Practice and awareness in interactive management of authority in dialogue

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Consensus-building is a necessary prerequisite for people to engage in cooperative joint actions. It is ubiquitous in our daily lives, from scheduling a meeting between colleagues to negotiating on treaties between nation states. Outcomes and the processes of consensus-building depend not only on the considerations of the information and the goals participants have, but also on the positions and the roles each of the participants occupy relative to the environment surrounding the consensus-building interactions. Whether they are aware or not, people engaging in daily interaction with others are embedded in a social context in which social roles and social status of participants both explicitly and implicitly shape the form of interactions.

Based on a comparative analysis of story construction task dialogues in Mr. O corpus, which has been collected in a number of languages, including Japanese, English, Thai and Arabic, we present a distinction between competence-based and deference-based interaction styles for participant status dependent behaviors. We then contrast two conceptions: the static conformance view and the dynamic interactive signaling view, for capturing this distinction in the interaction styles. We argue for the dynamic interactive signaling view, as taking that view enables us to look at seemingly deviant practices as evidences for cultural awareness of participants rather than to simply relegate them to violations of social norms.

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