace would show patterned differences in attitudes towards the Māori language, depending on their workplace type.

Participant recruitment and data collection process

The data collection design involved two rounds, using two different instruments: a questionnaire taking around 45 minutes to complete and semi-structured interviews of about 20 minutes. I thought my best chance of encouraging workplaces to participate in the research was to know someone at each workplace who could vouch for me if necessary (see Holmes and Stubbe 2003: 21). After making an initial selection of potential workplaces, therefore, I approached a contact person at each workplace (in all cases a friend or friend-of-a-friend) to seek approval for workplace participation. In some cases contact people were able to give approval for workplace participation themselves (depending on their level of authority in the organisation); in others they sought approval from an authoritative source. There was a high level of agreement to participate, with ten out of eleven workplaces approached throughout the course of the research agreeing to participate. The eleventh workplace was initially open to participating in the research, but subsequently withdrew due to concerns about how to approach potential participants, and one of the workplaces was later excluded from participation, due to a procedural error resulting in the participants knowing more about the purpose of the research than was intended. As with the approval process for workplace participation, how individual participants were contacted varied between workplaces, depending on what each workplace considered appropriate. Although ideally the participant recruitment process would have been the same for each workplace, I also needed to be sensitive to the local workplace context, so this was negotiated on a case by case basis, the only strict specification being that participants be recruited on a voluntary basis. The approach taken in most workplaces was for all employees to be sent an email describing the basic topic of the questionnaire (“people’s opinions about the Māori language in New Zealand”) and inviting them to participate if they met the selection criteria (being non-Māori, born or resident in New Zealand for at least ten years, aged between 25 and 45, and having access to a computer). In some workplaces participants were contacted in person by the contact person and invited to participate. The first ten volunteers from each workplace who met the criteria were selected for participation. This process resulted in ten participants from seven out of the eight initial workplaces, and four participants from the eighth (much

smaller) workplace. The eventual response rate for the questionnaires was 100% for seven of the initial eight workplaces (including the smaller workplace), and 60% for the eighth workplace. I attribute this lower response rate to not having direct access to these participants, who at the workplace's preference were contactable solely through their manager, whereas I was in direct email contact with all other participants. This, along with the lower number of participants at the smaller workplace referred to above, was the reason for subsequently approaching a ninth workplace (where the eventual response rate was again 100%). Twenty-six of the 63 participants who signaled their willingness in the questionnaire to participate in the second round were randomly selected for interviews, and all those approached took part. Participants were provided with incentives for completing the questionnaire (a movie voucher) and participating in the interviews (a twenty dollar book voucher). The questionnaires were completed over a period of five months, from March to August 2007, and the interviews took place over a period of three months, from June to August 2007. The questionnaire data was analysed using the statistics programme SPSS 14.0 for Windows, and the interview data was transcribed and analysed manually.

Association between attitudes towards the Māori language and workplaces

Although the choice of a workplace-based participant recruitment approach was made mainly in order to access participants with a range of attitudes towards the Māori language, the data collection also resulted in a number of findings relating to Māori language in the workplace in particular. The first such finding was the strong association between workplace type and attitudes towards the Māori language.

The attitude statements in the questionnaire were used to place participants into three attitude categories, based on those developed in three recent surveys on attitudes towards the Māori language undertaken by Te Puni Kōkiri (the Ministry of Māori Development) (Te Puni Kōkiri 2002, 2003, 2006)². The categories were 'Supporters' (who had positive attitudes towards the Māori language), 'Uninterested' (who were largely uninterested in the Māori language), and 'English Only' (who had negative attitudes towards the Māori

language). The proportion of participants within each category in this research (Supporters 56.3%, Uninterested 38.8% and English Only 5%) are similar to those in previous research (Te Puni Kōkiri 2002, 2003).

The Fisher's Exact Test showed strong evidence of an association between workplace type and attitude category ($p=0.002$), as shown in Figure 1 below. The pattern, as predicted, showed that participants in public sector Māori organisations were overwhelmingly likely to be in the Supporter category (90%), followed at some distance by participants from public sector general organisations (60%), participants from private sector New Zealand organisations (42.9%), and finally participants from private sector international organisations (34.6%).

Figure 1: Cross-tabulation of attitude category and workplace type

Attitude category	Workplace type (count and % within)			
	Public sector Māori	Public sector general	Private sector New Zealand	Private sector international
Supporters	18 90.0%	12 60.0%	6 42.9%	9 34.6%
Uninterested	2 10.0%	6 30.0%	7 50.0%	16 61.5%
English Only	0 .0%	2 10.0%	1 7.1%	1 3.8%

This pattern was also present in relation to each of the individual workplaces ($p=0.016$) (see Figure 2 below). The only workplace that did not entirely fit the pattern was one of the private sector international organisations ('PSII' in the chart), which was closer percentage-wise to the private sector New Zealand organisations than to the other private sector international organisations.

Figure 2: Cross-tabulation of attitude category and workplace

Attitude category	Workplace (count and % within)								
	PSM1	PSM2	PSG1	PSG2	PSNZ1	PSNZ2	PSI1	PSI2	PSI3
Supporters	9 90.0	9 90.0	6 60.0	6 60.0	2 50.0	4 40.0	5 50.0	2 33.3	2 20.0
Uninterested	1 10.0	1 10.0	4 40.0	2 20.0	2 50.0	5 50.0	5 50.0	3 50.0	8 80.0
English Only	0 .0	0 .0	0 .0	2 20.0	0 .0	1 10.0	0 .0	1 16.7	0 .0

These results appear to strongly validate the choice of workplace types as means of recruiting participants with a range of attitudes towards the Māori language. In addition to the broader benefits to the research of accessing participants with a variety of attitudes, the results also provide suggestive information about the distribution of attitudes towards the Māori language across different types of workplaces in Wellington. This has not been reflected in previous research, where broader categories such as income and education level have been considered as demographic variables (e.g. Te Puni Kōkiri 2002).

Participants' reflections on Māori language use in the workplace

A more unanticipated finding of the research was the salience of the workplace environment in general for the participants regarding their own and others' Māori language use. It is important to note that the fact the data was collected in a workplace environment is likely to have influenced participants' specific mentions of Māori language use at their workplaces. It is also important to re-emphasise that the research was limited to white-collar workplaces, to the Wellington region only, and involved a relatively small number of only semi-randomly selected participants (compared, for

example, to Te Puni Kōkiri's approximately 1,500 participants per attitude survey). These choices do not allow for generalising the results of the data collection to the non-Māori population as a whole, and mean the research can only be considered exploratory. These cautions aside, the participants' reflections suggest a number of interesting observations regarding Māori language in the workplace in Wellington.

The data discussed in this section comes from the interviews in the second round of the data collection³. These semi-structured interviews involved discussion of a selection of potential 'desired behaviours' (de Bres 2008) for non-Māori New Zealanders in relation to the Māori language, including: pronouncing Māori words and place names in a 'Māori' way, knowing and using basic Māori words and phrases in English, learning/speaking Māori fluently, responding positively to the use of Māori by others, supporting Māori language regeneration initiatives, and taking an interest in Māori language and culture. Just three of these behaviours are discussed here, as examples of cases where participants specifically referred to their workplace in relation to behaviours towards the Māori language. A notation system has been used where quotes appear to summarise participant characteristics.⁴

Pronunciation of Māori words at work

The first behaviour discussed was pronouncing Māori words according to Māori phonological principles, as opposed to anglicised pronunciation. All Supporters except one (a non-native speaker of English) said they tried to pronounce Māori words in a 'Māori' way and did so to show support for the Māori language. This behaviour was less common among the other attitude categories, but about half of the Uninterested participants and one English Only participant also claimed to use 'Māori' pronunciation - in these cases usually for reasons of linguistic 'correctness' rather than a stated desire to support the language. It was very common for participants to report variation in pronunciation depending on situational factors. This included using anglicised pronunciation to promote intelligibility, making a special effort to pronounce Māori words according to Māori principles around Māori people, not using 'Māori'

pronunciation around non-Māori to avoid negative reactions, or doing so despite these reactions to model behaviour. A number of participants said they were more likely to pronounce Māori words in a ‘Māori’ way at work, if not in their private lives:

If I’m in a work situation then I do my best to pronounce it properly
(F-S-25/30-PbG)

I’m probably more casual with my pronunciation if the relationship is closer [...] but if it’s a formal business setting for instance then I think whether you’re speaking Māori or English you do tend to watch your pronunciation and your articulation and things anyway so I do think situation does dictate how any person pronounces (F-U-30/35-PrNZ)

If I was in a work situation if I was interviewing someone [...] I would probably make the effort to pronounce things correctly [...] but in everyday life I probably wouldn’t make the effort (F-U-30/35-PrI)

As these comments came from participants who did not necessarily have positive attitudes towards the Māori language themselves or work in Māori-focused organisations, this practice appeared to represent a perception of ‘Māori’ pronunciation as an accepted standard to which participants oriented when necessary in formal contexts, such as at work. This may suggest that the much commented-upon reversal of the phonological assimilation of Māori words in English in the mainstream media has now transferred to other more formal domains of New Zealand life. This sense of a recognised standard was reinforced by those participants who chose not to use ‘Māori’ pronunciation but still referred to their behaviour as ‘incorrect’:

I’d definitely be on the not pronouncing it correctly side (F-U-30/35-PrI)

[Do I] pronounce it incorrectly? (*interviewer laughs*) Absolutely (M-U-40/45-PrI)

Use of Māori words and phrases at work

Another behaviour discussed with participants was knowing and using some basic Māori words and phrases in English, such as greetings (e.g. *kia ora*), borrowings (e.g. *whānau*) or phrases (e.g. *kei te pēhea koe?*). The participants' responses regarding this behaviour highlighted the quite conscious choice that appears to be involved for many non-Māori in using Māori words and phrases in English, as well as the high sensitivity of participants to the constraints and possibilities of their social environment regarding Māori language use. Using Māori words and phrases did not come naturally to most participants and, although several had favourable attitudes towards engaging in this behaviour, the sense of artificiality or discomfort they experienced in actually doing so could easily derail their intentions. Some participants talked of environments that were more conducive to the use of Māori words and phrases than others. While some felt comfortable engaging in this behaviour among friends, a number of participants in public sector organisations referred to their workplace as an overtly encouraging environment for the use of Māori words and phrases:

It's mainly through the influence of work, through the work culture here [...] it is a...partnership culture and there is levels of structure around...encouraging people through pronunciation and language skills so there's support there. [...] [In] my last group at work we spent some time learning together on a programme so then intrinsically as a group, after that structured learning, we spent some time practicing with each other, we tried to integrate that into our work routine, so you might introduce...phrases or terminology into meetings perhaps (M-U-35/40-PbG)

We talk about hui, we have hui we don't have meetings, I mean [name of workplace] in particular I think does have quite a strong focus on...so we've got little name tags on things that are in Māori I think they were originally put up for Māori Language Week but no one ever sort of took them down so pretty much anywhere you go [...] in the kitchen there's little signs with...so I think that's kind of a subliminal way people can...(trails off) (F-S-25/30-PbG)

For some public sector participants, their workplace environment had prompted them to go beyond using Māori words and phrases to actually learning Māori, or at least considering doing so:

I think for me the interface has been through public sector work where there's been an expectation but no pressure, but opportunities are provided [...] and often people might have very little interest but...if there are other workmates who would absorb them into a group and say come along then they would pick up things (M-U-35/40-PbG)

At my job a few years ago there was quite a big push to get people into Māori classes [...] and I did actually think about doing that because quite a few other people were doing it, and that again I guess it was around the kind of environmental factors, it being quite a supportive environment [...] it was an environment in which it was really easy to learn and work was obviously very much behind it, it wasn't just yep if you want to go off and do this we'll support you, it was a we're actually doing this we'd obviously really like you to actually do this (M-S-25/30-PbG)

In contrast, the workplace was seen by some participants in private sector organisations as a specific inhibitor to their use of Māori words and phrases:

My workplace is a fairly white...kind of (*laughs*) place you don't often hear languages other than English spoken I don't think so...in practical terms I probably actually don't [use Māori words] like I think it is actually quite worthwhile and sensible but I think maybe [it's] just a reflection of the kind of work environment that I'm in (M-S-30/35-PrI)

This private sector participant spoke of his own Māori language use changing as he moved from a more supportive to less supportive workplace environment:

I used to [use Māori] years ago with [name of workplace] because being a government department [...it was] a fairly kind of liberal place, it was a fairly diverse work environment so I used to answer the phone and say kia ora and had it on my voicemail message but then when I moved out of that environment...I sort of left that behind really...and I think if I did it now, if I actually answered the phone and said kia ora, I think people might react quite differently (*laughs*) (M-S-30/35-PrI)

Such behaviour changes occurred not just when participants changed workplaces entirely, but also when they changed teams within a workplace, one public sector participant commenting that:

I think I use words but I don't think I use phrases...even in the work environment and in fact that's slowed down for me because I sort of moved from a policy environment where I had done that in the past but now I'm in IT and I can tell you that there's very little use of Māori words and phrases in IT (M-U-35/40-PbG)

One public sector participant reported her active attempts to introduce more Māori language into her workplace, and how she felt this rubbed off on others around her:

I have been making an effort to begin all my business emails with you know a Māori greeting and that sort of thing and sometimes I might even go a bit further and chuck the odd word in here or there and what I've noticed is that people often feel obliged, and I'm talking about Pākehā people here, feel obliged to respond back (F-S-30/35-PbG)

Whether using Māori words and phrases in English (or, for that matter, pronouncing Māori words according to Māori principles) is a genuinely supportive behaviour for Māori language regeneration is a matter for debate⁵. What is interesting here, however, is that a number of participants who did view this as a desirable behaviour nevertheless felt

unable to engage in it with ease in their workplace environment, in direct contrast to those who worked in environments perceived as overtly supportive of Māori language use. This theme of the workplace environment as either an inhibitor or encourager of Māori language use suggests the current reticence of some participants in engaging in behaviours to support the Māori language could possibly be appeased through the fostering of more favourable workplace (and other) environments regarding Māori language use.

Responding to the use of Māori by others at work

Later in the interviews, the discussion moved from behaviours involving using the Māori language to behaviours towards the Māori language⁶. The first such behaviour was how participants responded to others using the Māori language around them. When asked if they heard the Māori language often or at all, some public sector participants claimed to hear Māori quite frequently, but it was much more common for participants to report rarely or never hearing Māori. Some participants occasionally heard Māori in everyday contexts, e.g. on the bus, but for most it was in the context of formal occasions. When asked how they generally felt about hearing Māori used around them, the majority of Supporters and a minority of Uninterested participants said they liked this, particularly if they could speak or understand some Māori themselves:

I really like it when I hear things that I understand you know those basic things [...] and I think those things are good because you know you almost don't even notice that it's a different language because you're just so in tune with what it means (F-U-20/25-PbG)

Uninterested and English Only participants were much more likely to refer to instances where they found the use of Māori frustrating. This was particularly when they felt Māori language use in formal contexts continued for too long:

It really doesn't bother me, as long as they don't go on and on and on and on [...] I get bored with it [...] I just switch right off (M-U-40/45-PrI)

A particular divergence in views emerged on the use of Māori at pōwhiri (formal welcomes) in public sector organisations. Supporters tended to appreciate this use of Māori at work:

I think that's great [...] because sometimes some of that stuff is quite scary and it can make people feel more comfortable (F-S-25/30-PbG)

A number of Uninterested and English Only participants were, however, highly irritated by pōwhiri, saying they were irrelevant to them and they just wanted to get their work done:

Every so often they welcome new people to the company and it's a Māori powhiri and speeches and things like that and it's very Māori cultural orientated and although I understand it and everything else like that it's...hey that's not my culture if you want to welcome me into here then do my culture as well [...] they take a whole day to do this welcome and I must admit I'm one of these people that's 'just let me get my work done please' (M-EO-35/40-PbG)

It just drives me nuts, I'm like a work in work person [...] it frustrates the hell out of me (F-U-30/35-PbG)

Such comments among English Only and Uninterested participants were often expressed in the context of more general monolingual views, particularly the idea that it was 'impolite' to use languages other than English around English speakers:

I get a little bit annoyed because it's similar to... other cultures when they speak their own language in front of me I find that *highly* offensive because I can't understand it and you know I suppose I get that little bit of paranoid oh they're

talking about me [and] I see the same thing with Māori where they're speaking in Māori and they know that I can't speak Māori (M-EO-35/40-PbG)

If participants said they enjoyed hearing Māori used around them at work, I asked if they were aware of ways they expressed this positive response. This was a difficult question for most participants to answer, but some Supporters had ideas, particularly providing minimal feedback in Māori:

When they do a prayer I say Amene at the end of it which is kind of a way of acknowledging that I understand that it was a prayer that was being said (F-S-25/30-PbG)

An example I can give is whenever people give a mihi at any function that I'm at and they finish usually saying tēnā koutou tēnā koutou tēnā koutou katoa, always responding with the chorus...kia ora you know finishing with that (M-S-25/30-PbM)

A word that I quite often use is tautoko...support, you know if somebody says something I agree with [...] I go 'tautoko' (M-S-25/30-PbM)

Participants of all attitude categories referred to their awareness of the responses of other non-Māori to Māori language use during pōwhiri at work, be these negative or positive:

One thing I find quite interesting is [at work when] we're doing the formal welcome for new staff then we'll have Māori people speaking their speech in Māori and people will just be nodding all the way through but I wonder how many people really understand the entire speech (F-U-20/25-PrNZ)

Yesterday [...] it was a going away thing with a big afternoon tea and [...] all the staff were invited [...] and I was actually quite interested because I was trying to work out what [the speaker] was saying and how much I understood but I was

conscious that there were other people there who were like (*imitates sighing*)...you know [...] and I am quite conscious of that (F-S-30/35-PbG)

Participants' awareness of how people other than themselves respond to Māori language use around them suggests these reactions must be apparent to Māori New Zealanders too.

Conclusion

Overall, the responses of the participants in this research suggested they were highly aware of their sociolinguistic environment regarding Māori language in the workplace. Not only did participants' attitudes towards the Māori language show patterned variation between workplaces, but this variation appeared to have a direct impact on the possibilities for Māori language use at work, and in some instances (particularly pōwhiri) the workplace became a site of contest between participants with differing attitudes towards the Māori language. Throughout the data collection as a whole, therefore, the workplace emerged as a highly salient environment presenting both constraints and possibilities for Māori language use in Wellington.

The use of a workplace-based methodological design for this PhD research was thus rewarding on several levels. Most importantly, it enabled me to achieve my objective of recruiting participants with a range of attitudes towards the Māori language. In addition, however, as shown in this report, the use of workplaces for collecting the data resulted in a number interesting findings in relation to Māori language in the workplace in particular, adding to our understanding of Māori language use in this important domain of everyday life in New Zealand.

Notes

¹ Te Puni Kōkiri (2002) found that non-Māori participants with positive attitudes towards the Māori language were more likely to be women, younger and have a high education level. Nicholson and Garland (1991) found that participants who were women, younger and living in the upper North Island were more likely to have positive attitudes towards the Māori language. AGB McNair (1992) found a link between attitudes to Māori language education and education level (although this operated in the opposite direction to the Te Puni Kōkiri research), but found no link between attitudes and other variables, including gender, regional origin and income.

² The categories and the allocation of participants to them are not identical to those used by Te Puni Kōkiri, the reasons for which are discussed in de Bres (2008).

³ This included eleven Supporters, eleven Uninterested participants and four English Only participants (representing all that were available in this last category).

⁴ Gender is indicated by M or F; attitude category is indicated by S, U or EO; age is indicated by tranche; workplace is indicated by PbM-PbG, PrNZ, or PrI; all are linked by hyphens. For example F-U-25/30-PbG indicates that the participant is a female Uninterested participant aged 25 to 30 working in a public sector general organisation.

⁵ For example, King (1995: 57) quotes Tipene Chrisp as having commented that “I have noted a tendency among some people to use more and more Māori words in English sentences. The intention is admirable, but ironically all that is happening is the English lexicon is being extended.”

⁶ See Ager (2005: 1039) for the distinction between behaviours involving using language (language-as-instrument) and behaviours towards language (language-as-object).

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Politeness in intercultural workplace interaction: A literature review

Mariana Lazzaro-Salazar

After completing LALS 543 (Language in the Workplace), Victoria's MA course on workplace discourse, Mariana Lazzaro has begun a research dissertation on the function of overlaps in intercultural workplace interactions. In her research she is investigating the extent to which overlaps can be considered 'polite' and argues that they facilitate rather than disrupt interaction. This paper provides a survey of the literature in the area, incorporating the fast moving field of politeness research and an overview of intercultural workplace interaction.

Abstract

The field of workplace communication continues to grow, and globalisation has encouraged researchers to focus on the phenomenon of intercultural interaction in multi-cultural workplaces. Usually, but not exclusively, framed within the constructs of Brown and Levinson's Politeness Theory, intercultural studies have typically concentrated on instances of miscommunication, taking a partial, one-sided account of intercultural workplace interaction. Differing social norms for what constitutes politeness has been a major focus of the debate into the merits of politeness theory. Rapport management, as developed by Spencer Oatey, provides a useful reconceptualisation of linguistic politeness with a greater focus on negotiated interaction. The aim of this review is to discuss politeness theory in the light of post-modernist contributions in the field to take a positive stance on the interplay of culture-specific norms of politeness in intercultural workplace interaction.

Introduction

Research into workplace communication has attracted considerable attention, and both developed and developing countries alike have taken note of those day-to-day activities which make companies successful (Coleman 1989). When it comes to examining the role of language in the workplace, linguists have looked into many different domains, most notably language in the courtroom to explore people's resistance to power (eg. Atkinson 1992, Harris 1989), language in doctor-patient interviews to examine consultation skills and their outcomes (eg. Heritage and Sefi 1992, Maclean 1989), and more recently

language in corporate organisations (eg. Holmes and Stubbe 2003, Koester 2006)¹. Most of these, however, restrict their examination to intracultural and/or crosscultural interaction.

More recently, organisations have been keen to host an increasing number of immigrants from around the world who bring their own ‘culture’ with them. Spencer-Oatey (2000: 4) defines culture as “a fussy set of attitudes, beliefs, behavioural conventions and basic assumptions and values” which will in turn influence other people’s behaviour and “interpretations of the ‘meaning’ of other people’s behaviour”. While the influence of culture remains relatively underexplored in the field (Bargiela-Chiappini and Nickerson 2003), understanding these differences and looking at *intercultural*² face-to-face interaction become paramount in an era of increased globalization (Harris et al. 2004), especially if harmonious work relations and interactions are the goal.

To date, those researchers who have focused on intercultural communication have been concerned with the role of cultural discrepancies in communication (see Boxer 2002: 52-72). Unfortunately, most have focused on how cultural differences work when there is a violation of pragmatic norms causing failure in communication, what Boxer (2002) calls “infelicitous interaction”. Clyne (1996), for instance, explored the workings of a number of speech acts in intercultural interaction and concentrated his analysis on miscommunication arising from the ‘incorrect’ use of certain speech acts. In addition, Günthner (2008) studied culturally specific expectations of communication and the effect of different social conventions on the construction and maintenance of rapport (relating to social relationships) in German-Chinese university students’ conversations. It is only recently that researchers have endeavoured to do justice to cultural differences showing that there could actually be ‘felicitous’ intercultural interaction (see Hickey and Stewart 2005).

The aim of this review is to discuss politeness as an aspect of communication which has been particularly unfairly regarded within the field of intercultural interaction. Rather than focussing on miscommunication, the goal is to outline politeness theory as a

theoretical framework for taking a positive stance on the interplay of culture-specific norms of politeness in intercultural face-to-face workplace interaction.

Investigating politeness in the workplace

Within the field of intercultural communication, politeness in workplace interaction has attracted considerable attention (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris 2006). Politeness theory as proposed by Brown and Levinson (1987) opened the door to a research tradition that has allowed researchers to consider politeness as a salient aspect of “socio-communicative verbal interaction” (Locher and Watts 2005). This rapidly changing field of socio-pragmatic research has most recently explored politeness across cultures in a variety of discursive workplace contexts (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris 2006, Holmes and Stubbe 2003, Holmes, Marra and Schnurr 2008, Holmes and Schnurr 2005, Spencer-Oatey 2008). In this regard, some researchers have been concerned with the dangers of applying concepts as defined by Western sociology and psychology, and/or categories that have been developed within culturally-distant domains to the study of politeness in intercultural communication (see Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris 2006 for a summary of studies). These concepts and categories, it has been argued, may hinder a comprehensive understanding of culture-specific interactional phenomena of workplace interaction. In addition, the “evaluative judgement” of what constitutes (im)polite behaviour also differs from culture to culture as it relies on people’s cultural beliefs, values and expectations (Ruhi and Işık-Güler 2007). In this regard, recent research has resulted in fruitful developments as researchers’ primary focus on context and culture-specific norms of interaction has provided a richer, though far from comprehensive, understanding of the role and workings of politeness in intercultural interaction (see Boxer 2002: 52-72 for an overview).

Interestingly, politeness research on intercultural communication has also traditionally focused on instances of miscommunication tracing its roots back to the assumption that some speech acts are intrinsically face-threatening moves (Brown and Levinson 1987, Clyne 1996). Following these assumptions, Tanaka et al. (2008) carried out a cross-

cultural study to discuss the differences in Japanese and English apologies relating to context and ways of apologising, and warns researchers of the dangers of using stereotypical cultural conventions as constructs for analysis. In addition, Spencer-Oatey and Xing (2008) provide empirical evidence on how understanding cultural conventions (for example, differing power distance norms) in British and Chinese business interactions plays an important role in maintaining face in order to achieve positive business outcomes. Holmes et al. (2008) on the other hand, takes a step further in the study of politeness and intercultural communication and offers a discussion on the workings of power and politeness in meetings in Māori-Pākehā workplace contexts in New Zealand. Following Holmes' line of research, Schnurr et al. (2007) have carried out case studies to explore effective ways of doing leadership and politeness in intercultural workplaces in New Zealand as part of the Language in the Workplace (LWP) project. This study highlights the importance of common norms developed in 'ethnicised' communities of practice (Schnurr et al. 2007: 712), while Marra (2008) focuses on how to adapt research methodology to work with specific cultures taking into account social norms and expectations of behaviour.

Research on intercultural workplace interaction has inherent flaws. These have been summarised by Boxer (2002: 177-193) as well as Hickey and Stewart (2005: 15-16) who argue that most studies have not used spontaneous face-to-face data in their analysis, that the majority of these studies have concentrated on a very limited number of cultures such as North American and Japanese and that little research has been conducted concerning the actual 'exercise' of politeness norms (Hickey and Stewart, 2005) or 'felicitous interaction' (Boxer 2002) particularly among "members of different ethnic groups interacting with each other on their own terms and in their own workplaces" (as argued by Schnurr, et al. 2007: 713). In order to do justice to the study of intercultural interaction then, Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris suggest drawing on "more than one theoretical/methodological model" (2006: 10) to offer a multidimensional approach to the analysis of cultural interaction. This presents the challenge of needing to draw on research in politeness *and* intercultural communication in order to explore the interplay of culture-specific norms of politeness in intercultural interaction.

Politeness Theory

Locher and Watts comment that Brown and Levinson's seminal work on politeness theory has prompted "an enormous amount of research mileage" as a solid starting point for politeness research (2005: 9): "Without it we would not be in a position to consider the phenomenon of politeness as a fundamental aspect of human socio-communicative verbal interaction in quite the depth and variety that is now available to us." However, this theory has come under extensive scrutiny and has been criticised as a theory of face-work rather than politeness (Locher and Watts 2005). Politeness theory (Brown and Levinson 1987) relies on the assumption that "the mutual knowledge of members' public self-image or face, and the social necessity to orient oneself to it in interaction, are universal" (Brown and Levinson 1987: 62). Hence, all interactants, regardless of their ethnic backgrounds, have face needs that require attention in interaction. Brown and Levinson's definition of 'face' as "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself" (1987: 61) derives from Goffman's notion of face (1967, in Brown and Levinson 1994: 61, Goffman 2006) but the authors add two dimensions claiming that all interactants have a negative face, i.e. interactants' "freedom of action and freedom from imposition" (1987: 61), and a positive face, i.e. interactants' desire to be approved of (1987: 59-64). Logically, there are acts that threaten interactants' negative and positive face. These acts are called 'face-threatening acts' (FTAs) and they have the potential to cause interactants to lose face. Along these lines, when considering intercultural communication Brown and Levinson (1987) emphasize the need to study 'systematic violations' or, in other words, FTAs, in order to uncover culturally-bound social norms. Indeed, most research done in this area shows a preference towards the observation and analysis of cross-cultural 'interference' in interaction³ but fails to look at the use of politeness strategies in successful intercultural interaction.

Furthermore, following their definition of FTAs, Brown and Levinson classified speech acts and interactional strategies as being either face-threatening or non-face-threatening acts (1987: 60). It follows that certain acts such as 'interruptions' whether cooperative or disruptive, where my own research interest lies, are intrinsically face-threatening (1987:

66-67, 232-233) since, according to this framework, interruptions constitute a “turn-taking violation” (1987: 232). All interactants’ instances of linguistic behaviour in interaction, i.e. speech acts, fall into one of these rigid categories, dashing away the possibility of applying a more flexible context-oriented perspective on the role of, for instance, interruptions or overlaps in an interaction.

In this regard, Eelen (2001) warns that this categorization of speech acts is made without any empirical examination and lacks evidence for how social norms of linguistic behaviour interact with a given social context. In other words, guided by the belief that “politeness [] arises in interaction between persons” (Arundale 2006: 194), both Eelen (2001) and Haugh (2007) acknowledge the need to move away from the utterance-level analysis proposed by Brown and Levinson, and to base face-work analysis on how politeness is dialectically negotiated and interactionally achieved. This reconceptualization of face-work as a dialectical phenomenon of interaction provides an alternative conceptualization of the threatening and non-threatening nature of speech acts making it possible to argue that certain speech acts can be face-threatening in a given context but may not be so in another context. Locher and Watts (2005) also conceptualise politeness as a discursive construct that should not be equated with FTA mitigation, and argue that instead we should consider the norms that govern polite behaviour in intercultural communication. In support of this claim, Spencer-Oatey (2008) discusses how, for example, requests, traditionally considered as FTAs, can actually be a face-enhancement act when, for instance, somebody is requested to do task since he/she is an expert in the area and the only one that can be trusted with the job.

Thus, during the last decades, this theory has been much contested since its basic framing principles do not provide much room for consideration of the fact that participants of different ethnic and/or cultural backgrounds have different social rules for what constitutes appropriate (polite) behaviour and that these culture-specific norms may or may not be knowledge shared by interactants across cultures (Bargiela-Chiappini and Harris 2006, Christie 2007, Locher and Watts 2005, Scollon and Scollon 2001). In attempting to pre-empt such claims, Brown and Levinson (1987) argue that politeness is a

universal construct of face-to-face communication since it has been shown that the underlying notions driving interactions, such as interactants' face needs, bear a significant resemblance cross-culturally speaking (Brown and Levinson 1987: 13-15). Moreover, they advise that politeness universals should be considered within the cultural context in which they are realized and that interethnic concerns of communication, such as implicatures and social distance, should be addressed in further research. They do not, however, advise on how to adapt their framework in order to address culturally-bound issues of politeness in intercultural interaction.

At this point, it should be emphasized that ethnically tinted rules of interaction make a rich contribution to cross-cultural, intercultural and intra-cultural communication which need not always be problematic but which can be “a major source of comity and enrichment” (Spencer-Oatey 2008: 6), and that different cultures differ dramatically in the realization of social norms of interaction (Locher and Watts 2005). Building on Eelen's (2001) critique of politeness theories, Spencer-Oatey highlights the normative nature of politeness and urges researchers to study interactions in terms of the (culturally sensitive) social norms surrounding them and the evaluations of behaviour by interactants as to what constitutes polite or impolite linguistic behaviour, or in Eelen's (2001) terms “evaluative activity” (2008, see also Ruhi and Işik-Güler 2007). While interactants have a positive and a negative face to attend to which *could* be threatened, it is also true to say that interactional strategies may be looked at from a more positive perspective regarding them, for example, as having a supportive role while evidencing engagement in an interaction. For workplace communication research, therefore, it would seem that a context-embracing framework, complementary to the constructs deriving from this theory, is most beneficial.

Rapport Management

Researchers' revisions have prompted the development of politeness theory into the foundations of relational management or relational work (Spencer-Oatey 2000, Spencer-Oatey and Xing 2003) and impression management (Bilbow 1997a, 1997b, Bargiela-

Chiappini and Harris 2006, Spencer-Oatey 2000) research which incorporates principles of politeness theory but operationalises this framework taking into account context-specific data and using less rigid categorizations of speech acts in relation to politeness for analysis. Current developments in relational work provide a useful framework for exploring differences in interactional norms of politeness across cultures and embrace the view that cultural differences do not *necessarily* lead to miscommunication problems (Spencer-Oatey 2008). For these reasons, this perspective has been actively adopted for investigations of workplace communication (e.g. Holmes and Marra 2004, Holmes and Schnurr 2005, Murata *fc*).

It is fair to argue that most work on politeness has been principally concerned with the illocutionary domain of interaction (Spencer Oatey 2008: 22). This leads researchers to search for a descriptive rather than a prescriptive model (Hickey and Stewart 2005) which could offer a broader framework of facework⁴ to incorporate new concepts such as ‘perceived intention’ and ‘intentionality’ (Schnurr, et al. 2007), which play an important role in the analysis of face-to-face interaction. The important framework of rapport management offered by Spencer-Oatey (2005, 2008) retains the core idea underlying politeness theory, i.e. that politeness is a universal concept that governs interactions and that interactants have face needs to attend to. However, she revises some of the assumptions made by Brown and Levinson and, in so doing, claims that no utterance is in itself, inherently, polite or impolite and that politeness is a “social judgement” (2000: 3, cf. Eelen, 2001) also referred to as “contextual judgement” (see Fraser and Nolan 1981 in Spencer-Oatey 2008: 2). Interactants then judge whether an utterance is polite in relation to the context in which it is said. Thus, with the aim of incorporating this broader view of politeness that reflects concerns not only of the self but also of the other, Spencer-Oatey (2008) suggests the term *rapport management* to refer to “the use of language [people make] to promote, maintain or threaten harmonious [=positive] social relations [=rapport]” (2008: 3). Within this framework, Spencer-Oatey asserts that “the concerns they [Brown and Levinson] identify as negative face issues are not necessarily face concerns at all” (2008: 13) since an utterance can be considered polite and ‘appropriate’ (see Spencer-Oatey 2008: 2, Locher and Watts 2005) in one situation but rude and

inappropriate in another. In advancing the argument she claims that rapport management is made up of two components. The first component is management of face defined as “the positive social *value* a person effectively claims for himself [*sic*] by the line others assume he has taken during a particular contact” (Spencer-Oatey 2000: 14) which is subdivided into quality face (cf. Brown and Levinson’s positive face) and identity face (people’s need of acknowledgement and maintenance of social roles). The second component is management of sociality rights, that is, the personal and social entitlements a person claims for himself/herself in a given interaction and the management of social expectancies, which is subdivided into equity rights (cf. Brown and Levinson’s negative face) and association rights (the belief people have of being entitled to maintain the type of relationship they have with other people) (Spencer-Oatey 2000: 14-16).

This distinction is essential when studying intercultural workplace interaction because, while it still accounts for personal aspects of interaction (quality face and equity rights), it incorporates a social aspect of interaction (identity face and association rights). Thus, on the one hand, the personal component of this framework allows the analyst to suggest interpretations of speakers’ *intentions* while interacting, and on the other hand, the social component allows for consideration of hearers’ *perceptions* of interactional components in intercultural interaction. In this regard, Holtgraves (2005) explains how interactants’ perceptions of the context of interaction influence the levels of politeness perceived and enacted in interaction. Moreover, according to this model, threatening behaviour can occur in two different ways: face-threatening behaviour and rights-threatening behaviour. This means that, as argued by Spencer-Oatey (2008: 17-20), some behaviour can violate, for example, sociality rights while not causing the participants to lose face⁵. Moreover, Spencer-Oatey claims that while some acts are interpreted as threatening face or infringing on sociality rights (depending on the context of interaction), the opposite is also true. In this way, this revision of the definition and subdivisions of positive and negative face makes it possible to claim that speech acts and other interactional strategies are not inherently face-threatening. In other words, speech acts *could* be face-threatening but need not *always* be so, and interactants’ intentions and perceptions of them depend upon the context of interaction, their social (behavioural) expectations and their rapport

orientation, i.e. how the interactant orients himself/herself in interaction (for example, challengingly or positively) (Spencer-Oatey 2005: 96-97). This framework, therefore, allows researchers to account for differences in the realizations of speech acts across cultures (Christie 2007) and how these function in intercultural communication. In addition it also allows for speech acts to be regarded as enhancing of face or supporting of sociality rights breaking the rigid 'violation' mould in which some speech acts have usually been framed and opening the door to new interpretations of politeness in intercultural communication.

Conclusion

Researchers in the field of politeness and (inter)cultural interaction have been concerned with adapting, combining and reformulating frameworks of analysis that can provide a broad and comprehensible scope of research to describe (inter)cultural communication (Christie 2007, Spencer-Oatey 2005). In the case of workplace interaction, the adoption of these frameworks is fruitful as workplaces are characterised by the presence of a mosaic of cultures (Harris et al. 2004) and call for a more comprehensible view of this interactional phenomena. Specifically, for a country such as New Zealand where every year a growing number of people from around the world decide to settle and start a new life (see www.stats.govt.nz for statistics), a discussion about the extent to which cultural differences may impact on workplace interaction seems essential.

In terms of my own research into the role of overlaps in intercultural workplace interactions, applying rapport management criteria when analysing cultural differences enables interpretations of the variation in contextual assessment norms (people of different ethnic backgrounds assess contextual factors in different ways) and fundamental cultural values (people from different cultures vary in the value they give to the same speech act). This will allow a deeper understanding of how people from different cultures perceive overlaps, providing a rich analysis of intercultural communication in the workplace.

Notes

¹ Since space does not allow for a comprehensive survey of studies in the literature concerning the role of language in the workplace, please see Coleman (1989), Grant et al. (2004) and Candlin and Gotti (2004) for an in-depth review of such studies.

² I refer to these terms as defined by Gudykunst (2000: 314): “‘Cross-cultural’ and ‘inter-cultural’ are often regarded as interchangeable. Cross-cultural research involves comparing behaviour in two or more different cultures (...). Intercultural research involves examining behaviour when members of two or more cultures interact.”

³ See Brown and Levinson, 1987: 13-15, 25-27, 33-35 for an overview of cross-cultural studies.

⁴ See Tracy (1990) and Penman (1990) as cited in Spencer-Oatey (2008: 3).

⁵ Cf. Locher and Watts (2005). They claim behaviour can be judged as appropriate or ‘politic’ but still not polite.

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