Academic socialization as the production and negotiation of social space

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ABSTRACT

This article introduces the concept of academic social space as a useful construct to understand and interpret the academic language socialization of individuals in English second language academic spaces. Academic social space builds on the concepts of community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and production of space (Lefebvre, 1991). The article then reports on a study that adopted the notion of academic social space to examine the language socialization of one international student in a tertiary institute in New Zealand. Data about this case from various sources including diaries, interviews, class observations, field notes, institutional documents, and video/audio recordings of classroom interactions are presented. The analysis of findings from this study showed the student displayed three differential participation patterns in the three social spaces in which he was engaged. He presented himself as an active participant in his English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course, a silent participant in the first mainstream social space, and a changing silent-active participant respectively in the classroom and online domains of his second mainstream social space. The findings also showed that the concept of academic social space enables thick description (Geertz, 1973) about the language socialization experiences of additional language learners in tertiary contexts. Understanding the various aspects of social space enables researchers, educators, policy makers, and teachers to revisit their notion of space by considering it as an active, dynamic, and organic participant in the learning process of second language learners.

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1. Introduction

This paper introduces the construct of academic social space to understand the academic language socialization of one international student in a New Zealand tertiary institute. The notions of community of practice (Lave & Wenger, 1991) and production of space (Lefebvre, 1991) are drawn upon to examine the three differing spaces of an English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course, and two mainstream semesters. Analysis of this student's participation patterns show that social space determined his participation in class activities.

Language socialization has been studied from a community of practice (CofP) approach. A CofP has been researched extenisvely in education (Anderson, Greeno, Reder, & Simon, 2000; Korthagen, 2010) and in Applied Linguistics (Belcher & Lukkarila, 2011; Casanave & Li, 2009; Toohey, 2000). Although a CofP approach has been useful in explaining the in-group relations between individuals in their relevant communities, it has been criticized in recent years (Barton & Tusting, 2005) for its application to different social

spaces including an L2 classroom. Wenger (1998) argues that space plays a role within the constitution of a CofP. He claims "practice is always located in time and space because it always exists in specific communities and arises out of mutual engagement, which is largely dependent on specific places and times" (pp.130-131). However, he does not address the specific nature of interaction between social practices and space itself.

Wenger acknowledges that there can be a relation between a social practice and the place in which it occurs; nevertheless he firstly minimizes its impact by mentioning that it is only defined by learning and secondly positions place as a physical container wherein social things happen. Wenger disregards the fact that space/place is socially produced and therefore conditions the way people act and interact within this space.

To understand the nature of my participants' language socialization, I have adopted the notion of spatiality from Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991), a French philosopher and sociologist, who developed the concept of the production of space. Drawing on Lefebvre's social space, I have coined the term 'academic social space', which is explained in this article.

In what follows, I describe (second) language socialization, CofP, and academic social space. I then provide an overview of academic

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social space which emerged from my study of one international student at a New Zealand university. I analyze the student's three distinct academic social spaces in his English for Academic Purposes (EAP) course, first mainstream semester, and second mainstream semester and study the social spaces that impacted on this student's participation, and identities in the diverse academic space of a New Zealand university.

1.1. Theoretical framework and previous relevant research

The overarching theoretical paradigm which I use in this study to investigate international students as they navigate a new academic space is language socialization. Language socialization has been used from a speech community and CofP perspective. In this study, building on a CofP perspective, language socialization is interpreted from a social space perspective.

1.1.1. Language socialization

Language socialization is "the lifelong process by means of which individuals typically novices are inducted into specific domains of knowledge, beliefs, affect, roles, identities, and social representations, which they access and construct through language practices and social interaction" (Duff, 1995, p. 508). Kulick and Schieffelin (2004, p. 350) contend that in becoming competent members of their communities and social groups, individuals are socialized through language and to use language. Poole (1994) refers to how caregivers provide children with interactional sequences to say "thank you" as an instance of how language socialization facilitates language development in children. Poole (1994, p. 594) refers to socialization to use language as "the use of language to encode and create cultural meaning." This is also explained by Ochs (1988) as "understandings of the social organization of everyday life, cultural ideologies, moral values, beliefs and structures of knowledge and interpretation are to a large extent acquired through the medium of language" (p. 14).

Although at first, language socialization (LS) had a focus on children's socialization and acquisition of their first language, L2 researchers applied the premises of LS to L2 acquisition with the conception being that second language socialization (L2S) is a gradual, life long process (Bronson & Watson-Gegeo, 2008; Ochs & Schieffelin, 2011; Talmy, 2008). Second language (L2) researchers have been influential in language socialization research (e.g. see Kinginger, 2017; Kobayashi, Zappa-Hollman, & Duff, 2017).

1.1.2. Communities of practice

LS research has used the concept of CofP to analyze the interactions between individuals, their activities, and the apprenticeship they may provide for one another in their groups (e.g. Morita, 2004). Wenger (1998) identified three dimensions for a CofP namely a) mutual engagement which entails the consistent and regular interaction and close engagement of the individuals, b) a joint enterprise which refers to a shared goal which is the result of collective interaction and negotiation with the other members of the community, and c) a shared repertoire which relates to the various values, ways of being, doing, saying, and thinking in the world which are produced and reproduced in the society through language and are the result of negotiating individuals' membership in a community.

Although CofP has been useful in explaining the relations between the individuals in their in-group communities, it is important to go beyond communities and consider the social space so that we interpret all the relations between individuals and their social space. Socialization and social space are closely related because socialization takes place in social space. In what follows, I address this relationship in depth and invite researchers to start to view language socialization with a more sophisticated understanding of (academic) social space.

1.1.3. Academic social space

To explain academic social space, I first discuss Lefebvre's (1991) concept of social space. Lefebvre argues that the dominant western understanding of space is based on the Cartesian notion of space which treats space as scientific space, which is abstract. The wonders of science and its apparent success in finding answers to some of the mysteries of the natural world have caused the scientific method to take center stage in understanding human behavior. The same path has been taken when it comes to an understanding of space by treating it as a mathematic/scientific space (Goonewardena, Kipfer, Milgrom, & Schmid, 2008, pp. 3–9). This aspect of space has been regarded as the kind of space which people could reference, thus considering it as absolute (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 285). The scientific understanding of space has led scientific researchers to consider only what this space contains and classify things accordingly. This kind of classification and fragmentation of space into different spaces such as space of literature, space of philosophy has led to the appearance of various abstract and mental spaces (Cresswell, 2004). And this is because everyone wants to appropriate a piece of space for themselves. Lefebvre argues that if we want to understand what space really is, we must have a more holistic approach to it. Space is not where things which are social happen. It is not something that can be broken down into pieces; rather space is a whole entity which is both the terrain for social relations and actions but also what makes these social actions and interactions occur in a certain way. This is the reason why space is always social and cannot be considered only as one of philosophy or literature or Mathematics, etc. In addition, the space viewed as abstract or mental does not address the physical and the lived aspects of the social space. The dominance of mental space has overridden all other forms of space. Lefebvre disagrees with this view of space that has limited the interpretations, understandings, and experiences of space itself in everyday life. The social side of space is thus not paid attention to and physical space has been treated as a container which is wrapped around our lives rather than structures that individuals help to construct.

To be able to propose a theory of social space that can account for the academic socialization of students, I critically unpack Lefebvre's conceptual triad (Lefebvre, 1991, p. 33) below. Lefebvre's social space is made of three aspects: spatial practice (also called physical space or perceived space), representations of space (also called conceived/mental/imagined space), and spaces of representations (also called lived space). Lefebvre (1991) puts forth explanations of these three components of social space – a triad of concepts as shown in Fig. 1 – which I summarize below.

1. Spatial practice refers to those processes that produce society's space. It is a production of relations between objects and products. In other words, it is that aspect of space that is related to the material things around us which provide us with a sense of navigation. This aspect of space must be mapped out socially.
2. Representations of space refer to conceptions of space (ideological, linguistic, and symbolic) and dominant systems of knowledge. It is in this aspect of space where the articulation of power and knowledge are activated. This aspect of space reflects the desires and interests of those with power.
3. Spaces of representation refer to spaces lived through associated images and symbols. It is the lived, emerging from a relation between spatial practice and representations of space. Lived space is how space is experienced and used by people through their interactions with others. This aspect of space is a site of possible resistance by those who are not equipped with power.