Formulaic leadership language: How formulaic sequences are part of leadership practice in a rugby team

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This paper explores the use of formulaic sequences (Wray 2008) within the leadership discourse of rugby coaches in a New Zealand rugby team. It posits that the formulae uncovered through corpus-led analysis of recorded team interactions show certain sequences to be linked to functions of leadership such as command, solidarity-building, criticism and encouragement (Holmes et al. 2003). The formulae used to perform these functions of leadership discourse become part of the repertoire that defines leadership in this community of practice and hence emergent leaders can be recognised as aligning with a common practice through their use of these formulae (Wenger 1998).

The data upon which this study was based was gathered over an extended period of ethnographic research with the team in question and the results are thus interpretable through an ethnographic lens. The findings can be compared with similar studies of formulae of command in fitness instruction (Kuiper and Lodge 2004) and formulae of solidarity in rugby (Kuiper 1991), and demonstrate that although these functions of formulaic sequences is widespread, their form is locally negotiated as part of communicative practice and identity construction.

References

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