Negotiating identities and competencies in decision-making talk.

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Following Jayyusi (1984), displays of competence are morally accountable phenomena that are driven by the identities that participants are able to achieve in talk. This paper seeks to shed light on how identities are strategically negotiated in talk so as to influence the decision-making process. More specifically, using data taken from an audio-recording of one of President Kennedy's meetings, in which crucial decisions concerning the funding of the Apollo mission to get a man on the moon before the Soviets are discussed, we examine the way in which Kennedy and Webb (Head of NASA) negotiate identities. We are especially concerned with the way in which the participants build up their own identity in order to make their claims to states of knowledge that influence the decision-making process more credible and how, on the other hand, they try to undercut their interlocutor's claims to knowledge. By strategically negotiating identities in talk, the participants make relevant states of knowledge and competencies which allow them to emerge as the decision-maker. Findings indicate how Kennedy makes relevant the topic of geo-politics which lies within his domain of competence as president. This allows him to make relevant states of knowledge associated with the identity 'president' and so influence the decision-making process. On the other hand, Webb shifts topic to the importance of scientific research so as to undercut Kennedy's competence and bolster his own competence as a member of the scientific community. In this way, Webb seeks to make his professional competence count more than the competencies associated with being the president in the decision-making process.