Illocutionary Work:
A theory of shared agency in human-AI group discussion—exploring how learners, peers, and AI co-construct meaning

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Session Overview

1. The reality of asymmetrical roles and authority
2. Theoretical reframing
3. Design implication
4. Data and workshop activity
5. Synthesis and takeaways

What kind of
group discussions
do you take part in?
- at home
- at school
- at work

Some are easy. Some are risky. Some really matter.

Who are the participants in these discussions?
· at home
· at school
· at work

- *Do participants have...*
- *· Equal power?*
- *· Equal rights?*
- *· Equal responsibility?*

Learning Context

CEFR B1+ learners
EMI university (Japan)
Protected language classrooms
Discussion and Debate course
Asymmetric mainstream environments

The AI Problem
(Stockwell & Wang, 2025)

- Collaboration assumes shared accountability

- Human–AI interaction is asymmetric

- "Collaboration" is the wrong lens

Where human-AI collaboration fails
(Stockwell & Wang, 2025)

- ✗ No shared intention
- ✗ No reciprocal understanding
- ✗ No distributed accountability
- ✗ One directional trust

The system may participate in interaction, but it cannot participate in responsibility.

Speech Act Theory
(Searle, 1969)

- Language does things
- Utterances carry force
- Effects depend on uptake

Locutionary Acts
Illocutionary Acts
Perlocutionary Acts

Illocutionary Force and Intention

- Intention = Choice + Commitment

  (Cohen & Levesque, 1990)

- Intentions can be future oriented

- What we say is often planned

From acts to Work

- Not skills
- Not tasks
- Work—the agglomeration of choices/moves
- Where voice emerges in nonlinear phases

Illocutionary Work in Group Discussion

Preparation

Near Moment of Speaking

Public Interaction & Uptake

Illocutionary Work

creation of potential moves   *selection of moves*   *enactment of moves*
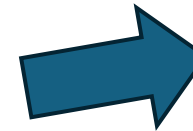
Formative Pedagogical Tasks

Practice and Feedback

Choices and Commitments toward practice provide affordances for emergent readiness to communicate

Moves create effects on others

Recorded and transcribed group discussion can be analyzed and feedback provided by Teacher/AI

AI Supports as…
· **tool** for extending capacity
· **resource** requiring evaluation
· **interlocutor** reflecting our intentions

Where AI belongs

- Illocutionary work = human

- Preparation can be supported

- Performance must remain accountable

Design Implications: Pachi

What Pachi can make possible

- *Scaled preparation*
- *Externalized role preparation*
- *AI-driven, formative feedback*

Why role-based tasks matter

Roles → Provide anticipated illocutionary commitments, allows for legitimate peripheral participation and academic skill consolidation

Worksheets → Provide models of acceptable moves

Case narratives → Provide contextual boundaries

PDF packets → Provide additional guidance for stakeholder discussion such as mock trial procedures, direct/cross examination rules

Anti-hero crime fiction genre of graded readers

Multistage Stakeholder Discussions:
Now possible with AI-driven flipped support

- Literature Circle Discussion Roles
  - Discussion Leader
  - Summarizer
  - Passage Person
  - Experience Connector
  - Vocabulary Master
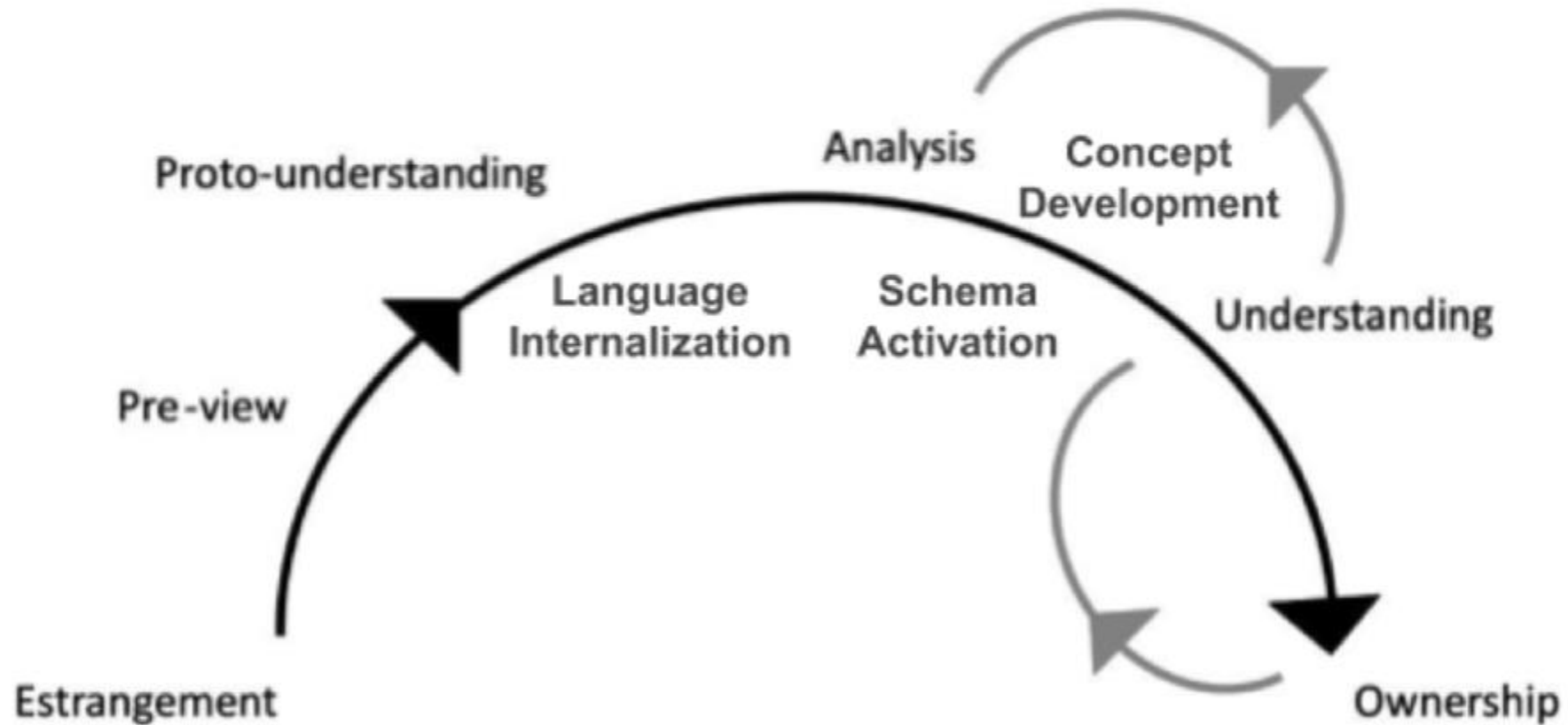 (Daniels, 2002)
  (Sevigny, 2022)

- Mock Trial Roles
  - Prosecutor
  - Prosecutor's Witness
  - Defense Lawyer
  - Defendant
  (Sevigny, in press)

Bell's Arc with Vygotskian Modifications

(Sevigny (2019) mod of Bell (2011) with Vygotsky (1978)

Interpretive Reasoning in Multistage Discussions

Discussion Stage	Bell 2011/Vygotsky 1978 Levels of Interpretation	Asymmetrical Roles	Content Cognition
Mock Trial	9. Ownership 8. Deep Understanding 7. Concept Development 6. Analysis	Judge/Juror Prosecutor Prosecutor's Witness Defense Defendant	Means, Motive, Opportunity, Manslaughter, Murder, direct examination cross examination
LIterature Circle	5. Schema Activation 4. Literal Comprehension 3. Language Internalization 2. Preview – Key Details 1. Estrangement	Discussion Leader Summarizer Experience Connector Vocabulary Master Passage Person	Protagonist Antagonist Characters Narrator Theme Conflict

Two Dimensions for Illocutionary Work

	Withdrawn/ Disruptive 0	Reactive/ Other reliant 1	Collaborative / Interlang Edge 2	Strategic/ Elevating 3
Interpretive/ Ownership 3	3	4	5	6
Conceptual/ Relational 2	2	3	4	5
Literal/ Surface 1	1	2	3	4
Estranged/ Minimal 0	0	1	2	3

Interpretive Reasoning (vertical axis)

Interactional Management (horizontal axis)

EXCERPT 1 – Literature Circle

Question 1:

What kinds of work is S8 doing to make this discussion possible, and where do you see evidence of interpretive vs. interactional effort?

Roles:

- S8 – Discussion Leader (DL; also assumes Summarizer role)
- S5 – Experience Connector (EC)
- S13 – Passage Person (PP)

Time: 00:28–01:25

- S8 (DL):
- So today, there's no summarizer here, so I want to summarize quickly.
- This story is about Kai, who returns to his hometown and looks for his old love, Mizuki.
- He still has doubts about her and their past, and there was a violent incident that sent him to prison.
- The story ends with learning about trust or love or something like that.
- So first, who are the main characters in this story?
- S5 (EC):
- Kai, Mizuki, and Ryo.
- S8 (DL):
- Can you describe their relationship? S13-san?

EXCERPT 2 – Literature Circle

Roles:

- S13 – Passage Person (PP)
- S8 – Discussion Leader (DL)
- S5 – Experience Connector (EC)

Time: 16:09–18:08

S8 (DL):

- I want to focus on Kai's mom's bedtime story.
- Can you see this line on page four?
- I think there is a connection between this part and Kai's behavior toward Ryo.
- What do you think is the connection?

S13 (PP):

- I think Kai really values the truth.
- But at the same time, it's really difficult to tell if someone is telling the truth or not.
- He wanted to believe Mizuki, but because he couldn't be sure, he couldn't believe her.
- I think his mom's line affected the way he was thinking.

S5 (EC):

- I think Kai is an honest person.
- He doesn't want to lie to anyone, anytime.
- That's why he couldn't accept the situation.

S8 (DL):

- So the relationship between Kai and Mizuki is… ambiguous?

EXCERPT 3 – Literature Circle

Question 3: What kinds of work are missing here, and how does their absence affect what becomes possible in the interaction?

Roles:

- S17 – Discussion Leader (DL)
- S15 – Passage Person (PP)
- S4 – Experience Connector (EC)

Time: 09:50–10:01

S15 (PP):

- When you read this passage, what do you think what he's done?

S17 (DL):

- Actually, I didn't read this sentence, so sorry about that, S15.

S15 (PP):

- Okay, thank you

S17:

- I think I'm not sure what he's done, but he did something bad, so that's why the owner said that.

EXCERPT 4 – Mock Trial

Roles:

S8 – Prosecutor

S9 – Defendant (Kai)

Notes:

- S8 asks sequenced, contingent questions (not scripted)
- Questions track mental state over time (intent → doubt → action)
- S9 resists simplification and elaborates (flouting yes/no)

Time: ~17:16–18:12

S8: When did you start wondering the baby might not be yours?

S9: When I heard the baby news… I doubted at that time.

S8: Did you try something to understand Mizuki or confirm the truth?

S9: Yes, of course I tried… but every time Mizuki met Ryo, I had to doubt.

Questions (MT-Q1):

- Where do you see evidence that S8 is working with the story, not just asking questions?
- What interpretive and interactional work is S9 doing in response?

EXCERPT 5 – Mock Trial

Roles:

S8 – Prosecutor

S9 – Defendant

Notes:

• Clear yes/no pressure

• Witness expands instead of complying

• Shows illocutionary work under high responsibility

Time: ~20:19–21:05

S8: Did you try to kill him?

S9: No… I didn't plan to kill. But my feeling was out of control.

Question (MT-Q2):

• How does S9 reshape the question rather than simply answer it?

• What does this tell us about ownership, responsibility, and risk?

EXCERPT 6 – Mock Trial Deliberation

Source: MT1 G2 Deliberation

Notes:

- Jurors revoice trial evidence

- Movement from personal opinion → collective judgment

- Clear interpretive + interactional management
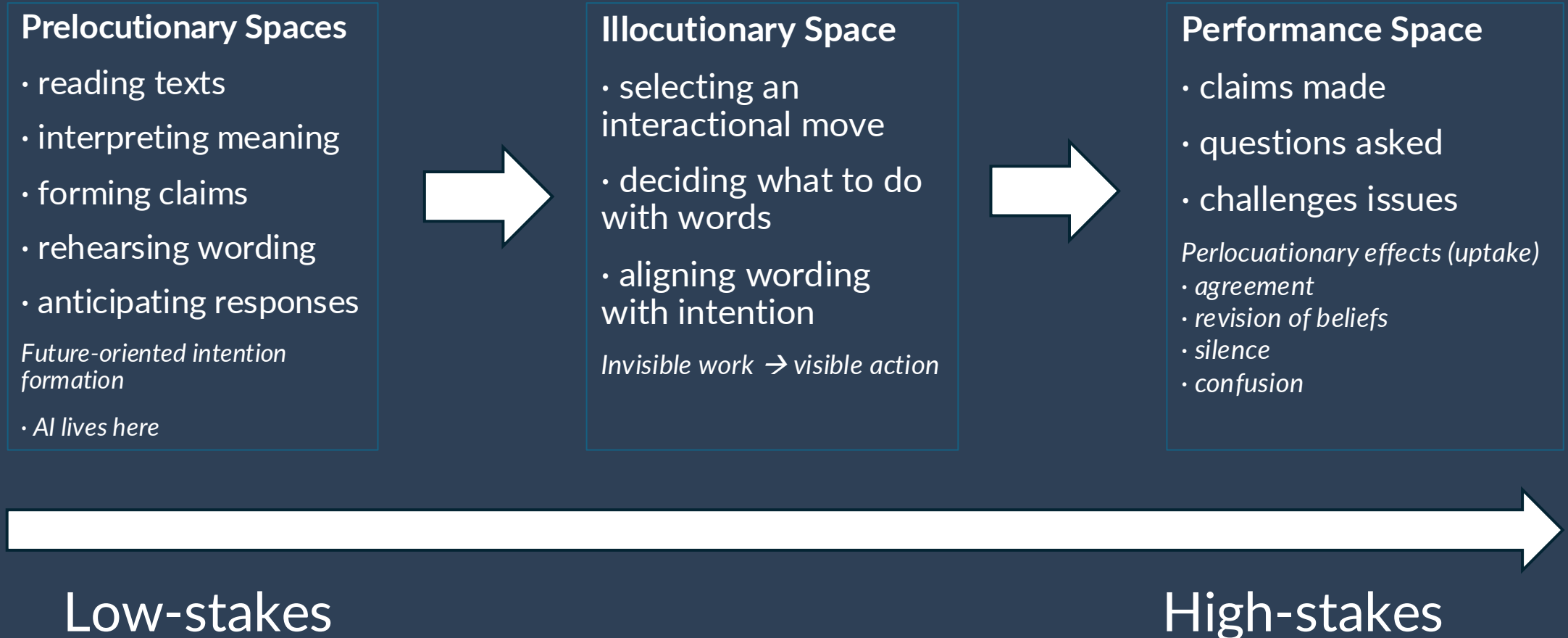
- Time: ~00:18–01:15

S8: He hit twice, so there was intention—but he was out of control.

S1: Mental illness is the biggest reason. He should go to a hospital.

Questions (MT-Q3):

- What kinds of work are jurors doing to turn testimony into judgment?

- How is responsibility distributed differently here than during the trial?

Illocutionary Work Spaces

Prelocutionary Spaces

· reading texts

· interpreting meaning

· forming claims

· rehearsing wording

· anticipating responses

Future-oriented intention formation

· AI lives here

Illocutionary Space

· selecting an interactional move

· deciding what to do with words

· aligning wording with intention

Invisible work → visible action

Performance Space

· claims made

· questions asked

· challenges issues

Perlocuationary effects (uptake)
· agreement
· revision of beliefs
· silence
· confusion

Low-stakes

High-stakes

Mapping AI Use onto Illocutionary Work

AI does not perform Illocutionary Work – Learners Do

- AI may *afford* moves
- AI may *scaffold* options
- But illocutionary force only *emerges* in learner interaction

Two Dimensions for Illocutionary Work

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Interactional Management →

Notes: Integrating Chatbots into a Course

- Syllabi should notify students of required chatbot use
- Students need to be taught how to manage settings ethically
- Students need technical skills for using chatbots
- Texts and PDFs that can be uploaded to a chatbot will be, so make sure your course material copyrights are amenable to this
- Customized chatbot coding, functions, and use by your students need ongoing evaluation and revision

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