Foreword: Examining and Experiencing Academic Discourse Socialization through Collaborative Research

The nature and challenges of academic socialization – especially the multimodal literacies, genres, activities and practices inculcated across disciplines that newcomers must learn and negotiate – have attracted considerable interest in recent years. This work, now often referred to as academic discourse socialization (ADS), brings together and extends earlier research on (1) language socialization, which focused primarily on oral language development through social interaction in formal and informal contexts of learning (from pre-K to adult); (2) the development of academic literacies through formal education; and (3) multilingual socialization into various communities and cultural practices (e.g. academic, professional, vocational, recreational) across the lifespan (see, for example, Duff, 2007, 2010, 2017; Kobayashi et al., 2017).

Several factors are associated with this increased attention to multimodal, multilingual (or translingual) academic discourse and the means by which people are socialized into it. First, the demographics in secondary and postsecondary education contexts are changing, with a greater proportion of multilingual transnational students being accommodated than ever before. Second, in many parts of the world, instructors and students are now involved in education and scholarship conducted through the medium of a language such as English that is neither their home language nor the language of their earlier schooling. They must therefore learn to engage meaningfully with the subject matter and curriculum, disciplinary discourses, and literacies in institutionally privileged languages and registers. In some cases, the education programs are designed precisely to increase
students’ possibilities and mobilities for subsequent transnational higher education and careers. Third, academic literacies and practices themselves continue to evolve with new technologies and social media, increasing recognition of the affordances of different semiotic repertoires and of changing norms about acceptable and valued practices within and across disciplines. However, these literacy practices do not exist within an affective, historical or ideological vacuum. They are wrapped up with learners’ identities, assets, aspirations, agency, languages and program ideologies, and with their relationships, power dynamics, communities, and trajectories – all central aspects of contemporary sociocultural research in applied linguistics, including ADS. These multifaceted influences on development and performance should therefore be understood holistically across scales of time, space and place, to the extent possible. Finally, research has begun to explore doctoral and postdoctoral academic socialization itself as a site of high-stakes apprenticeship (and, possibly, contestation), as emerging scholars learn to navigate and gain command over complex, competitive, social, political and discursive cultures and practices. This book provides compelling examples of doctoral socialization into multiple genres of research activity and scholarship, as well as undergraduate students’ experiences.

Changing educational contexts and issues, such as these, pose wonderful opportunities for applied linguists and writing specialists to examine critically the populations, texts, processes, practices, pedagogies, cultures and products of learning in their midst. To that end, this volume brings together the work of a team of researchers exploring their own and others’ academic discourse socialization across multiple genres, languages, program contexts and communities at one US university. Supported by a Creating Inclusive Campus Grant (CICG), the project reveals a vibrant community of practice exploring academic socialization and mentoring among team members: doctoral students, writing center instructors, emerging scholars and new professors, as well as established professors and advisors. The authors present case studies of first-year undergraduate international students’ experiences with various aspects of English writing instruction, including innovations some of these authors introduced into the curriculum. They frame the work in terms of activity systems (divisions of labor, rules, tools, participant structures, objects and outcomes featured in activity theory) or ‘mobility systems,’ and the kinds of scaffolding or mentoring that can strengthen writing courses and writing center interactions. Most importantly, the chapters in the book tell the stories of educators and students working within demanding interdisciplinary academic cultures mediated by English primarily. The research participants’ and authors’ resourcefulness and resilience in managing teaching/learning processes and participation in their learning communities, with crucial support from sponsors, peers,
tutors, instructors and others (both near and far), remind readers of the challenges, opportunities and improvisation inherent in contemporary academic socialization.

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References