



Virtual Workplace Communication – a linguistic perspective

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Abstract

Over the last decade, globalized companies operating in the ‘new economy’ are increasingly using virtual forms of spoken communication including phones, conference calls, skype and chat with colleagues and customers scattered across the world.

Project management, as well as back office administrative work, is conducted increasingly via such virtual channels; a large-scale study across multinational companies recently reported that 80 % of its respondents were part of a team with members based in different locations (RW Culture Wizard, 2010). However, many businesses complain about communication breakdown problems where work teams communicating virtually lack cohesion, miss deadlines and waste time.

Studies in the business management and organizational behaviour literature have explored this problem from the perspectives of individual leadership style and management skills in virtual teams (Kayworth & Leidner 2002; Walsh 2011); technologies for virtual team work (Klitmoller & Luring 2012); the particular types of virtual teams and the nature and timing of their work; and by considering the notion of leadership ‘trust’ when being part of a virtual project management team (Olsen & Olsen 2012). However, linguistic studies have been scant (Harzing, Koster & Magner 2011). In sociolinguistics, some attention has been paid to the ways the new globalized economy has influenced communication in the co-located workplace and how this has, in turn, had consequences for the construction of employee identities through language use at work (e.g. Cameron 2000a 2000b; Heller 2003, 2010; Urcioli 2008; Duchêne & Heller 2012; Sonntag 2009; Kell 2009; Park, 2013). However, it appears that no linguistics studies have been conducted into the nature of virtual workplace communication.

This seminar explores how the field of linguistics may contribute to an improved understanding of why communication breaks down in virtual teams. Data from a training needs analysis for a virtual team communication course, collected within a multinational company is used for this seminar.

Date: Monday 2 May 2016
Time: 4.10 pm to 5.30 pm
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