Oral Academic Discourse Socialization in Graduate Education

Betül Kınık Gülek, English Language Teaching, Inonu University, Malatya, Türkiye, betul.kinik@inonu.edu.tr

Recommended Citations:

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Betül Kınık Gülek[1]

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Academic Discourse Socialization (ADS) refers to the processes through which newcomers, particularly graduate students, integrate into their academic communities. Academic Discourse Socialization (ADS) has been extensively studied in both written and oral contexts. This paper reviews oral ADS studies at the graduate level. The review shows that the research trends in oral ADS focus on themes, such as classroom participation, identity negotiation, power dynamics, disciplinary enculturation, and multimodal learning. These studies demonstrate that ADS is a dynamic and context-dependent process shaped by institutional, cultural, and individual factors. However, certain areas remain unexplored from the perspective of oral ADS, particularly in the exploration of digital platforms, interdisciplinary environments, and the intersection of ADS with social justice issues. The paper calls for future research studies on digital oral discourse, AI-driven feedback, and social justice dimensions in ADS.

Academic discourse has been defined as "a complex representation of knowledge and language and identity" (Duff, 2010, p.175). Academic discourse socialization (ADS) refers to the processes through which newcomers become members to their communities. (Duff, 2010). The socialization process has traditionally been viewed as an apprenticeship model, where novices learn through expert guidance and participation in a community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991). More recent perspectives define it as a complex, interactive process with negotiations between novices, community members, and peers, as well as the social networks they develop rather than a predictable and prescriptive view (Duff, 2010; Kobayashi, et al., 2017).

ADS has been extensively explored in both written discourse (Okuda & Anderson, 2018; Yang, 2023) and oral discourse (Burhan-Horasanlı, 2024; Dumlao, 2020; Morita, 2000; Zappa-Hollman, 2007). The literature shows us that the academic discourse studies were initially focused on the written discourse (Belcher, 1994; Casaneve & Hubbard, 1992). Over time, with the increasing participation of international and second-language (L2) students in higher education, the scope of ADS has expanded to include not only written (Okuda, 2018; Yang, 2023) but also oral, multimodal (Burhan-Horasanlı, 2024, Dumlao, 2020) and online discourses (Chang & Sperling, 2014; Yim, 2011). As increasing numbers of international and

[1]English Language Teaching, Inonu University, Malatya, Türkiye, betul.kinik@inonu.edu.tr

second-language (L2) students engage in higher education, ADS has become a central topic in applied linguistics and educational research (Morita, 2004; Zappa-Hollman & Duff, 2015; Friedman, 2023).

Since Morita's work in 2000 on oral academic discourse socialization, the field has evolved significantly over the past 25 years. Graduate students now engage in more complex academic activities, including seminars, presentations, research discussions, and webinars. As a result, oral academic discourse has become an essential part of their socialization into academic communities. While several review studies have examined ADS more broadly (Duff, 2010; Friedman, 2023; Kobayashi et al., 2017; Xiao & Chen, 2023), the scope of this paper is limited to the oral ADS studies conducted at the graduate level of education.

2. Theories Underlying Academic Discourse Socialization (ADS)

Although ADS studies have been informed by several theoretical frameworks, e.g. activity theory (Engeström, 1987), language socialization Ochs and Schieffelin (1984), sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978); identity (Norton, 2000) to understand how individuals are socialized into various academic communities, this paper will focus specifically on language socialization, sociocultural theory and communities of practice.

2.1. Language Socialization

Language socialization is a not only a theoretical but also methodological framework (Ward, 2024) that examines how individuals acquire linguistic and cultural competencies through social interaction within their communities. It emphasizes the interplay between language learning and the process of becoming a competent member of a society. Developed by Ochs and Schieffelin (1984), language socialization is not merely about learning grammatical structures but also about understanding social norms, values, and practices embedded in communication. This process begins in early childhood and continues throughout life, as individuals navigate different social contexts and adapt their linguistic practices accordingly. For instance, children learn to use polite forms of address or specific speech registers by observing and participating in interactions with caregivers, peers, and other community members. Language socialization also highlights the role of power dynamics and cultural ideologies in shaping communicative practices, making it a critical lens for understanding how language both reflects and reinforces social structures (Garrett & Baquedano-López, 2002). This framework has been widely applied in different disciplines, such as anthropology, linguistics, and education to explore how language acquisition is intertwined with cultural learning.

2.2. Sociocultural Theory

One of the most widely used theoretical frameworks for understanding ADS is Sociocultural Theory (SCT), which emphasizes the role of social interaction in learning (Vygotsky, 1978). SCT is based on the idea that people learn through social interactions. It sees learning as a shared and culturally influenced process, not just an individual mental activity. According to SCT, learning is a socially mediated process where individuals acquire knowledge through interactions with more experienced members of a community. A key concept in this framework is the zone of proximal development (ZPD), which refers to the difference between what a learner can do independently and what they can achieve with guidance. This is particularly relevant to ADS, as students gradually internalize academic discourse through support, such as feedback from professors, collaboration with peers, and engagement with academic texts (Duff, 2010). Additionally, Lantolf and Thorne (2006) highlight the role of mediation in

language learning, where cultural tools, such as language, writing, and digital resources shape cognitive development. Considering the evolving nature of higher education and the increasing diversity of student populations, SCT remains a valuable framework for understanding how students adapt to academic norms and expectations through social interaction.

2.3. Communities of Practice (CoP)

The Community of Practice (CoP) framework, introduced by Lave and Wenger (1991), examines how learning occurs through participation in a community. According to this theory, newcomers to a community (e.g., students in an academic discipline) start as peripheral participants and gradually move toward full participation as they acquire the knowledge, skills, and values of the community. Wenger (1998) expands on this idea by emphasizing the importance of mutual engagement, joint enterprise, and shared repertoire in building a community of practice. Learning is seen as a process of socialization, where novices learn not only the explicit rules but also the tacit norms and practices of the group. This theory highlights the importance of mentorship, collaboration, and shared goals in the learning process.
In the context of academic discourse socialization, CoPs help explain how newcomers, such as graduate students or early-career scholars, gradually integrate into academic communities. It provides a useful lens for analyzing how students become members of academic communities and adopt their discursive practices, as it focuses on the social and collaborative nature of learning. Through activities such as collaborative research, peer feedback, and conference participation, they transition from legitimate peripheral participation (Lave & Wenger, 1991) to becoming fully engaged members.

3. Research Trends in Oral Academic Discourse Socialization Studies

Research studies in Oral Academic Discourse Socialization encompass a range of interrelated themes, such as classroom participation, identity negotiation, power relations, and disciplinary enculturation. While this paper categorizes studies into distinct sections for clarity, it is important to note that many studies contribute to multiple themes. For instance, Morita's (2009) work on classroom participation is not only about participation but also highlights how gender and cultural factors influence academic discourse socialization. Throughout this review, cross-references are provided to indicate where studies contribute to multiple themes.

3.1. Classroom Participation and Negotiation of Identity

Classroom discussions, oral presentations, and seminar interactions are central to ADS. Studies have shown that students navigate identity through these interactions, often facing tensions between cultural norms and academic expectations. For instance, Morita (2009) examined a Japanese doctoral student's struggles with participation in seminars at a Canadian university, highlighting how language, culture, and gender impacted his classroom engagement. Similarly, Ahmadi & Samad (2015) explored how TEFL graduate students develop their professional identity through oral discourse practices in collaborative settings. Chen & Curdt-Christiansen (2024) investigated classroom participation of Chinese students in the UK. The study had to be completed within online platforms due to the Covid19 pandemic. The researchers show that the participants have benefited from different types of agencies. Hadizadeh and Vefalı (2020) conducted their study in an EFL context and examined the oral academic discourse socialization of doctoral students at an English-medium university in Northern Cyprus. Their study found that participation in discussions played a key role in identity construction and agency negotiation.

While these studies focus on participation, they also provide insights into power dynamics and disciplinary enculturation and positioning.

3.2. Power, Agency, and Social Positioning in ADS

Power dynamics shape academic socialization, particularly in multilingual settings. Students' agency in resisting or adapting to dominant discourse norms plays a crucial role in their socialization process. Soltani and Tyran (2023) demonstrated that students strategically employ silence and selective engagement to navigate power asymmetries in classroom discourse. Likewise, Cho (2013) studied how Korean MATESOL students in U.S.-based programs exercised agency in disciplinary enculturation, highlighting how their participation levels varied based on identity negotiation, institutional support, and perceived curriculum relevance. These studies align closely with discussions on disciplinary socialization and silence as a form of strategic engagement.

3.3. Disciplinary and Professional Socialization

ADS is highly discipline-specific, with different fields having unique discourse expectations. The process involves learning not only linguistic conventions but also epistemological and professional norms. Baffy (2016) analyzed international law students' socialization into legal discourse at a U.S. law school, revealing challenges in adopting authoritative legal rhetoric. Mussman (2019) examined how Chinese and Taiwanese IMBA students adapted to oral academic discourse in the U.S. and transitioned into workplace settings through internships. The study revealed linguistic and sociocultural challenges in both academic and professional environments, emphasizing the need for additional adaptation strategies in workplace communication. In the field of ESP, Burhan-Horasanlı (2024) highlighted how research presentations, preparation to the presentations and peer feedback contribute to professional socialization of international graduate students in engineering. While primarily focused on disciplinary discourse, these studies also reflect power structures in academic settings and multimodal learning strategies.

3.4. Multimodal and Collaborative Learning in ADS

Peer collaboration and multimodal engagement (e.g., visual presentations) play essential roles in discourse socialization. Zappa-Hollman (2007) studied the role of academic presentations in non-native English speakers' discourse socialization, identifying coping strategies such as collaboration and strategic language use. Additionally, Morita (2000) found that small-group discussions provided a space for L2 students to negotiate their academic voice and enhance disciplinary engagement. Similarly, Ho (2011) explored the role of small-group discussions in oral academic discourse socialization within a TESOL graduate course. The study found that these discussions facilitated identity construction, critical thinking, and intertextual connections among students. This enabled them to gradually integrate into their disciplinary discourse community. These studies also connect with professional socialization processes and digital discourse engagement.

3.5. Gender, Culture, and ADS

Gendered participation in academic discourse is an emerging area of study. Some research suggests that cultural expectations influence how students engage in academic conversations. Morita (2009) documented how a doctoral student's gendered identity affected his academic socialization, leading to restricted participation and self-positioning in classroom discourse. Similarly, Cho (2013) found

that female students in MATESOL programs often navigated complex gendered expectations in professional discourse settings. These studies intersect with power and agency discussions and classroom participation themes.

3.6. Silence, and Strategic Engagement in ADS

Silence is often perceived as disengagement, but research suggests it can be a strategic or culturally influenced form of engagement. Some students choose when and how to participate based on social and academic pressures. Soltani and Tran (2023) explored how international students in EAP courses used silence as a tool for learning and identity negotiation. Additionally, Morita (2004) found that silence can function as a protective strategy for students navigating unfamiliar academic expectations. These findings also relate to power dynamics and identity negotiation.

3.7. Feedback, Assessment, and ADS

Feedback mechanisms—whether from professors or peers—are crucial in ADS, influencing students' adaptation to academic discourse norms. Kim (2018) examined feedback networks in doctoral education, showing how students learn through iterative feedback and disciplinary enculturation. Ahmadi & Samad (2015) highlighted the role of structured peer feedback in scaffolding students' oral academic discourse development. These findings also connect with professional socialization and multimodal learning strategies.

4. Common Themes, Gaps, and Future Research Directions

The studies reviewed in this paper highlight several recurring themes in oral academic discourse socialization. First, academic discourse socialization is not a linear process but rather a dynamic and negotiated one, shaped by institutional contexts, disciplinary norms, and individual agency (Duff, 2010; Kobayashi et al., 2017). Many studies emphasize the interplay between identity, power relations, and social positioning in academic discourse, illustrating how students navigate their roles in academic communities (Morita, 2009; Soltani & Tran, 2023). Furthermore, studies emphasize the importance of peer collaboration, mentorship, and multimodal engagement in facilitating students' adaptation to academic discourse (Zappa-Hollman, 2007; Burhan-Horasanlı, 2024).

Despite the significant insights gained from these studies, several gaps remain in the literature. First, studies have explored classroom participation and identity negotiation, there is limited research on how students navigate discourse socialization across different academic settings, such as conferences, networking events, and interdisciplinary collaborations. Another notable gap is the role of digital and online platforms in oral ADS, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic, which has reshaped communication in higher education (Chen & Curdt-Christiansen, 2024). Future research could investigate how virtual environments and AI-driven feedback tools impact students' oral academic discourse socialization. Further studies are also needed to explore the intersection of ADS with social justice issues, such as how race, gender (Morita, 2009), and socioeconomic background influence students' participation in academic discourse communities. Additionally, while most studies focus on second-language (L2) learners in Western academic settings, comparative studies across diverse educational and cultural contexts (Hadizadeh & Vefalı, 2021) would provide a more comprehensive understanding of ADS (Friedman, 2023). While existing longitudinal studies have provided valuable insights into students' discourse socialization over time, more longitudinal research is needed to further explore how their participation, agency, and identity evolve throughout their academic journeys. By addressing these gaps,

future research studies can contribute to a more inclusive and holistic understanding of how students engage with academic discourse, ultimately informing pedagogical practices that better support their integration into academic communities.

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