

How VET teacher talk engages students and builds a professional trades identity

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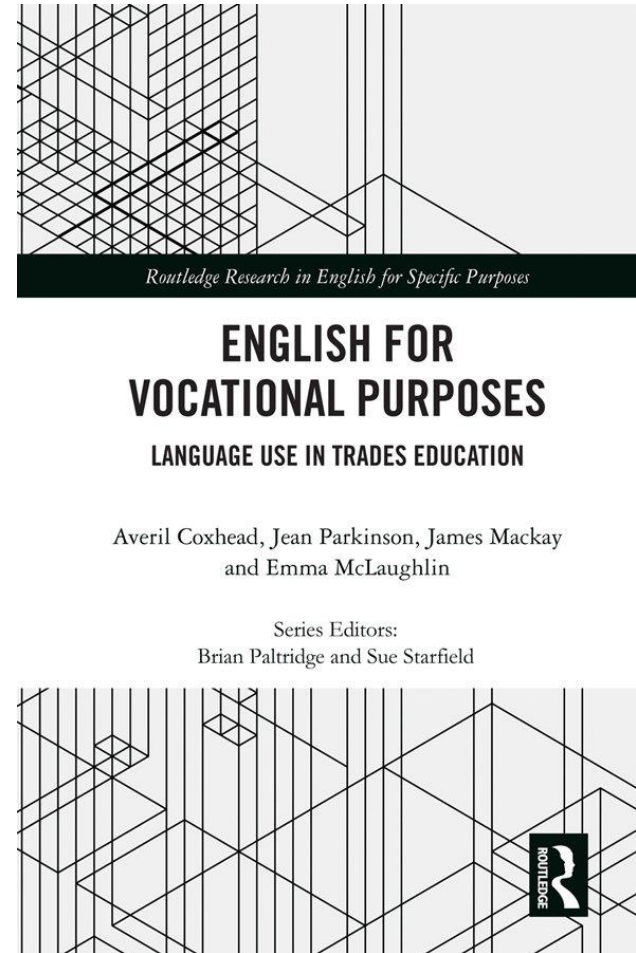
The Language in Trades Education Project

- Data collected: 2014-2017

Purpose:

- To describe trades language
- To support learning of trades language

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Method

Context: A polytechnic institution in Wellington, New Zealand.

- 4 trades: Automotive technology, Carpentry, Fabrication, Plumbing
- Data: 455,000 words of classroom discourse was recorded
 - theory lessons in the classroom
 - practical classes in the workshop or on the building site

My questions

- How do vocational instructors use classroom talk to engage students in the content of their lessons?
- How do subtle features of teacher talk build students' professional identity

Classroom talk

T: now what does impervious mean?

S1: can't go through it

T: water can't pass through it. Ok

What do we have to be careful of?

S2: like chemicals or something?

T: chemicals! Exactly!

[Plumbing classroom]

Initiation
Response
Evaluation
Initiation
Response
Evaluation

- Three-move structure (Initiation Response Evaluation)

At the more micro-level of discourse

- Does teachers' talk include students as part of the trade community?
- If so how?
- How does teachers' talk engage students in the topic?

Tag Questions

Instructor: Hang on, hang on, hang on... come back here, you know how to check a relay, **don't you**↓

Student: I do

Instructor: So you do it right now. [Automotive workshop]



Instructor: Unless you want to put the holes in here, eh, but you haven't got those marked, **have you**↓

Student: No, I haven't yet.

Instructor: You can do that later. [Fabrication workshop]



- No evaluation of the correctness of the answer
- Not part of the IRE
- Not a 'display' question – teacher doesn't know the answer

But some tag questions seem more like **statements**

Teacher: That's the longer one, it's the outside line, **isn't it**↓
which is the same as that length, **isn't it**↓ So we just go
from that there, we're always working from that point...

Teacher: So even you open the lid of a vat, all those heavy gases
will stay in that vat, they'll just push all the air out
doesn't it↓ So, you know, most accidents involving
confined spaces is asphyxiation. [Plumbing classroom]

- No pause for/expectation of a response
- Speaker is knowledgeable
- So what's the point of the tag question?
- Includes student as having some knowledge and judgement about the topic

Some tag questions seem partly like **statements** and partly like **questions**

Teacher: Where do we get water under the ground? Artesian water, **don't we**↓.

Student: Yeah

Teacher: How many times you guys ever dug a fence post? And you go down in the ground that much and next thing you know you hit water... [Plumbing classroom]

Teacher: ... which is the same as this one here, you can mark that one and say F7, which is also E1, which is also exactly the same as that one there too, **isn't it**↓

[pause with no audible response]

Teacher: Cool? So when you mark this one here... the longer of these 2, mark them underneath the drawing

[Fabrication classroom]

Some tag questions are **suggestions** **/instructions**

Teacher: So you cool that down and then clean that up. He's got a piece now. That's it...sweet. Now you weld the nut on there, **don't you**↑ Go and have a look at the sample one because you've got to weld the nut on top of the thread too. [Fabrication workshop]

Teacher: You need to mark the centers, ok? What we'll do in that instance... it doesn't really matter too much. We can take it to the right, **can't we**↓.

Student: Yeah

Instructor: Just take it slight to the right because it doesn't matter for that, **does it**↓. [Fabrication workshop]

Student constructs himself as knowledgeable

Instructor: I'm wondering whether we... oh that's not going to make any difference. It looks to me... see this cable is a bit manky, **isn't it** ↓.

Student: I'm wondering...if we swap that spring over...

[Automotive workshop]

Constructing students as knowledgeable

- Tag questions are woven throughout the instructor's talk
- With tag questions teachers encourage student engagement, even when there is limited opportunity for student talk.
- They provide a subtle suggestion to learners that the teacher regards them as already having knowledge about the topic and ability to make judgements.

- How does use of address terms in classroom talk align with students' vocations?

Findings

- *Guys* and *mate* were the most commonly used address terms

Guys

Many addressees

More
Instructional
Purposes

Mate

One addressee

More
interpersonal
purposes



Cultural meaning of *guys* and *mate*

- Both *guys* and *mate* minimise power differences between speaker and addressee and stress egalitarianism
- ‘Mateship’ associated with an ideal of self-reliant working men and the ethic of working-class camaraderie (Bannister, 2005).
- This makes these address terms appropriate both culturally and in terms of students’ vocations

How do vocational instructors' address terms engage students in content?

Instructors used *guys* for instructional purposes:

- To signal the start, end or change of a task

T: Ok *guys* so we're just going to recap yesterday's lesson and we're going to start off with our meter. [Automotive]

- To emphasize key information

T: What you can do then *guys* just have a look is with your compass again just develop with that line there [Plumbing]

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T: **What you can do then** *guys* **just have a look** is with your compass again just develop with that line there [Plumbing]

How does instructors' use of address terms align with students' vocations?

- Culturally, *mate* is associated with solidarity between workmates, but the solidarity function of *mate* was infrequent

T: One of them is a little bit too thick, you know what I mean? It's just pushing the other one out. Yeah so we can just trim a bit of this... See, like that? Pass your knife... You got one knife?

S: Yeah

T: Beautiful! Don't try to tuck it in too much, eh? 'Cos then he goes 'oh don't try and tuck it in'. It's those inspectors, *mate*, they are just harsh! [Carpentry]

How does instructors' use of address terms align with students' vocations?

- *Mate* makes criticism / directives more palatable:

T: Out of the ears *mate*. You know the rules, aye. I don't care what you're saying. It's health and safety regulations. I have to enforce them [Fabrication]

- *Mate* used with encouragement:

T: Move it to there, which is foresight, then the next measurement is gonna be written on the backsight. Sweet. Cool. You'll get your head around it, *mate*. Nice work, nice work, people. [Carpentry]

- *Guys* – addressing groups; instructional functions (getting attention; emphasis)
- *Mate* – addressing individuals
 - softening face-threats (like instructions and criticism);
 - heightening friendliness by intensifying praise and reassurance

Other engaging language features

T: Anyway, if we have a magnetic field passing through this wire here, **our** right hand grip rule **would tell us** that we're going in a clockwise direction, so **our** magnetic field is going **dadadada** like this **and oh look at that, unfortunately**, it's cut through the conductor above it. This magnetic field that's cutting through that conductor above it will induce a voltage in that conductor, but **the unfortunate thing** about this is the voltage that it produces is in the opposite direction so **we** would normally talk about this in year one as being counter EMF, counter EMF.

Engagement features embedded in explanation :
personal pronouns and **affective language**

T: Did anyone know what EMF stood for?

Initiation

S Electromotive force.

Response

T: **oohh**, electromotive force... **fantastic, good stuff.**

Evaluatn

References

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Thank you!