A multi-perspective analysis of the request e-mail discourse of a team of education professionals in Hong Kong

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This thesis is presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Linguistics
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Abstract

A multi-perspective analysis of the request e-mail discourse of a team of education professionals in Hong Kong.

This thesis analyses the discourse of the request e-mails exchanged among a group of professional teachers of English in a Hong Kong public education institution. As its analytical framework, the study draws on the 'multi-perspectived approach' to analysing professional discourse proposed by Candlin (1997: xiv) and outlined by Bhatia (2004). The request e-mails, categorized basically as downward (from leaders to subordinates), lateral (among subordinates), and upward (from subordinates to leaders), are analysed by treating the discourse as text, genre, professional practice, and social practice. Seeing the discourse as text, the study examines the lexico-grammatical features of the clauses of the e-mails by drawing upon systemic functional grammar (Halliday 1994, Halliday and Matthiessen 2004). It also discusses the use of intertextuality (Fairclough 1992, Candlin and Maley 1997) in the production of the request e-mail discourse. Seeing the discourse as genre and professional practice, the study discusses the rhetorical move structure of the request e-mails in relation to the necessity for the inclusion and exclusion of moves, and the sequence of appearance of these moves in the professional context of the community of practice (Lave and Wenger 1991, Wenger 1998) of which the teachers are members. Another focus in this part of the thesis is interdiscursivity (Candlin and Maley 1997). This discusses how the author's knowledge of genres and discourses contributes to the production of the request e-mail discourse. The use of deductive and inductive rhetorical approaches to topic introduction is also explored in relation to the order of discourse (Fairclough 1992, Foucault 1974) of the community of practice and the institution to which the community of practice belongs as a whole. Seeing the discourse as social practice, the study
discusses the personal identities (Tracy 2002, Simon 2004) constructed by the e-mail authors through their request e-mail discourse by means of analysing lexico-grammatical resources such as process types and modality, influence strategies (Yukl 2006), rapport management (Spencer-Oatey 2000, 2005), relational work (Locher and Watts 2005, Watts 2003), and politeness (Brown and Levinson 1987, Gu 1990, Scollon and Scollon 2001). It is observed that the personal identities constructed through the request e-mail discourse, the lexico-grammatical features of the clauses, the rhetorical move structures of the request e-mails, the rhetorical approaches to topic introduction, and the use of intertextuality and interdiscursivity differ among authors and/or recipients of different status (leader/peer/subordinate) and different cultural background (Chinese members and non-Chinese members). The study offers explanations regarding the effect of status on the request e-mail discourse construction. The cultural background of the authors and/or recipients, however, will be argued to have only affected the authors’ choice of Participant terms in the clauses and the construction of identities by the NCM subordinates but not the other aspects of the request e-mail discourse.
Acknowledgements

I would like to thank a number of people who have helped make this thesis a dream come true for me. My PhD Principal Supervisor, Professor Christopher Candlin, has provided me with all the guidance and inspiration that are indispensable for completing this thesis. His timely feedback, which is always critical and valuable, has greatly broadened and enriched my knowledge on linguistics, especially in the field of discourse analysis. Thanks also go to my PhD Associate Supervisor, Dr. Peter Roger. His valuable and practical advice on my PGRF application has made possible my first conference attendance in the UK.

My former teacher and current supervisor at work, Dr. Cynthia Lee of Hong Kong Baptist University, has made my study a lot easier by sharing with me her own experience and giving me all the emotional support that I needed when I was down.

During my on-campus study at Macquarie University, I was lucky enough to have made some very good friends who have made my stay in Sydney a wonderful and unforgettable experience. So, my thanks go to Lanna Leung, Dr. Paul Cheung and his wife Doris Cheung, Dr. Akiko Kato and my very best friend and tennis partner, Dr. Nick Dungey.

Finally, I would like to express a big ‘thank you’ to my wife, Daisy Chow. She is the one who encouraged me to pursue the degree in the first place. Without her continued support and understanding, I would not have been able to persevere till the end of the study.