

Forming Identity and Leadership Roles in Group Discussions

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This study was conducted at an English-medium university in Japan where students were tasked with having a debate and discussion with other non-native speaking (NNS) peers and one native speaker (NS). Preconceived notions of the expert-novice dyad assume that native speakers should naturally take on the role of the expert due to their linguistic competence. However, recent studies have deconstructed this assumption (Dings, 2012; Reicher & Liebscher, 2012; Vickers, 2010), allowing for a new perspective on how group dynamics can be constructed within discussions. This shift occurs as a result of a co-constructed identity amongst the members. Using conversation analysis as the method of research, this study adds to the current body of research regarding the deconstructing of the expert-novice dyad, by analyzing the conversational turns that students use to determine their expert or novice identity. In addition to the expert/novice identity, two types of roles emerge within group discussions: unofficial leader roles and follower roles. Participants who self-identify as an expert will spontaneously take on unofficial leader roles, while novices stay in a follower role. However, there is no set rule that dictates leadership roles should fall only on the native speaker. By showing that non-native speakers can take on unofficial leadership roles, this can open up opportunities for them to expand their conversational ability.

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