***Nick Wilson  
Victoria University of Wellington***

**Swearing as a leadership tool**

As several researchers have now shown, swearing is not necessarily offensive, indeed it often functions much more positively as a marker of solidarity and group membership (Daly, Holmes, Newton and Stubbe 2004; Stapleton 2003). While there is no doubt that many people continue to find swearing offensive, and it is considered inappropriate in many contexts, in some it is the opposite. Indeed, for some social groups and communities frequent swearing is the norm.

This paper presents an analysis of the function of swearing within a context in which high frequency swearing is a group norm: a male rugby team. In this team, swearing is used for a variety of functions, but of particular interest here is its use in performing leadership duties such as pre-match motivation. It is in the pre-match motivational huddle that swearing is at its most frequent within the team, however it can also be found in a very different context: backstage interactions (Coates 1999; Goffman 1959; Hughey 2011; Richards 2010; Wittenberg-Lyles, Cie’ Gee, Oliver and Demiris 2009). To this end, both frontstage and backstage use of swearing in the leadership discourse of the rugby team is analysed. A quantitative analysis of the frequency of swearwords and their function in team leadership discourse is presented, followed by a qualitative analysis of an example from each type of leadership discourse. The aim of the paper is to demonstrate not only that swearing can be used to engender solidarity, but that a range of functions of swearing such as intensifying, othering, exclaiming annoyance, and indexing a vernacular identity, can all be used in performing leadership.

The data upon which this paper is based was gathered through detailed ethnographic fieldwork with the rugby team, allowing full recording access to all aspects of team interaction. The team in question was an amateur team in New Zealand, however other research on rugby in the UK, combined with the author’s own rugby playing experiences has shown that the level of swearing found in this team may be regarded as commonplace in a rugby context.

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