TALK AT MEETINGS
IN A MALAYSIAN SMALL-MEDIUM ENTERPRISE

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KUALA LUMPUR

2014

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IN A MALAYSIAN SMALL-MEDIUM ENTERPRISE

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THESIS SUBMITTED IN FULFILMENT
OF THE REQUIREMENTS
FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF PHILOSPHY

FACULTY OF LANGUAGES AND LINGUISTICS
UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA
KUALA LUMPUR

2014

UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA

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ABSTRACT

This study seeks to examine talk at management meetings at a Malaysian small medium enterprise. It uses Community of Practice (CofP) as the underpinning theory which allows data to be examined within the wider as well as the local context of talk. CofP is a concept developed from the theory of social practice (Holmes 2003), and a conversation analysis (CA) influenced methodology is used to analyse the data. The analysis and interpretation of the data is carried out based on CA interactional resources such as turn taking organization, sequence organization, repair, interruptions and the use of lexis. Koester's (2006) term of discursive activities is used to identify the types of talk in the data.

The main data comprises audio-recorded talk at the internal meetings with managers who meet regularly to discuss matters pertaining to the running of the company. Of the five recorded meetings, detailed transcriptions of two meetings comprising 253 minutes of talk time were analysed.

The findings indicate that this particular CofP has shared practices which are directed towards a common goal, that is, to get work done. The practices are related to the language forms they use and the meeting talk unveiled four types of activities: checking information, giving accounts, giving instructions and problem solving. These discursive activities are demarcated by the topic change, initiated by the Chair of the meetings. The way the talk participants use CA interactional resources is then examined to see how these resources facilitate or impede their talk to achieve that common goal.

By doing a micro level analysis of the talk within each discursive activity, it was found that in account-giving, the use of question-answer sequences propelled the discussion along and enabled the talk participants to co-construct meaning and understanding. The Chair of the meetings, who is also the General Manager, has the prerogative to terminate the discursive activity with an evaluation, a directive, or a reprimand. In checking information and giving instructions, the talk closed with the goal achieved through question-answers sequences. In the use of pronouns, it was found that the asymmetrical relationship between the Chair and the others is most obvious: the use of the institutional "we" promotes solidarity, while the individual stance of "I" shows the power she has over them. Another interactional mechanism, repair analysis, shows the power play between the GM and her subordinates.

The findings of this study may contribute to various fields of discipline which include communication studies, particularly in business and management. Pedagogically, the data provides authentic talk data which may be used as resource materials in training for business communication courses and its findings may also be used to highlight the use of language in the enactment of power within business meetings and provide awareness for practitioners in this domain. Suggestions for future research may include looking into comparative studies in other contexts such as meetings in other workplaces, and with differing CofPs.

ABSTRAK

Penyelidikan ini mengkaji perbualan dalam mesyuarat pengurusan di sebuah syarikat perniagaan kecil dan sederhana (SME) di Malaysia. Ia menggunakan teori *Community of Practice* (CofP), sebagai teori asas yang membolehkan data dikaji dalam konteks perbualan yang luas ataupun memusat. CofP adalah satu konsep yang dibangunkan dari teori *social practice* (Holmes 2003), dan data seperti ini membolehkan penggunaan analisis wacana terutamanya Analisis Perbualan (CA) sebagai kaedah analisis. Sumber pergaulan sebagai contohnya; mengambil giliran, urutan organisasi, serta mekanisma pembaikan, menyampuk dan penggunaan kata nama, turut dikaji. Istilah 'aktiviti secara diskursif' Koester (2006) telah digunakan untuk kajian ini.

Data utama merangkumi wacana perbualan yang dirakamkan secara audio semasa mesyuarat dalaman dengan pengurus syarikat tersebut yang berjumpa secara berkala untuk membincang urusan syarikat tersebut.. Sebanyak lima mesyuarat pengurusan telah dirakamkan; di mana dua daripadanya (rakaman sejumlah 253 minit) melalui proses transkripsi yang lebih terperinci untuk dikaji dengan lebih mendalam.

Hasil kajian menunjukkan CofP ini mempunyai praktis yang berkongsi yang bertujuan untuk mencapai satu matlamat yang sama. Praktis ini berkaitan dengan bentuk bahasa. Analisis perbualan mesyuarat turut menunjukkan 4 jenis aktiviti: menyemak maklumat, memberi perakuan, memberi arahan dan menyelesaikan masalah. Aktiviti ini ditandai oleh pertukaran topik, yang dimulakan oleh pengerusi mesyuarat tersebut. Berikutan klasifikasi ini, cara peserta dalam perbualan menggunakan CA sebagai sumber

pergaulan dikaji untuk menentukan bagaimana sumber tersebut dapat membantu atau menghindari perbualan mereka untuk mencapai matlamat yang sama.

Kajian ini mendapati bahawa dalam pemberian perakuan, penggunaan urutan soal-jawab mendorong diskusi dan membolehkan peserta dalam perbualan mengkonstruksi semula makna dan seterusnya mengakhiri perkara perbincangan mereka, tetapi pengerusi selaku Pengurus Besar, mempunyai hak untuk menamatkan aktiviti diskursif dengan satu penilaian, perintah ataupun teguran. Dalam menyemak semula maklumat dan memberi arahan, perbualan diakhiri dengan pencapaian matlamat melalui urutan soal-jawab. Dalam penggunaan kata nama, adalah didapati bahawa hubungan yang tidak simetri di antara pengerusi dan pengurus lain adalah yang paling ketara sekali: penggunaan secara institusi "kami" menentang kegunaan secara individu "saya" mendorong perpaduan, sementara penggunaan "saya" apabila digunakan oleh Pengurus Besar menunjukkan kuasa beliau ke atas mereka. Satu lagi mekanisma interaksi adalah pembaikan. Terdapat pembaikan ke atas diri sendiri atau pembaikan ke atas orang lain dan apabila masalah interaksi berlaku adalah didapati bahawa penutur menggunakan pembaikan untuk menentukan kuasa.

Hasil kajian dapat menyumbang kepada pelbagai bidang, seperti dalam pengajian komunikasi dan pengurusan. Dari segi pedagogi, data yang berdasarkan perbualan secara lazim dapat menyediakan data perbualan secara asli yang boleh digunakan sebagai bahan sumber dalam latihan untuk kursus komunikasi bisnes. Cadangan untuk kajian masa yang akan datang termasuk melihat kepada pengajian komparatif dalam konteks lain seperti mesyuarat dalam tempat kerja lain dengan CofPs yang berlainan.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

A study of this nature is challenging in so many ways, and it has taken me longer than expected to complete the process. There are many people who have come alongside to help make this whole endeavor become a reality, and to each of them I say "THANK YOU".

First of all, I would like thank my supervisor, Associate Professor Dr. Kamila Ghazali, for her encouragement and invaluable guidance. I also wish to thank the former and present Heads of the English Department, as well as the former and present Deans & Deputy Deans at the Faculty of Languages & Linguistics, for their support. I also thank the University of Malaya for granting me full scholarship to support my studies.

Next, my sincere and heartfelt gratitude goes to ***ALL MY FRIENDS***, both near and far: for their prayers and loving support throughout this journey. There are just too many to name but all of them are so precious and greatly valued: you know who you are and I thank God for each one of you who have made this journey an enlightening and endearing process.

Further, to the group of managers & their fellow colleagues at the business organization: you truly are a great team of employees who give off your best at work each day. Special thanks to Ms Tan & Ms Low for allowing me access to such a dynamic workplace.

And to a few individuals who have played a significant role in seeing my thesis take form: Ngat Har, KK, Rachel, Sheena, Siew Ming, Richard, Hooi Koon, thanks so much! My immediate and extended families have always been here for me and I wish to thank each one of them: I love you all. Special mention to: Jase Lin & Jayson who have been patient with me throughout the whole endeavor; Eng for always being a strong support and encouragement, pushing me on; to my 2 brothers & 4 sisters, & their spouses; nieces & nephews, & their spouses; grandnieces & grandnephews. I also dedicate this degree to my late parents, and three brothers, who though have left this earth, are and will always be in my heart and memory. I am so blessed to belong to this family.

And most of all, I thank and praise God, whose love and grace encompass me each and every day of my thesis work. Without His grace and strength I might have given up long ago. The final completion of this thesis is a testament of His faithfulness in my life. All Glory be unto Him!

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