Speaker transitions and negotiation of knowledge domains in workplace PowerPoint presentations

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PowerPoint presentations are distinct interactional activities, in which talk and body gestures work in accordance with the manipulation of objects. In terms of turn organization, they are distinguished by an extended turn, during which the speakership has been given to one single participant (Rendle-Short 2006). However, in this study we aim to turn the lens to the recipients of the presentation by examining the exchange, during which the turn is allocated to another participant than the one who is legitimately delivering the presentation. The focus on the ’next’ turn within a monologic talk is driven by our data, which originates from videotaped organizational meetings. There are 16 PowerPoint presentations in these meetings and 8 of them comprise multiple speaker transitions, which can be divided into three categories: 1. the member of the audience bids for a turn, 2. self-selects him/herself, 3. or is given a turn by a presenter.

Analyzing these instances of speaker transitions with a conversation analytical method, we will investigate how the knowledge discrepancies between the participants become visible in and through these exchanges, and in particular, how the PowerPoint text projected on the screen and evoked by different participants in their talk and embodied action is interwoven with this process. Comparing these presentations to those ones, in which such speaker transitions do not occur, we will show how the activity of information delivery is transferred into shared knowledge construction, as the participants reposition themselves in the continuum of knowing and non-knowing participants. Finally, we will discuss the findings in the light of our workplace data suggesting that in this interactional environment the activity of PowerPoint presentation is characterized by a heightened orientation towards each other’s expected knowledge domains.


Keywords: knowledge domains, PowerPoint presentation, speaker transition.