



Constructed dialogue as a resource for promoting students' socialization to written academic discourse in an EAP class

Marta Baffy

Georgetown University Law Center, 600 New Jersey Avenue NW, Hotung Building, Suite 5000, Washington, DC 20001, USA

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:

Received 5 October 2016
Received in revised form 25 May 2018
Accepted 4 June 2018

Keywords:

Academic discourse socialization
Academic writing
Classroom discourse
Constructed dialogue
Reported speech
Teacher talk

ABSTRACT

This article examines how a professor in an advanced English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course promotes her students' socialization to written academic discourse through what she says in class. Drawing on a corpus of teacher–student interactions in 12 class sessions, the paper focuses on the professor's use of “constructed dialogue” (Tannen, 1989), also referred to as direct reported speech or quotations, during her classroom talk. Close analyses of the professor's discourse reveal that she frequently constructs the speech of “writer” and “reader” of academic texts in order to subtly convey to students both the intellectual and social dimensions of the academic writing and reading process. The paper goes on to show that by fabricating and enacting the speech of writer and reader as engaged in this mutually dependent process, the professor both dramatizes and demonstrates the socio-cognitive nature of academic writing and reading, thereby supporting similar points she makes more directly in class.

© 2018 Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

1. Introduction

Novice writers of academic texts often struggle with the notion that writing is not only a solitary, intellectual exercise, but also a fundamentally social act. Through the written word, writers “speak” to a reading audience, who will subsequently engage and grapple with the ideas presented in academic texts. Successful writers think carefully about how to effectively communicate their ideas, keeping in mind that readers bring to bear their own assumptions and perspectives while reading academic content. Experienced writers anticipate reader reactions and preemptively respond to them, using clear and concise language while also delivering a persuasive, central line of argument. Producing such writing is no small feat for the language learner who has had minimal exposure to authentic texts and little experience with writing in academic environments. Writing instructors are thus charged with a challenging task: “apprentice” (Rogoff, 1990) novice writers into thoughtful writing practices that work to engage and persuade a reading audience.

There is a wealth of research on academic writing suggesting that certain teaching methodologies and activities may promote students' socialization to practices associated with effective academic writing (see, e.g., Atkinson, 2003; Cumming, 1992; Hyland, 2007; Leki, 1990; Matsuda, 1997; Ramanathan & Atkinson, 1999a;

Susser, 1994). However, far less scholarly attention has been paid to the discourse of writing instruction and the talk that such teaching occasions, despite the fact that this is where students are often first introduced to the writing practices which they ultimately carry with them (Heller & Morek, 2015). This article seeks to fill this gap and takes a discourse analytic approach to the study of academic writing instruction, examining how one professor in an advanced English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course promotes her students' socialization to written academic discourse through what she says in class. The focus is on the professor's use of constructed dialogue (Tannen, 1989), also called direct reported speech or quotations, during her classroom talk. Close analyses of the professor's discourse reveal that the professor constructs the speech of “writer” and “reader” of academic texts in order to subtly convey to students both the intellectual and social dimensions of the academic writing and reading process. Indeed, by fabricating and enacting the speech of a writer and reader as engaged in this process, the professor both dramatizes (Baynham, 1996; Tannen, 1989) and demonstrates (Clark & Gerrig, 1990) the socio-cognitive nature of academic writing and reading, and thereby supports similar points she makes more directly in class.

The paper proceeds in Section 2 with a discussion of the uses and functions of constructed dialogue, the primary unit of analysis applied in the study. Next, Section 3 describes the study context, as well as the ethnographic methods employed and types of data collected. Section 4 presents analyses of the professor's classroom discourse, beginning with frequency counts of salient characters implicated in the professor's classroom talk (e.g., “writer” and

E-mail address: mlb258@georgetown.edu

“reader”) and constructed dialogue episodes. Following this, qualitative analyses of brief excerpts of the professor’s classroom talk are presented to illustrate how the professor fabricates the speech of writer and reader and draws on constructed dialogue as a resource to dramatize and demonstrate three actions involved in academic writing and reading: (writer) thinking about what to write; (writer) communicating via the written text; and (reader) reacting to what has been read. Section 5 discusses the pedagogical implications of the professor’s use of constructed dialogue to enact the speech of a writer and reader of academic texts, cautioning that because this is a single case study, findings may be neither unique to this instructor nor generalizable to other instructional contexts. This section also offers avenues and questions for future research. Finally, Section 6 concludes the paper by summarizing key study findings.

2. Constructed dialogue

In the following sentence, the material within quotation marks is frequently labeled “reported speech” in the linguistics literature and grammar texts:

Example 1

My teacher said, “wow, you wrote the best paper I’ve ever read!”

As Tannen (1989: 110) points out, however, the term “reported speech,” as used to describe this utterance, “is grossly misleading in suggesting that one can speak another’s word and have them remain primarily the other’s words.” She argues that any “reporting” of a stretch of talk practically always transforms what was formerly said, as speakers often appropriate another’s speech—though not always consciously—to communicate a message different from what was originally intended. In fact, speakers frequently impute utterances to others that were never spoken or heard by them (e.g., Emmison, Butler, & Danby, 2011; Myers, 1999), while others relate thoughts running through their own and even others’ minds (e.g., Vásquez & Urzúa, 2009). What is “reported” is thus often a mere (re)construction of a prior or purely hypothetical speech event, not a verbatim retelling of what was, or could have been, actually said. In this paper the term “constructed dialogue” (Tannen, 1989; henceforth, CD) is thus preferred to refer to the discourse phenomenon that others have called reported speech, direct reported speech, and quotations elsewhere.

Examined from a variety of theoretical perspectives, CD has been found to have an array of communicative functions. Chafe (1994) points out that this feature of talk may invite hearers to evaluate information connected with a prior speech event. For instance, positive and negative evaluation is often introduced through prosodic devices used in constructed dialogues that invite hearers to assess individuals, actions, and events (e.g., Günthner, 1999). Others argue that CD works to provide evidence for earlier claims, particularly in the courtroom setting (Baffy & Marsters, 2015; Galatolo, 2007; Matoesian, 2001; Philips, 1986), but also within the classroom (Buttny, 1998) and ordinary conversation (Holt, 1996, 1999). A great deal of work has also centered on the identity building function of CD. De Fina (2003), Hamilton (1998), Schiffrin (1990, 1996), and Vásquez and Urzúa (2009) report on how speakers use this discourse feature to construct and shape their own and others’ identities. Hamilton (1998) describes, for instance, how patients create the persona of a strong, self-advocating survivor rather than a victim by frequently “reporting” speech acts that were initiated by them.

Two additional functions of CD are dramatization and demonstration. Constructing dialogue may work to dramatize events and create listener involvement by conveying a sense of immediacy (Baynham, 1996; Chafe, 1994; Tannen, 1989). Tannen (1989, p. 110) explains that “casting ideas as dialogue rather than

statements is a discourse strategy for framing information in a way that communicates effectively and creates involvement.” Likewise, in a study of CD in the mathematics classroom, Baynham (1996, p. 78) finds that this discourse feature “dramatiz[es] the process of math[] reasoning as a way of maintaining involvement.” CD also permits speakers to move from “telling to showing” (Bauman, 1986, p. 65)—or from describing to demonstrating (Clark & Gerrig, 1990). Thus, if a boastful student exclaims, “My teacher said, ‘wow, you wrote the best paper I’ve ever read!’” he may conjure up his instructor’s words (whether they were in fact spoken as such or at all) to generate increased listener involvement (particularly if he employs exaggerated pitch contours to play up his teacher’s appreciation). The student may also deploy CD to more convincingly demonstrate his writing prowess. Though he could say, “My teacher said my paper was the best she’s ever read,” this construction would not carry the same undertones of excitement as the “reported” utterance. Further, an indirect report does not demonstrate the student’s expertise in quite the same way as the teacher’s “actual” words, which ostensibly serve to “lend[] an air of objectivity to (an) account” (Holt, 1996, p. 242). The present study is concerned with these two functions of CD, namely, how a professor’s use of CD operates to both dramatize and demonstrate to her students important actions involved in the academic writing and reading process.

3. Data and methods

3.1. Situating the research

Data is drawn from an ethnography of a year-long EAP class for international attorneys pursuing a graduate law degree in the United States. The course, called Working with Legal Texts (Legal Texts), was mandatory for all students enrolled in the first year of a two-year Master of Laws (LL.M.) program at East University School of Law,¹ an institution of higher education located in the United States.

An LL.M. is a graduate academic degree for students who already have a “first” law degree—either a Juris Doctor or its equivalent. East University offers both a two-semester, one-year LL.M. program and a four-semester, two-year LL.M. program for foreign-trained attorneys. The first year of the two-year LL.M. program consists of an “EAP-like” curriculum, with a combination of language and law classes, which entitles students to a Certificate in Legal English. In the second year of the program, students take only law classes with one-year LL.M. students. The two-year program is designed for students who have lower English proficiency as measured by the Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) than required for admission into the one-year program. However, some students who are eligible for the one-year LL.M. enroll in the two-year program in order to further develop their English and/or complete their studies at a more leisurely pace in four semesters as opposed to two.

At the time of the study, Legal Texts was team-taught (Dudley-Evans, 2001) by a linguist, Professor Schultz, and a lawyer-linguist, me. Professor Schultz, who was the director of the Two-Year LL.M. Program, had over 20 years of English as a Second or Foreign Language (ESL or EFL) teaching experience and approximately 12 years of experience teaching academic writing to native and non-native speakers of English. Professor Schultz instructed students in “general principles of inquiry and rhetoric” (Spack, 1988, p. 29) and “core” (Dudley-Evans & St John, 1998) language skills for academic writing and seminar-style discussions. Having taught in the

¹ Names of all entities and study participants have been anonymized.

Download English Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/en/article/6845887>

Download Persian Version:

<https://daneshyari.com/article/6845887>

[Daneshyari.com](https://daneshyari.com)