Directives in an Auckland Factory

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Introduction

Directives have been described as "attempts of varying degrees ..... by the speaker to get the hearer to do something" Searle (1976: 11). They have been the focus of a great deal of research in a wide range of contexts over the last twenty years. Ervin-Tripp's influential 1976 paper examined the range of ways in which directives were realised between adults in natural conversation. James (1980) systematically examined their use by children in roleplays involving dolls representing adults, peers and younger listeners. Directives have also been investigated in a range of workplaces. Holmes (1983) examined variation in the form of directives used by teachers in classroom interaction, while Goatly (1995) focussed on teacher trainees in the same context. Others have looked at the kinds of directives used between rural agricultural workers (Weigel and Weigel 1985), and the directives used to office workers (Pufahl Bax 1986). And Jones (1992) looked at the kinds of directives used among members of a morris dance group.

The research which is the focus of this project examines directive usage in a factory environment, a context which has not featured in any previous research, and which thus usefully extends the range of contexts in which directive usage has been investigated. The large Auckland factory in which this project is based processes fresh hides, pelts and skins for the international leather industry. The majority of the employees are Pacific Islanders. The factory has a manager, whose role it is to ensure that the factory runs smoothly, supported by a production supervisor who acts as the interface between management and up to 150 shop-floor workers. The manager's office staff includes an accountant, a pay clerk, an administration secretary and a receptionist.

Aims of the research

The research is designed to identify the structure of the directives used in interactions between factory workers, and examine the extent to which these structures are accounted for by previously developed typologies. The research will also examine the correlation between directive form and the strength or force of the directive, as well as the relationship between these features and aspects of the social context in which the directive occurred. Social relationships, including status relationships, between workers will be examined in relation to the form and strength of the directives which occur in the data.

Method

The data to be analysed consists of taped conversations between various

factory workers. To date, twenty hours of conversation have been recorded using the methodology developed by the Language in the Workplace Project team at Victoria University (see Stubbe and Vine, this volume). These conversations have been collected by the manager and the pay clerk as examples of their normal working interactions with others in the administration office, and with supervisors and manual workers on the shop-floor. The manager and the pay clerk were chosen as the focus of recording because of their key roles in the factory.

The recorded material has been transcribed following the transcription conventions of the Wellington Corpus of Spoken New Zealand English (Holmes, Vine and Johnson: 1998). The data collectors have been given an opportunity to read, and delete any sensitive sections of the transcriptions.

The researcher has also interviewed the manager and the pay clerk to discuss the data with them, including their interpretation of the relative 'strength' of particular directives in the specific contexts in which they were used. (Relative strength here refers to differing points on a scale from command or order at one end through request to suggestion or hint at the other. See Ervin-Tripp (1976)).

Analysis

All instances of directives used by the manager and the pay clerk in the recorded data have been identified. Classification by structure and strength is currently underway.

A preliminary examination of the transcripts has divided them according to their form as imperatives, declaratives and interrogatives (see Holmes: 1983). Examples from the data include the following.

Imperatives

EXAMPLE 1
Context: Female pay clerk to male worker who has come into her office to check on his pay.

sit down and keep quiet

EXAMPLE 2
Context: Manager to production supervisor discussing computer based information.

go into it and get the figure for you(rself)

Declaratives

EXAMPLE 3
Context: Male manager to production supervisor discussing the office staff

yeah we'd better make sure that the girls get plenty of work

EXAMPLE 4
Context: Male manager to younger male accountant discussing the factory budget.

> we'll go through this first

Interrogatives (including tag questions)

EXAMPLE 5
Context: Female pay clerk to older, male production supervisor.

> can you sign this cheque for my friend Umu and for last week's wages

EXAMPLE 6
Context: The manager wants a tour of the site from his production Supervisor.

> you don't want to go out and have a look at the clean up do you?

A preliminary analysis of the data collected to date suggests that the majority of the directives in the factory interactions are expressed in either declarative or imperative form, with considerably fewer in interrogative form.

The researcher's interviews with the data collectors in this exploratory study indicated that their directives are tailored to the specific interactional context, as suggested by Brown and Levinson's (1987) Politeness model. Within each of the structural categories declarative, imperative, and interrogative, there are significant variations in the strength of directives achieved by a variety of linguistic, paralinguistic and discourse strategies, as well as by more extra-linguistic contextual factors. Linguistic strategies include the use of modal particles such *just* or *please*, a softening or emphatic intonation pattern, and the use of emphatic stress. Paralinguistic factors include smiling voice, laughter or a severe facial expression. Discourse features include the use of humour and sarcasm to soften or intensify the strength of the directive. Finally the strength of the "same" directive may differ depending on such factors as how well the person using it knows the person to whom it is addressed, their relative status, and whether it occurs in the work setting or not.

Implications
New migrants as well as native speakers need to be aware of local linguistic conventions in the expression of directives. The norms vary greatly between different social contexts. The research project outlined is intended to assist new immigrants in recognising what counts as a directive in the social contexts in which they will be working. The analysis will also provide a basis for developing materials which will enable workers to identify for themselves the linguistic, paralinguistic, and discoursal factors which affect

the strength of directives as well as the social factors relevant to this analysis.

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