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

Chung Kwong HO (MA, BSc)

The Department of Linguistics, Faculty of Human Sciences, Macquarie University

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

Table of Contents

List of Tables vi

List of Excerpts ix

List of Figures ix

Abstract x

Statement of Candidate xii

Acknowledgement xiii

Part 1 Thesis Introduction

Chapter 1 Introduction 1

Part 2 Identity Construction

Overview 17

Chapter 2 Identity construction by leaders

Section 2.1 Introduction 32

Section 2.2 What and how identities were constructed 32

Section 2.3 The need for the construction of various identities 50

Section 2.4 Conclusion 53

Chapter 3 Identity construction by peers

Section 3.1 Introduction 54

Section 3.2 What and how identities were constructed 55

Section 3.3 Reasons for the construction of various identities in relation to the wider social and cultural 88

context

Section 3.4 Some additional evidence to the purposeful construction of identities by civil servant CM 90

Section 3.5 Conclusion 93

Chapter 4 Identity construction by subordinates

Section 4.1 Introduction 95

Section 4.2 What and how identities were constructed 95

Section 4.3 Conclusion 104

Conclusion to Part 2 105

Part 3 The Generic Structure of the Request E-mail

Overview 108

Chapter 5 Generic structure of downward request e-mails

Section 5.1 Introduction 113

Section 5.2 Moves and their lexico-grammar 113

Section 5.3 Participant in the *Convincing* move and the *Requesting* move 151

Section 5.4 Rhetorical approaches to topic introduction 154

Section 5.5 Interdiscursivity 160

Section 5.6 Conclusion 162

Chapter 6 Generic structure of lateral request e-mails

Section 6.1 Introduction 165

Section 6.2 Request e-mails sent from CM to CM 165

Section 6.3 Request e-mails sent from NCM to CM 195

Section 6.4 Conclusion 205

Chapter 7 Generic structure of upward request e-mails

Section 7.1 Introduction 208

Section 7.2 Moves and their lexico-grammar 208

Section 7.3 Rhetorical approaches to topic introduction 223

Section 7.4 Conclusion 225

Conclusion to Part 3 226

Part 4 Intertextuality and Interdiscursivity

Overview 228

Chapter 8 Intertextuality

Section 8.1 Introduction 230

Section 8.2 Intertextuality across the three directions of communication 231

Section 8.3 Conclusion 243

Chapter 9 Interdiscursivity

Section 9.1 Introduction 244

Section 9.2 Discursive blending of institutional, professional and personal discourses 246

Section 9.3 The mixing of formal and informal styles 261

Section 9.4 The use of both deductive and inductive rhetorical approaches 271

Section 9.5 Conclusion 274

Conclusion to Part 4 276

Part 5 Thesis Conclusion

Chapter 10 Conclusion 277

Appendix 283

References 285

List of Tables

1-1	The three categories of request e-mails	14
2-1	Number of dismissals and termination of contracts of civil servants	51
3-1	Mood in lateral requests	77
5-1	Move structure of downward request e-mails	114
5-2	Prototypical genre-specific moves in downward CM and NCM request e-mails	118
5-3	Use of various influence strategies by leaders	121
5-4	Modals used in different levels of modality	123
5-5	Level of modality of convincing-clauses in downward request e-mails	123
5-6	Realization and categorization of Themes in *Convincing* move in downward request e-mails	127
5-7	Structural components of multiple Themes in *Convincing* move in downward request e-mails	129
5-8	Use of process types in *Convincing* move in downward request e-mails	132
5-9	Linguistic realization of the *Closing* move in downward request e-mails	134
5-10	Directness of downward requests	138
5-11	Request strategies and rank of imposition of downward requests	140
5-12	Mood in request-clauses in downward communication	144
5-13	Process types used in downward *Requesting* move	146
5-14	Use of Participant terms in downward request e-mails	151

5-15	Rhetorical approaches used in downward request e-mail	156
6-1	Moves in downward and lateral request e-mails	166
6-2	Prototypical moves in CM-authored lateral request e-mails	167
6-3	Directness of downward and lateral requests	169
6-4	Rank of imposition of requested acts in downward and lateral request e-mails	170
6-5	Mood in downward and lateral request-clauses (CM recipients)	173
6-6	Process types used in downward and lateral request-clauses	174
6-7	Use of influence strategies in downward and lateral request e-mails	178
6-8	Level of modality of convincing-clauses in downward and lateral request e-mails addressed to CM	179
6-9	Realization and categorization of Themes in *Convincing* move in downward and lateral request e-mails	182
6-10	Structural components of multiple Themes in *Convincing* move in downward and lateral request e-mails	183
6-11	Use of process types in *Convincing* move in downward and lateral request e-mails	184
6-12	Use of rhetorical approaches in downward and lateral request e-mails	193
6-13	Move structures of CM to CM and NCM to CM lateral request e-mails	196
6-14	Directness of request Head Act in CM to CM and NCM to CM lateral requests	199
6-15	Rank of imposition of CM to CM and NCM to CM lateral	201

requests

6-16 Process types used in CM to CM and NCM to CM lateral request-clauses 204

6-17 Use of rhetorical approaches in CM to CM and NCM to CM lateral request e-mails 205

7-1 Moves in downward, lateral and upward request e-mails 209

7-2 Directness of request Head Acts in downward, lateral and upward request e-mails 211

7-3 Rank of imposition of downward, lateral and upward requests 213

7-4 Use of process types in request-clauses in downward, lateral and upward requests 215

7-5 Use of process types in *Convincing* move in downward, lateral and upward request e-mails 219

7-6 Realization and categorization of Themes in *Reporting* move 220

7-7 Process types used in *Reporting* move 222

7-8 Use of rhetorical approaches in downward, lateral and upward request e-mails 223

9-1 Discursive blending of discourses in downward request e-mails 246

9-2 Discursive blending in lateral request e-mails 256

9-3 Discursive blending in CM downward, lateral and upward request e-mails 259

List of Excerpts

3-1	Appraisal report of HKSAR civil servants – core competencies	59
3-2	Appraisal report of HKSAR civil servants – assessment aspects	76
5-1	Writing Effective E-mail Messages	158
6-1	Duties of NETs	202
6-2	Duties of GELTA	202
9-1	Writing Effective E-mail Messages	265

List of Figures

9-1	Scale of institutionalization	254
9-2	Scale of institutionalization for downward CM and NCM request e-mails	254
9-3	Scale of institutionalization in downward and lateral request e-mails	257
9-4	Scale of institutionalization for downward, lateral and upward request e-mails	260

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 Macqaurie 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.