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Finding out what new employees know: Analysing questions and answers in employee orientation lectures

The newcomers' acquisition of work-related knowledge is a central goal in new employee orientation. In this article, I analyse how the knowledge and skills of new employees are discussed and investigated during interaction between the lecturer and the group of new employees in orientation lectures. I focus on the knowledge-probing questions presented by the lecturers and the answers provided by the new employees. The data consist of videorecordings of such lectures. The analysis reveals that the lecturers present two kinds of knowledge-probing questions that involve different expectations concerning the knowledge status of the new employees. The first category of questions deals with the knowledge the employees may have acquired before the orientation programme. These questions are formulated in a manner to make it clear that there is no assumption that all the participants possess the knowledge or skills the question deals with. The second category of questions deals with the knowledge the participants may have acquired during the orientation programme alone. These questions are formulated in such a manner that the expected answer will display knowledge. The methodology of the study is conversation analysis.