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Received: 16/12/2017; Accepted: 17/01/2018; Published: 31/01/2018

Language Socialization of Written Academic Discourse

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Abstract

This paper will look at the studies conducted to see how written academic discourse is socialized. Written academic discourse socialization is a dynamic process, mostly socially situated and contemporarily involves multimodal, multilingual, and intertextual context. This paper will see what influences the process of language socialization within this context, focusing on how the novice learners learn to participate themselves into the academic written discourse. In different setting of culture, there are various values that learners bring into educational context. The same thing also happens in the socialization of written discourse. Learners bring their previous experiences, shaped identity, and other values that might be different, or even in contrast with what is being socialized. In this way, it is interesting to see how learners cope with such things and take the step to participate in the academic world. Equally important, it is necessary to examine the impact of language socialization forms, either in the form of feed back, remodelling, or criticism on the learners resistance or conformity

Keywords: language socialization; written discourse; educational context; identity.

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1. Introduction

Academic discourse is examined in several studies within the sub-field of applied linguistics. There have been various issues addressed in this field, one of which is the socialization of academic discourse, especially English academic discourse. As one of the international languages, English has been used as the language of communication in many important areas, including in scientific field. The result of research and experiment works are mostly written in English, and the language of international seminar are mostly English. With such usage, English in academic discourse is taught in schools with various levels not only to teach English for communication but also to socialize the academic discourse.

In Indonesia, English is also taught in schools with various levels, from elementary schools until university. The main objective in designing curriculum for English before K 12 is focused on the communicative language teaching, targetted on teaching the students to be able to use English for communication (Diknas, English Curriculum, 2013). By focusing on communicative English, academic discourse has very little room to be taught even in high schools. The possible expectation for teaching academic discourse is in university level. However, this is also not always the case. Many universities are clueless of what to expect in offering English for their students, and therefore somehow it is difficult to believe that the academic discourse, especially the academic written discourse is actually taught in university.

Yet, many university graduates in the end show a certain extent of having capability in understanding and working within the academic discourse, many of whom are even capable in working with English written discourse. This should initiate the question of how actually the written discourse is taught, or socialized, a term that should be more appropriate to use, since the students master this discourse not merely as the result of the classroom teaching process.

2. Language Socialization

Language socialization is a term used to refer to the language and literacies development within certain communities at certain period of time (Duff, 2010a). The notion of language socialization is mostly brought into discussion by anthropologist, sociologist, (socio)linguist, and those who are working in education field (Duff & Honberger, 2008). The idea of language socialization is not only focused on how language is taught either formally or informally, as in the case of foreign or second language acquisition, but it goes beyond the teaching process itself, as language socialization is developed through the idea that

“language is learned through interactions with others who are more

proficient in the language and its cultural practices and who provide novices explicit and (or) implicit mentoring or evidence about normative, appropriate uses of the languages and of the worldviews, ideologies, values, and identity of community members.” (Duff, 2010b).

What is prevalent in language socialization is the fact that the language is learned through interaction, as in the case of first language acquisition. This is also true in the case of second/foreign language learning, as the term of teaching mostly refer to the formal interaction in the class, while in language socialization it is the interaction that is considered important in establishing lessons, values, or whatever implicitly needed to be transferred in language learning.

Based on language socialization premise, as learners gain knowledge of language and ability to use the language and practice it in a discourse community, at the same time they will also acquire other important information on cultural knowledge about ideologies, identities or subjectivities, affective orientation, linguistic and non-linguistic content, and other practices valued by the community (Ochs, 1986). Therefore, in a particular language learning setting, learners are not only exposed to the language entities explicitly but they also learn other implicit language aspects such as social stratification, roles or values of the language learned.

In language socialization, the close interaction of the learners and those who are proficient in what is learnt plays an important roles of how certain values and other cultural aspects are transferred. This is also true in the cases of bilingual, or multilingual contexts. In multilinguals context, the intertwining of various values and other cultural aspects may play a major contribution of any changes, which may include identity change or even social change. When the ability targetted by the learners are involving values that are greatly different from what is possessed by the learners, there are chances that those values are socialized in a way that may result in identity conflict, or identity adjustment.

3. Academic discourse

Academic discourse is a term which refers to forms of communication, either oral or written, which involve particular genre, registers, pattern, and or other linguistic structures. These forms are normally expected to meet particular standard and therefore they are usually evaluated by instructors, institutions, or editors within the educational and professional context (Duff, 2010b). With such definition, academic discourse is evolving within the professionalism in education, targetted to spread science and technology in particular circle, and that is why, the academic discourse heavily contains registers which mostly understood easily within that particular circle.

One of important aspects existing in academic discourse is the need to be evaluated. There are always either instructors, institutions, or editors ready to evaluate the academic works. With this notion, the academic works are completed in a way that must meet the standard of both oral or written works. On the other hands, though these instructors, institutions, or editors are evaluating the academic work, at the same time they are also providing guidelines and assistance in meeting the standards. The interactions provided by instructors, institutions, and editors in helping learners meet those standards are normally completed in the forms of language socialization. Although the teaching activities take place resulting an academic works, still other interaction scheme occurs, especially for non-class study, such as writing a thesis or disertaton or submitting an article to a journal publisher.

According to Leki (2007), academic discourse is a complex representation of knowledges, authority and identity, in the sense that in the presentation of knowledge, there also exists the negotiation of authority and identity of the writer. In other words, academic discourse is also showing the typicality of discourse; having interaction, and context (Fairclough, 1989). These interactions, and context which may represent authority and identity may take the form of languages, ideologies, and other symbolic resources which can be seen from the text that pretty much shows cultural, or social fundations (Leki, 2007).

When a student enters an academic discourse, especially the second or foreign language discourse, he or she may experience different kind of difficulties, depending on their prior experience in that area. As quoted by Xingsong (2007), that in language socialization, a novice is socialized into using the language and through the language of not only the immediate local context but also the historically and culturally grounded social beliefs, and expectation of the group members of the targeted community. Therefore, student as the novice will face not only what can be seen at the moment of his/her studying, but he or she should be able to digest the grounded social beliefs and expectation in a purpose that he or she will be considered succeded in entering the targeted communities. In bilingual, or multilingual setting, when a student entering an academic discourse in their second or foreign language learning, these grounded beliefs can be contestated with the student's own grounded beliefs resulted from years of experience through among of which his or her first language socialization.

The difficulties encountered by the students having differences of their first and second language may be seen as a disadvantages in progressing with their work on academic discourse, though such disadvantages are not always seen as a factor to cause any failure. The disadvantages are seen mostly as the discomfort feeling of the novice in entering new situation and this may be resulted from the awareness

of differences of their worlds, communities and experiences (Leibowitz, 2005). In this sense, the discomfort feeling then is associated with the internal anxiety of not knowing what to expect and in the end not knowing what to do in the environment.

Nevertheless, even students who are able to recognize the differences and immediately manage to identify the familiarity of the targeted community practices may still undergo certain discomfort in entering academic discourse. Some studies (Morita, 2004; Xingsong 2007; Ariff & Mugableh 2013) reported that the discomfortness may be created due to the interactions and other social practices by dominant power structures. This is to say that the interactions that happen during the academic discourse socialization will affect students' experiences in their new world; how they are positioned, or perceived by others or institutions, whether they are seen as being capable or incapable, having potential or not, being outsiders or insiders, etc, will determine their engagement with the academic discourse.

4. Language socialization of written academic discourse

In practice, there are some problems encountering the socialization of written discourse. It should be understood though that engaging in academic world is not an easy matter, therefore encountering problem should be perceived as the least common thing. The problems among others include plagiarism, authority, authorship, authenticity in writing, article revising strategies, silence, disciplinary enculturation, experiences of multilingual writers, and resistance.

Plagiarism is the number one problems encountered in the socialization of written discourse. Even in this level of term-paper, a paper assigned to be completed by the end of the semester, many cases of plagiarism occur. Also in the process of thesis and dissertation writing, there are chances that students committing plagiarism. In 2010, ITB (Bandung Institute of Technology), revoked the doctoral degree earned by Mochamad Zaliensyah due to plagiarism (ITB Press Release, April 23rd, 2010). Knowing that Zaliensyah was a faculty member of ITB itself, it is surprising that plagiarism is still conducted by those who are already engaged in academic world. In undergraduate levels, there are also many complaints asserted by the lecturers in finding out that their students are committing plagiarism in writing their 'only' essay assignment. This suggests that many students feel that they fail to understand and to work on an academic field in that they have to commit plagiarism. However, there may be a point to notice, that it is not because the learners take the wrong way by committing plagiarism, but there may be a chance where the teachers are not providing appropriate teaching models of how to do correct citation.

Other implicit problem is on the notion of authority, in a way that many students feel that they are no longer having control of what he wants to write,

because the teachers intervene too much in developing the ideas of the work. Sometimes students come to the program already having ideas of what he wanted to write in his/her dissertation or thesis, but then he or she must adjust that ideas due to several circumstances, for example, the fact that he or she has difficulties in finding sufficient materials for her project, or simply because the advisor are not very happy with the idea, and instead suggesting similar ideas at the beginning, but then it turns out to be a different idea when it was dwelled on. Learners often feels that it is him who does not have enough sources to work on his original ideas, and therefore he has to accept the advisor's suggestion.

Silence is also the problems reported in the socialization of written academic discourse. This effect both the learners and the advisors. Both cases resulted in difficulties in understanding what is meant by the others. Often time, learners are not able to get their point across, due to several conditions, such as the feeling of less confident due to fear of being judged of not having enough sources or evidents in supporting their argument to their advisors. They may also keep silent because the advisors are showing no intention in hearing the learners' argument. Both condition is actually destructive for the learners, in a way that the learners keep having the uneasy feeling towards the advisors and at the same time they will not be able to defend their authority in writing and let the advisors take more than what he wishes in the writing the thesis or dissertation. Teachers or advisors can also be silent, in other words, they does not seem to be willing to explain what they want to the students. Sometimes they just write down their feed back in students' draft, without communicating what they mean. With this condition, it is the students who feel difficulties in understanding the advisors' comment, and in the end the process will not only make the work progress slower, but it will also hurt the students' esteem, and create or worsen the negative feeling for the students, advisors, and the writing process.

Many instructors do not provide explicit and appropriate scaffolding, modeling, or feed back to support the students' performance. This is due to the assumption that students should be famillir already with the genre required in writing academic text. Often time, the advisors in universities have high expectation that students have already master the ability in writing an essay or research report. They have such assumption because students are already exposed in such writing genre as part of their readings. Though it might be so, in reality many students are still having problems in the writing process, and the fact that there is no detil, scaffolded guidance or feedback makes the work more difficult.

There is also sociopolitical and socioeducational factors, such as the instructor's rank in the university, the availability of teaching assistant, or qualified peer proofreaders, the number of students in the class or under the supervision. The

fact that the advisors, as part of the faculty members, are also influenced by the other condition of their working environment can not be neglected. If an advisor has many students to work under his supervision, and that takes up most of his energy, the quality of supervision that can be expected from him will also decrease. Whether the university provides writing center, thus students can obtain help from peer proofreaders before advancing to the advisor, will also take account in providing rich and helpful writing process.

When the problem encounters the students from different cultural background, there is a tendency that students will look help from other people having similar cultural background. Duff (2007) reported how Asian students manage in filling the gap of being novices by seeking assistance from other older/longer Asian students rather than to native English speaker. So, instead of trying to understand how the native speakers view the problem within their cultural habit, these students prefer to look aid from their own more familiar group of people. It should be a lot easier to seek better understanding from native speakers because these native people can show how the proces of language socialization does work. They are accustomed with what is explicitly and implicitly mentioned by the advisors. Another disadvantage from asking their own senior asian students is the fact that these longer asian students also experience complicated trajectories as they are trying to maintain their biculturalism, identities, dominant languages, and academic goals. In other words, they are facing their own problems as well; they are also encoutering the same culturally based problem, and therefore, their advice in facing such problem may not be the best or even the appropriate solution for the students.

5. Conclusion

Looking at the language socialization in written academic discourse, bring us to the thought of not only how it will help our understanding of such process, but it will also raise our awarenes of the negativeness brought about throughtout the process. Therefore, it is important to understand better how students perceive the academic enculturation provided by the instructor, in a purpose of not only to improve the quality of the students written work, but also to improve to notion taken into the process.

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