PSYCHOLINGUISTIC ANALYSIS OF OPERATIONAL COMMUNICATION (PART II): PRESCRIBED COMMUNICATION FOR RELIABILITY IN HIGH RISK INDUSTRIES

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ABSTRACT

A specific language of communication at work is developed by professionals particularly in high risk industries (such as energy production industries, aircraft companies and hospitals): this comes from the high level of technicality which is often at the root of these words. One of our previous studies demonstrated that this kind of standard usage of communication is reliable in specific contexts but can produce mistakes giving rise to undesirable events (such as deviations from prescription). One solution might be to change for a prescribed use of communication but then the question of the consecutive effects on the workers and work activities arises. Yet the literature is void of studies regarding the effect of such change on workers and work activities while Psycholinguistics might help towards this. Simulated and real operating working situations were observed for French nuclear reactor operators. Analyses were carried out from psycholinguistic and socio-psychological perspectives; this was based on observations, video-recordings and interviews. This was undertaken after the management demanded the substitution of the standard usage of communication by a prescribed use for reliability enhancement purposes. We showed that this implementation could have a negative impact on workers' professional identity and professional genre: reinforcement of the referential function of dialogue, disturbance of emotive and metalingual functions and additional cost from the cognitive economy standpoint. In parallel, safety results improved.

Keywords: Discourse analysis; operational communication; reliability; risk; prescription.