Title	パーティのためのコミュニケーション 支援メディアに関する研究
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Citation	
Issue Date	2018-03
Type	Thesis or Dissertation
Text version	author
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10119/15159
Rights	
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A System to Support Vitalizing Conversations in

a Social Gathering

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March 2018

In the modern society, face-to-face communication is considered indispensable to maintain human relations in the company's welcome party, annual meeting and so on. However, it not always easy to proceed the conversation in a party, in particular, a person with whom meet for the first time or a superior. This paper proposes a communication support system that enables a third person to inject topics into such an awkward conversation in a one-way manner to help keep on conversing. Results of a pilot study shows unexpectedly injected topics are useful to continue the conversation.

Communication between people is becoming more and more convenient and more frequent, so it is easy to get consensus on the topic of communication between people. Still, some awkward situations may happen. In some cases, the conversation will not go on well because of the speaker's own reasons of not knowing what to say even the partner is actively talking to him or her, which will hinder the conversation. Finding the right topic for a good conversation is a huge challenge for these people who are regarded as "topic disabilities".

In the past, many people proposed to solve the problem of dialogues in parties by prompting topics. Most systems require the subjects to provide their own personal information in advance. However, in the process of collecting information, the information might not be accurate and comprehensive. For example, some people may be ashamed or feel uncomfortable to show their good grades, so it is hard to achieve the ultimate purpose of the experiments.

Therefore, this paper uses the introduction of the third person to help those who have the above problems. The third person is in the same party with "topic disabilities" and they are not in the same dialogue but he/she is the person who understands the basic information of the "topic disabilities". When the helper notices that the conversation of "topic disabilities" cannot continue, then a signal is sent to give "topic disabilities" some helpful cues through the system suspended from the chest. At the same time, the partner who is talking to the "topic disabilities" can keep up with the conversation by seeing the external information and guidance to continue the conversation. This method is similar to the mutual introduction of friends to understand each other better but it would not be bound by space or conditions.

The two experiments were conducted to prove the effectiveness of the proposed system. In this study, 30 native Chinese subjects were recruited to simulate real-life party scenes. Before the experiments, each participant was asked to fill out a questionnaire to determine how many people they know in the party and get instructions of the experiment description and system login. Like normal parties, everyone can talk freely, eat and drink. After the experiment they were asked to answer a questionnaire. According to the result of questionnaire, it is proved that the experiment is very useful in promoting the communication among the parties. It can relieve the embarrassment of subjects and they become willing to communicate with others. In addition, there were also some unexpected results.

In the future the study will also be researched to promote the system, and we hope that it can be applied to the real life scenes to help those who have difficulties in conversation can have a smooth communication.