

## BOOK REVIEW

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### SPOKEN ENGLISH FOR ACADEMIC PURPOSES: RESEARCH AND PRACTICE

**Megan M. Siczek (Ed.)**, PEDAGOGICAL INNOVATIONS IN ORAL ACADEMIC COMMUNICATION (2022), Michigan: University of Michigan Press. 256 pp., ISBN 978-0-472-03895-4 (PBK); ISBN 978-0-472-22030-4 (EBK).

Spoken English for academic purposes (SEAP) is key to success and participation in educational contexts and yet in the field of English for academic purposes (EAP) research is limited. This edited volume responds to the need for research and provides practical insights into oracy in Higher Education (HE), by drawing on a range of theoretical principles – task and genre-based pedagogy, intertextuality, multimodality, digital literacy, academic socialisation and others. The volume offers insights from an emic perspective, where teachers and researchers examine the complexity and reality of spoken communication in undergraduate (Part I), postgraduate (Part II), interdisciplinary (Part III) and diverse inclusive (Part IV) educational contexts. The book suggests a range of practical applications that can be adopted in HE contexts.

#### **Part I Oral Academic Communication in Undergraduate Contexts**

Megan Siczek opens the book in her chapter that spans oral academic communication in three contexts, the United States, Brazil, and the United Kingdom. She promotes the teaching of relevant oral academic genres that represent the linguistic diversity of global students who need to function both in person and digitally in academia and the workplace. Siczek outlines three modules that were developed: Module 1 outlines an evaluation criterion that combines “preparation/professionalism, focus and coherence of the story, visual appeal, e.g., use of image and graphics, dynamic text, multimedia, delivery and timing” (p. 26). A

further contribution would be to link this evaluation criterion to the theoretical concepts underpinning the module – e.g. Was the genre of a *linguistic autobiography* or the intertextuality of languages and identities deconstructed for students as a scaffold to develop the student’s personal narrative? In Module 2, the relationship between genre and activities is clearer, and introduces valuable ideas that could be incorporated into EAP resources. Module 3 presents a task and the support given to students when preparing an *individual persuasive presentation*, that engaged students in academic research examining the context of internationalisation at their university. Numerous quotes attest to the positive impact these modules had on the students’ oral communication.

Liberato Silva dos Santos and Rejane Maria Gonçalves Maia introduce a design thinking (DT) approach that enriches academic presentation involving undergraduate students from different disciplines in Brazil. The authors use a range of abbreviations, e.g. OAC (oral academic communication), LS (language socialisation), MCBI (Multi Campus Brazilian Institution), SLS (second language socialisation), SLA (second-language acquisition), CoP (communities of practice), as well as other more commonly known, like NNES (non-native English speakers), ESL, EFL, L1, L2, which at times can be a little distracting. They outline how typical DT stages can inform the development of six DT-based OAC Activity Stages. These stages provide a clear overview of the process of preparing, drafting, testing leading to the performance of an oral presentation. The six DT-based OAC Activity Stages are mapped on to four DT stages: discover, empathise, experiment, produce (DEEP), and an example of applying to DEEP with the MCBI students is presented. As the authors point out, it would have been interesting to have pre and post samples of the student’s presentation to assess the impact of the DT approach.

Andrew Preshous and Tega Cosmos Akpogi integrate subject-specific content and oral presentation skills at a university in the United Kingdom. The study took place with International Business Top-up degree students on a credit bearing English Business Presentation Skills EAP unit. All students were attending an overseas work placement in their final year. The unit bridges the gap between studying for a degree and authentic language use in the workplace where oral communication pervades, as pointed out in previous research by Evans (2013), Forey (2004), or Handler (2017), among others. Handler (2017) highlights the central role of company and product presentations in the workplace. Responding to this research, Preshous and Akpogi critically engage students in research that informs the development of convincing workplace presentation. They acknowledge that the authenticity is still limited; however, the task mirrors workplace skills such as teamwork and effective presentation skills. Their blended learning environment also reflects the globalised digital workplace. The study demonstrates the need to incorporate digital literacy, oracy, interdisciplinarity and teamwork that closely reflects the demands of the workplace and leads to greater employability for graduates.

## Part II Graduate Contexts for Oral Academic Communication

Joseph A. Davies, Tyler J. Carter, and Maxi-Ann Campbell's study reports on graduate academic communication skills at an English as a Medium of Instruction (EMI) Sino-US university in China. They draw on performative habit building with the aim to increase confidence and reduce performance anxiety through repetition, which provides familiarity with the language and genre of academic presentations. The core material involves a series of five, three-to-five-minute presentations that incorporate skills building, peer and self-reflection. The repetition of these short presentations culminates in a more formal presentation, the Graduate Student Colloquium, an authentic presentation where students share research on a discipline specific topic.

Susan M. Barone, Summer E. Dickinson, and Romy Frank discuss disciplinary socialisation of an international Master of Law, LLM (Latin for Legum Magister) students at a US university. They observed that international students were reticent to socially engage or network at various academic events, and under-utilised discussions with staff during office hours. Small talk was identified as being a key contributor to developing professional social networks, as reported in previous studies, e.g. Eggins and Slade (2006), Holmes, Marra, and Vine (2019), and improving office hour discussion. Focusing on small talk, they designed and implemented socialisation communication resources and a mentoring plan, where students learnt to analyse authentic spoken interactions and were taught useful phrases for negotiating and responding to advice and leave taking.

Jane Freeman outlines the teaching of academic conversation skills using metacognitive strategy instruction. She draws on Flavell's (1979) definition of metacognitive processes which involves knowledge of cognitive processes and the capacity to monitor, regulate and orchestrate those processes. The author proposes pedagogy that explicitly uses metacognitive strategy instruction (MCSI) that was adopted when teaching listening and speaking. In teaching academic conversation skills, Freeman identifies four layers of conversational features – content, mechanics, hidden influences/cultural assumptions and self-evaluation. She introduces students to material that scaffolds the development of these four features, and presents an overview of how students were taught to apply metacognitive knowledge that assists the development of self-regulated learning choices, equipping learners with tools beyond the classroom.

Michelle Crow, Nathan Lindberg, and Melissa Myers discuss a co-inquiry approach that was developed with international students studying on professional graduate programmes at Cornell University. The focus of their non-credit bearing co-inquiry programme promoted collaboration between student and teacher as well as an understanding of the complexity of professional communication, student agency, communication tasks and needs. They draw on MacDonald's (1994) six areas of knowledge skills and combine these with an inquiry model where the teacher and student together examine the genre knowledge, discourse knowledge, information literacy knowledge, rhetorical knowledge, process knowledge and

subject matter knowledge required to communicate effectively in professional contexts.

### Part III Cross Disciplinary Collaborations

Carmela A. Romano Gillette and Deric McNish outline an approach that affords students the opportunity to navigate and challenge their own identity and agency through their experience of academic discourse socialisation. The authors adopt actor-training techniques that combine the discipline of theatre with English language learning in order to scaffold authentic oral communication. They provide an overview of activities such as improving, selecting and analysing scripts, script rehearsal, working with corpora, performance and reflection as a means of improving oracy in the EAP classroom. Students report to enjoying the course, overcoming inhibitions, building confidence and developing an understanding of how they construct their identity in academic contexts.

Greer Murphy and Marcus Weakley outline the teaching of oral communication in EAP programmes for international graduate students who are required to have a grasp of advanced academic literacy in their specialised discipline, and at the same time be able to explain their disciplinary knowledge in concrete terms to non-specialists. They aimed to “develop the socio-academic sophistication and rhetorical awareness need to engage in graduate-level courses as discerning consumers and preceptive producers of knowledge” (p. 160). To achieve these aims, they actively engaged students as sociolinguists and required students to collect empirical data from their field. The research the students undertook was *small* – e.g. collecting small chunks of discrete language data. The teachers helped to direct these studies enabling them to be *specific* and achievable. Students would then *crowd source* their work and collaboratively advance their critical discussions of how language makes meaning. The course encouraged a willingness to learn, experimentation, decision making, critical thinking and led to empowering students in understanding and making meaning through oracy.

Kyung-Hee Bae, Tracy Volz, Jennifer Shade Wilson, and Sandra Parsons detail the collaboration between a STEM academic in the field of engineering and an ESL teacher identifying and addressing the needs of computer science students who are required to give a research presentation, known as a “graduate seminar”. They run a yearlong course which incorporated instruction-led workshops, and focused on delivery skills, slide design, question handling and reviewing other presentations. The students were carefully scaffolded to prepare a draft and present their presentation and offer reflective self and peer feedback, as well as receive feedback from the tutor. This rigorous approach to scaffolding, explicitly teaching presentation skills, and the feedback from different audiences resulted in an improved attitude and involvement in the course. Ultimately, the students acquired greater insight into the complex processes of presenting and the role of metacognition, and enhanced their presentation performance.

## Part IV Valuing Linguistic Diversity and Elevating Students' Voices

Karen Lenz critically maps the tensions related to implementing English as an International Language (EIL) in conjunction with English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) curriculum in the United States. She reports on an action research project where EIL/ELF and native speaker English was established not as a binary framework but rather variations of English. Students appreciated the opportunity and valued interacting with English speakers from diverse backgrounds. Some students reported that they had started the course thinking that they wanted to sound like an American when speaking English, but that their goal had changed. They learnt to appreciate English as an international language and the affordance of opportunities for variation in accent and pronunciation.

Norah Fahim, Jennifer T. Johnson, and Helen Lie investigate academic socialisation as a two-way process through the discussion of three vignettes. These vignettes illustrate teaching approaches that aim to understand how students negotiate and establish their place in an academic community. They provide practical examples of activities that can develop student's rhetorical appreciation and use, along with activities that encourage translanguaging and challenge the hegemony of *standard* spoken genres. The chapter asserts that their teaching approach affirms and acknowledges linguistic and multicultural diversity as a positive force in educational contexts. It also provides students with tools of critical language awareness that enables students to deconstruct the relationship between language and meaning in their discipline, in academic communities and in wider contexts.

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### Concluding Remarks

This edited volume offers a valuable contribution to understanding oracy in HE and demonstrates the need for research that leads to improvements in the teaching of SEAP. The volume is a valuable resource for interdisciplinary HE teachers and specifically EAP teachers who incorporate oral forms of activities and assessment. The focus on decolonising SEAP demonstrates the need to encourage and explicitly teach the language of social networking for all students. It is also a useful starting point for researchers who are interested in extending research in the field of oracy in HE contexts.

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