

(Re)constructing epistemic status: Some techniques for legitimizing an epistemic claim in interaction

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1 Background and Goals of the Study

There is a growing body of conversation analytic research on “epistemics”, i.e., interactants' orientations to rights and responsibilities regarding knowledge and knowledge distribution (Heritage 2002; Heritage and Raymond 2005; Raymond and Heritage 2006; Stivers 2005 among others). Much of the argument in this line of inquiry is based on the analysis of encounters where participants make a claim to “index” epistemic status tied to a certain aspect of their social identity (e.g., a grandmother claiming to know her grandchild better than her friend, an American citizen claiming to know the country's culture better than an immigrant, etc.). However, in casual conversation, participants often make an epistemic claim that cannot be immediately or unquestionably attributed to their social identity. The goal of this study is to document interactional resources that participants employ to legitimize their epistemic claims in such cases.

2 Methodology

The methodology adopted in this study is conversation analysis (CA): it systematically examines details of spontaneous social interaction to reveal interactional orders. The database for this study consists of roughly 22 hours of video-recorded face-to-face conversations and 7 hours of audio-recorded telephone conversations. All of the participants are native speakers of Japanese. So far, I have extracted and analyzed fifteen cases in which interactional efforts to give grounds for an epistemic claim are observable.

3 Analysis

The following three techniques could be identified as means to legitimize a party's claim to know the referent better than others: (1) provision of a “strong” evaluation (e.g., *I love it so so much.*); (2) demonstration of an “expert” knowledge or perspective on the spot; (3) other initiation of repair to claim the right to answer the preceding question. The analysis reveals that these techniques serve not to “index” epistemic status but to negotiate and establish relative distribution of knowledge among participants in turn-by-turn talk in interaction.

4 Discussion and Conclusion

The findings provide us with a window into the ways in which parties in social encounters construct or reconstruct who they are to each other.

References

Heritage, John. (2002). "Oh-prefaced responses to assessments: A method of modifying agreement/disagreement." In C. Ford, B. Fox and S.A. Thompson (eds.), *The language of turn and sequence*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 196-224.