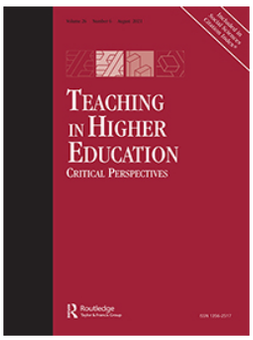

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Dialogue and subject positioning in pedagogical practice: the academic literacies classroom in a Ghanaian University

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ABSTRACT

The importance of academic literacy acquisition through enculturation in higher education is self-evident. Important within the processes of enculturation is how interactants are positioned. This study examines how interactants within the writing classroom of a higher education institution in Ghana are positioned through dialogue. Data for this study are recordings of lectures of a mandatory undergraduate programme. The study indicates that though there are attempts to position the student as an active and equal participant within the writing classroom, the instructor still emerges as dominant participant. It also establishes that the pedagogical practices of the classroom adopt strategies such as peer deliberations, and epistemic discovery to help foster personal agency development in the student. It concludes that the academic literacies model has not informed what goes on in the literacies classroom of the institution. The study recommends that the enculturation processes will have to adopt a more critical approach.

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Academic literacies; positioning; pedagogy; classroom; agency

Introduction

Academic literacies has been defined by Lillis and Scott (2008, 7) as a 'descriptor of the range of rhetorical practices, discourses and genres in academia bound up with specific disciplines'. The acquisition of academic literacies is today seen as an integral part of the practices of higher education (HE). One of the reasons for this status of importance for academic literacy within higher education is the understanding that literacy is a form of situated practice (Brandt and Clinton 2002; Lea and Street 1998). As situated practice therefore, for one to be able to engage with academic literacy, one will have to acquire the peculiar literacy practices of disciplines within HE. HE therefore demands that the student acquires the practices of specific disciplines.

The demand made of students is the second reason why academic literacy is important in higher education. An implication of this demand is that it raises the question of how to approach the teaching and learning of disciplinary practices (Johns and Swales 2002). This question brings us to a second conceptualisation of academic literacies. At the core of this conceptualisation is the view of academic literacies as referring to courses intended to enable student-writers to meet the writing demands at the university

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(Lillis and Scott 2008). The implication of this second conceptualisation of academic literacies for its importance within higher education is self-evident.

Whether academic literacies is viewed as a descriptor of rhetorical practices, discourses and genres or as referring to programmes that are to help students meet the literacy demands of the academe, the consensus today is that academic literacies are manifested in discipline-specific practices (Hyland 1999, 2002, 2009; McKenna 2011; Turner, Miller, and Mitchell-Kernan 2002). This consensus means that pedagogy within this area has had to allow itself to be shaped by the reality of the discipline-specific nature of the demands made on students by academic communities.

This reality of disciplinarity specificity also implies that academic literacies pedagogy is by no means a simple matter. A fundamental question that arises from the recognition that academic literacies pedagogy is a complex phenomenon is: how best can the literacies demands of the academe be taught to students who are by definition peripheral members (Lave and Wenger 1991) of the academe? A second question is: what is the role of the student in the pedagogical practice whose objective is to allow the student to acquire the literacies of the academe?

Academic literacies pedagogy – a brief review

Raimes (1991), in giving a summary of the history of pedagogical approaches to writing, indicates that instruction in academic writing has generally focused on linguistic and rhetorical form, the writer and the writer's processes, on the content of writing, and on the expectations of the reader. He goes on to indicate that it was only until the late 1980s that the focus of writing instruction began to respond to the demands of the academe. The observations made by Raimes (1991) reveal that for much of the history of academic writing instruction and research, the focus has been on text to the detriment of practice (Wingate 2012).

The distinction between text and practice and the depth of focus on either in writing pedagogy is one of the most defining features of the different pedagogical approaches to academic literacies instruction today. Street (2004) identifies three (3) distinct although not discrete approaches to literacies instruction. These are the study skills model, the academic socialisation approach and the academic literacies approach. The study skills model is premised on the understanding that writing is a skills (Wingate 2006). This understanding of the model is also reflected in its definition as a 'a set of atomised skills which students must learn and which are transferable to other contexts' (Street 2004, 13–14). The study skills approach is usually marked by a preoccupation with language issues such as grammar and punctuation (Reynolds 2010; Street 2004; Wingate 2012; Wingate and Tribble 2012).

From the characterisation of the study skills model emerging from the discussion, it is apparent that this model is largely textual. It is a text-based approach in the sense that its focus is to give students the skills needed to construct different the kinds of texts. But it is also a text-based approach because it uses what Wingate (2012) describes as genre-based models. These genre-based approaches that have defined English for Academic Purposes (EAP) (Hyland 2017, 2018) aim at identifying specific language features, genres and discourse practices, and then helping students acquire these. From this perspective therefore, the general area of EAP is an approach that emanates from the study skills model.

The second pedagogical approach is the academic socialisation approach. This approach, Street (2004) notes, draws on social psychology, anthropology as well as constructivist education. The premise of this pedagogical approach is that the objective of instruction in the literacy classroom is to inculcate students into a new culture. To achieve this, the academic socialisation approach holds that teachers in the discipline must take an active role in inducting students into the discipline (Wingate and Tribble 2012). The focus on inducting students into the academy means that this approach is anchored in practice. However, it is important to point out that the socialisation approach fails to recognise the multiplicity of communities of practice in the academy (Lea and Street 2006; Street 2004; Wingate and Tribble 2012).

The term 'academic literacies' which emerged in the UK in the 1990s (Wingate and Tribble 2012) originally referred to the study of literacies in higher education (Lea and Street 2006). It was not a pedagogical approach but a critical research approach for studying literacy and writing in the context of higher education. From this initial status as a research approach, academic literacies has evolved into a pedagogical approach that is built on the understanding of literacy as practice (Lea 2004; Lea and Street 2006; Street 2003; Wingate and Tribble 2012). As a pedagogical approach, Lea and Street (2006, 369) point out that academic literacies is similar to the academic socialisation model. The difference, however, is that it conceptualises the processes of socialisation as 'complex, dynamic, nuanced, situated and involving both epistemological issues and social processes, including power relations among people, institutions, and social identities' (Lea and Street 2006, 369). In this regard, academic literacies as a pedagogical approach differs from both the study skills and academic socialisation models because it is essentially a critical approach that insists that all forms of literacies are ideological.

Some case studies on academic literacies pedagogy

Even though the status of academic literacies as a pedagogical approach has been acknowledged, it is important to admit that a well-grounded criticism of the approach has been that it is unclear what academic literacies pedagogical practice looks like (Lea 2004; Lillis 2003). The response to this criticism by practitioners has been to undertake case studies to demonstrate its pedagogical approach. In a case study of a postgraduate level programme at Open University, UK, Lea (2004) demonstrates that the principles of academic literacies such as the discipline specific nature of academic literacies, the contested nature of literacy practices among others can be embedded into higher education curriculum.

In a similar study involving King's College London and Open University, UK, but which focuses on the undergraduate level, Lea and Street (2006) show how adopting a collaborative approach that involved students and tutors led to a better understanding of the literacies practices of particular institutional contexts and an understanding also of students' struggles with literacies practices. Further, this case study helped students as well as tutors to understand, through conscious reflection, the relationship that exists between literacy practices and the epistemology of disciplines.

Lillis (2003), in a case study of how student writing can be improved through an academic literacies approach, showed that a dialogic approach which challenges the conventional monologism of academic writing allows academic literacies to evolve from its

status as an oppositional frame towards one that is suited for pedagogical practice. She suggests that this can be done by moving away from the practice of feedback, which involves the use of evaluative language, and which looks at students' text as product, to the practice of talkback which involves looking at student writing as text in process. This talkback allows the student to reflect on their own writing so that they can better mean what they want to say. Lillis' (2003) study is an illustration of the benefits of ascribing agency to the student in writing pedagogy.

Despite the attempts to develop a functioning pedagogical approach based on academic literacies through case studies, it is true as of present that such case studies are rare and writing pedagogies based solely on the principles of academic literacies are not in the mainstream of literacies pedagogy. It is in fact the case that a lot of programmes purporting to be academic literacies programmes are so in name only. The principal reason for this is provided by Wingate (2012, 26) who points out that the instructional potential of the academic literacies approach is difficult to realise 'because its preference for issues such as identity, power relations and institutional practices over text seemed to be at conflict with students' preferences'. The way forward is to use the research strengths of the academic literacies framework to examine current writing pedagogy and then proceed to make recommendations about how the principles of academic literacies can be integrated into current practice for better learning outcomes. This approach is adopted here.

What has subject positioning got to do with it?

The argument has been made that one of the defining features of the three pedagogical approaches is the extent to which an approach can be described either as a text-based or as a practice-based approach. But also significant in defining the three pedagogical approaches is how subjects are positioned by the discourses of these approaches. Subject position here is used to indicate identities that are shaped by discourse (Fairclough 2013; Ivanič 1998). The presence of these identities in any discourse also indicates the role(s) of interactants within any discursive event.

Why are the subject positions that are discursively made available in pedagogical practices of academic literacies significant? It is because the acquisition of academic literacies implies the acquisition or cultivation of subject positions that are warranted by the disciplinary communities that students are legitimate, albeit peripheral members of (Gee 1989, 2008; Hyland 2011, 2009). The expectation therefore is that interaction within the academic literacies classroom, especially in terms of how the interactants are positioned, will give an indication as to what the target identities are.

Each of the pedagogical approaches indicated above are defined by how the two interactants within pedagogical practice are positioned. For the skills model for instance, since the student is defined as lacking certain skills that will have to be learnt through instruction, the student is positioned as a recipient and therefore has less agency within the writing classroom. Conversely, the instructor is positioned with more agency within the classroom since s/he is the source of the skills that the student will have to acquire.

In academic socialisation, the student is predominantly positioned as a peripheral member. In this regard, within the enculturation processes taking place in the

writing classroom, the student will have a comparatively active role. This active status will allow the student to acquire the norms required by the discourse community. The instructor, on the other hand, is positioned as a facilitator and therefore has a reduced agency within the process as compared to that which is afforded the instructor in the study skills model. The ascription of agency to the student within the processes of enculturation is most pronounced in the academic literacies approach where literacy practices are viewed as contested (Lea and Street 2006; Street 2004; Wingate 2006). In this approach, just as in the academic socialisation approach, the instructor is positioned relatively passively to allow room for the student to engage critically with academic literacies practices.

In view of the argument above concerning pedagogical practice and positioning of interactants within the academic literacies classroom, this study examines how interactants are positioned through dialogue in the academic literacies classroom of a Ghanaian university. The examination of the way interactants are positioned within the pedagogical practice under consideration is important for observing how practice relates to the three models of academic literacies instruction reviewed. This observation is made with an awareness of Wingate's (2012) position that writing instruction cannot be based on one theoretical model. Part of the purpose of this study is therefore to discover how the different pedagogical perspectives are influencing academic literacies pedagogy within the context of higher education in Ghana.

Study site and data

A higher education institution in Ghana constitutes the site for this study. It is a public institution and one of the oldest higher education institutions (HEIs) in the country. It runs both graduate and undergraduate programmes in a variety of disciplines. The institution is run on a collegiate model. The writing programme from which the data was collected is a two-semester programme which is compulsory for all first-year undergraduate students. The programme is offered at a humanities department.

For programme delivery, students are placed in groups. The numbers in these groups range from seventy (70) students per group to two hundred (200). The two groups that were used for this study had sixty-five (65) students and seventy-six (76) students for the first and second semesters respectively.

Lectures delivered during the 2018/2019 academic year were recorded and transcribed. There were twelve (12) weeks of recording for each of the two (2) semesters. Lectures were delivered at two sessions within this twelve-week period. A two (2) hour session on Wednesdays and a one (1) hour session on Thursdays. In all seventy-two (72) hours of lectures were recorded and transcribed. The analysis presented in this paper is based on these transcriptions.

Ethical approval

Ethical approval for this study was granted by the Ethics Committee for the Humanities at the University of Ghana. The approval was granted on February 6, 2019. The following is the approval number: ECH: 27/18-19.

Theoretical framework

Although the academic literacies approach has been discussed as a pedagogical approach, it is also a theoretical approach to the study of literacies. It draws heavily on New Literacy Studies, Critical Discourse Analysis and the Sociology of Knowledge (Lillis and Scott 2008). At the core of this theoretical approach is its questioning of the language intervention programmes at universities in English as a Second Language (ESL) contexts (Boughey 2002). This paper relies on the theoretical positions of this model and draws largely on insights from Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). In this regard, the study relies on Fairclough's (1992, 2013) conceptualisation of discourse as well as his framework for CDA. We rely on the three-dimensional model of discourse to describe, interpret and explain what is going on within the discourse of enculturation as it relates to the positioning of interactants within the pedagogical practice taking place in the literacies classroom. The analytical process of this approach is that we look at the text by focusing on the structure of the discourse and its peculiar discursive features. In the case of this study, this has meant focusing on turns and clauses. Secondly, we account for choices of these discursive features. The third step is to explain how larger social contexts have shaped what is happening within the discourse. Fairclough's (2013) concept of Ideological Discursive Formation, which is used to refer to the convergence of ways of seeing and ways of speaking, is also used to understand how ideologies are underpinning the ways in which interactants are being positioned within the discourse.

Positioning of interactants in dialogue

A key argument of academic literacies is that enculturation should not only be interested in giving 'students access to the academy and to socialise them into the dominant practices' (van Rensburg 2005, 218) but that students need to be encouraged through writing pedagogy 'to contest the dominant conventions of the academy' (218). This can be achieved if the classroom enculturation allows the student to assume an active participant subject position. To examine the extent to which the positioning of the student as an active participant in the process is actualised through the classroom discourse, the nature of the language-based interaction within the lectures should be of interest. In this regard, the first observation that is true of the classroom interactions is that they are unmistakably dialogic. They are dialogic because the primary interactants within each lecture take turns in speaking. Figure 1 provides a visual summary of the nature of the dialogue across the lectures used in this study.

There are three categories of interactants within every lecture. These are Lecturer, Student and Class (see Figure 1). The distribution indicates that the Lecturer holds fifty-one percent (51%) of speaking turn within the data. The Student category holds twenty-nine percent (29%) of the speaking turns whilst the Class category holds the remaining twenty percent (20%). Some explanation of the difference between the Student category and the Class category is needed. The Student category is used to designate turns that are taken by individual students whilst the Class category refers to turns that are taken by the class. Such turns are usually ritualistic responses to the statements or questions posed by the lecturer. In terms of their grammatical form, they are realised as

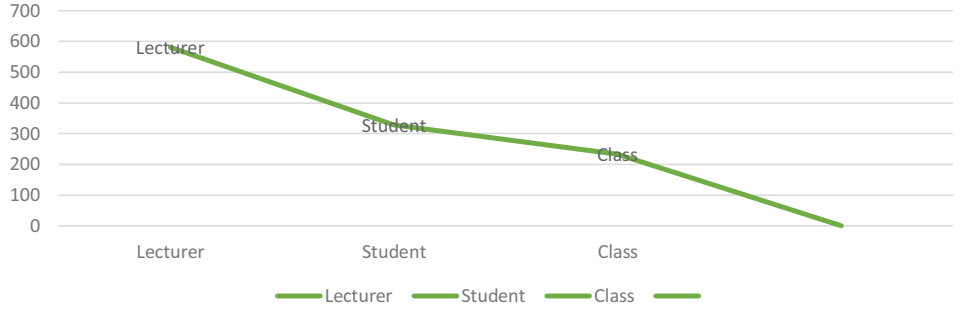

Figure 1. Turns and dialogue.

single lexical items such as 'yes', 'short', etc. In some cases, they are realised as whole clauses. The following dialogue from the data demonstrates this point:

1. **Lecturer**: Does this sentence have a subject?
   Class: Yes.

In instances where the Class holds a turn with clausal level structure, one finds that such structures are usually responses to requests made by the lecturer. An instance from the data is below.

2. **Lecturer**: Alright, what was the first question? The first one … the first one. Yes, quick, quick. The first one was?
   Class: To be successful in marriage, communication is vital.

But to return to the statistical information summarised in Figure 1, if one were to create a dichotomy of Lecturer versus Student, where student is the category that includes all turns taken by students as individuals and by them collectively as the Class, one will see that the lecturer dominates the interaction marginally. The student category will have forty-nine per cent (49%) of the turns whilst the lecturer will have fifty-one per cent (51%). From this distribution, it appears that the discourse of enculturation attempts to actualise the active participant construct of the student.

To fully account for the extent to which the processes of enculturation are discursively positioning the student as an active participant, there is the need also to go beyond merely looking at the distribution of speaking turns. Useful insights can be gained by examining how long each of the discourse participants holds the floor. For instance, how much of the text produced in the classroom interactions is authored by each of the two participants? Figure 2 provides a summary of this distribution.

From the chart above, one can see that whereas there is near parity in terms of the distribution of turns between the Lecturer and the Student, there is clear dominance on the part of the Lecturer when it comes to the amount of time and space that each of the two participants hold the floor. Eighty-seven per cent (87%) of all the words spoken in the lecture interactions are spoken by the Lecturer. A comparatively paltry thirteen percent (13%) is spoken by the Student. This clearly points to a different conclusion in terms of the discursive position that is being constructed for the Student than the one that the turn-taking distribution hints at. Although the turn-taking

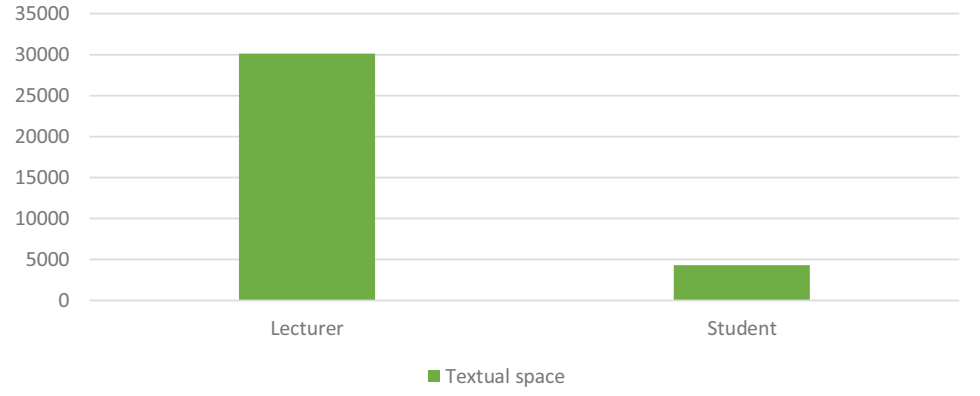

Figure 2. Textual space distribution.

distribution points to a dialogic nature of the discourse, the distribution of the textual space across the data indicates that the instructor is still very much at the centre of interaction.

An implication of the centrality of the lecturer within the enculturation process is that the lecture still largely constitutes a process of epistemological transfer where the lecturer, who is the source of knowledge is involved in transmitting that knowledge to the student. This reality means that the active participant construct of the student as suggested by the distribution of turns is one that has a limited realisation in the processes of enculturation. From the textual space distribution for Student and Lecturer, the traditional discourses of pedagogy which are hinged on the conceptualisation of the lecture as an act of epistemological transfer is one that is still dominant within academic enculturation. This is an indication of the extent to which the pedagogy is underpinned by the study skills model (Street 2004; Wingate and Tribble 2012).

The evidence of the textual space distribution between the Lecturer and the Student therefore points to a situation where the new discourses of neoliberalism which have begun to shape mainstream pedagogy have yet to entirely colonise the enculturation processes of the academic writing classroom in the context of higher education in Ghana. There is, however, enough evidence from the turn-taking distribution to argue that the naturalised status of the ideological discursive formation (Fairclough 2013) which constructs the lecture as a discursive event of epistemological transfer is being challenged by the discourses at the heart of the academic socialisation as well as critical pragmatic EAP pedagogies (Hyland 2018; Lea and Street 2006; Pennycook 1997).

The interrogative mood and positioning

Apart from the distribution of turns and textual space, another useful window through which the ways in which the processes of enculturation position the student is to examine the interpersonal metafunction broadly and the mood system of the clauses (Halliday and Matthiessen 2004) present in the data. A specific focus of attention is the interrogative mood because this mood imposes a sense of interactivity on any discursive event and allows us to see the extent to which the discourse participants have agency within a

discursive event. To do this, all instances of the use of the interrogative mood were identified. There is a total of eight hundred and forty-six (846) instances of the interrogative mood. Figure 3 presents a distribution of its usage among the Student and Lecturer categories.

Eight hundred and forty (840), representing ninety-nine percent of all instances of the interrogative clause are used by the Lecturer whilst six (6), representing one percent of the interrogative clause is used by the Student. It is clear then that the interrogative clause is almost entirely preserved as a resource for the Lecturer within discursive events. What is the implication of these interrogative clauses for the subject positioning of the Lecturer and the Student? The interrogative mood is itself an expression of power and authority within the context of the lecture as a discursive event. This is because the interrogative mood allows the discourse participant to direct and control the discourse. The interrogative mood is also used to regulate turn-taking within the discourse by signaling when it is permitted for the other participant to intervene and articulate a perspective. These two discourse functions of the interrogative mood are illustrated through the following extracts.

3. Never use a pronoun before the main noun. An example is 'Although he was sick … although he was sick, Kojo went to school. Although he was sick, Kojo went to school.' *Why is this one problematic? Why is it problematic?* 'Although he was sick, Kojo went to school.' *Why is it problematic?*
4. We learnt last week that when … what was the rule? Let's go to our notes. *What was the rule? Where there is a modifier, there must be what?* A referent. *Do you remember?*

In both extracts above, instances of the interrogative mood have been italicised.

It is important to point out that the use of the interrogative mood in both extracts can be interpreted as functioning to regulate taking-taking within the interaction. The clause 'What is problematic?' uttered by the lecturer demands that the student responds. It is therefore used to control the point at which a student is allowed to discursively enter the interaction. In extract four (4) the interrogative ' … what was the rule?' especially in its repetition and reformulation as 'Do you remember?' constitutes an expression of power and authority because it makes a demand of the student that must be complied with. The dominant use of the interrogative by the Lecturer as compared to the Student therefore reveals the steep asymmetry that exists between the student and the lecturer within the classroom interaction.

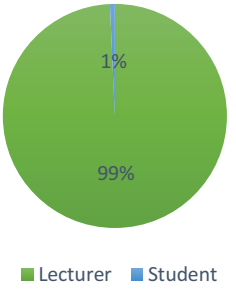

Figure 3. Distribution of the interrogative mood.

What is also worth our analytical focus is the grammatical structures that have been used by both the Lecturer and the Student to realise this mood and the implications of those structures for the subject positions available within the discourse. Although the corpus reveals that both the wh-interrogative and the polar type of interrogative (Mathews 2007) are employed by the lecturer, one also finds a good number of reduced clauses and fragments such as 'Any other?', 'Versus what?', 'Any question?' and so on. Fragmented clauses are of course a prominent feature of spoken discourse. Their occurrence here is therefore not marked. In contrast, one finds that almost all (5/6) of the interrogative clauses used by the student within the data are realised as full clauses. These clauses as extracted from the data are presented below:

5. The company?
6. Can characters be animals?
7. Madam, please before you continue with the paragraph, is it advisable to include a point to be discussed in the thesis statement?
8. Please, in writing the essay, you, is it wrong to go beyond the limit?
9. With regard to statistics, do you have to be factual?
10. Sir, and the historical antecedent, should it be factual?

The realisation of the interrogative mood used by the student as full clauses even in this spoken discourse demonstrates how the asymmetrical relationship between the student and the lecturer is informing the discursive practice even at the level of mood choices and the grammatical forms used to realise those mood choices. Five (5) of the six (6) interrogative clauses here are structured as polar/close ended questions. Even in the case of (5) above which is a fragment in the form of a noun phrase, within the context in which this question is posed, the student merely wants an affirmation of what the lecturer had early on said.

What is influencing the use of the polar interrogative by the student? One will have to begin by recognising that each of these polar interrogatives are a demand from the student that the Lecturer takes a speaking turn. This demand is implicitly a face-threatening act which will have to be mitigated. Since the polar interrogative, unlike the open-ended interrogative, reduces the time duration that the Lecturer will have to dedicate to responding to the demand of the interrogative, it helps in mitigating the face threatening act that it poses. The motivation for choosing this sub-category of the interrogative mood by the student is the recognition of the asymmetrical relationship between student and lecturer. Further, the form of the polar interrogative allows the student to reduce the duration of their stay on the speaking floor, thereby ensuring that the dominance of the lecturer in the event is maintained.

A third observation about these questions (Questions 5–10), but which is not related to their structure, is that they are all epistemic. Epistemic in the sense that each question constitutes enquiries that are about the subject knowledge of the programme. The students are, in these questions, seeking information and clarification about the topics being discussed. This makes the questions epistemic. The epistemic nature of these questions ensures that the students' role in the discursive event is closely aligned to the core goal of the classroom activity and therefore serves as justification for the students wanting to hold the speaking turn in the discursive event. This contrasts sharply with how the interrogative mood is employed by the Lecturer where the repetition of

questions as well as the use of the interrogative in the rhetorical sense is commonplace and not directly related to what constitutes subject knowledge within the programme.

The subject epistemic nature of the interrogative mood as used by the students reveals a recognition on the part of the students that they are subordinate participants within the discursive event and therefore can only take the speaking floor when the relevance of what is to be uttered is not in doubt. The need to maintain epistemic relevance of the student utterance within the discursive event partly explains why the student's turn within the classroom is limited. For whereas the instructor can afford repetitions, and rhetorical questions, the student is not afforded such strategies mainly because of the peculiarities of the discursive event.

These peculiarities arise from the social formation which ascribes primary agency to the lecturer in the enactment of the discursive event. This primary agency position ascribed to the lecturer is consistent with the construct of the lecturer within traditional approaches to academic writing pedagogy. Such approaches as the study skills approach, the remedial approach and the pragmatic EAP approach are hinged on this construct of the lecturer as assuming primary agency within the classroom.

Attempts at agency cultivation

It is imperative to explore how the classroom discourse, apart from the dialogue that has already been discussed, is being used to cultivate agency within the student. An important strategy that appears central to fostering student agency within the enculturation is the assigning of group tasks to the student. The following two extracts, in which lecturers are using this strategy, are useful in analysing how this discursive strategy is being used to foster the development of agency.

11. We should ban? Okay. Alright, so. That's what you're going to do. I want you, in a group of two, raise as many points as possible concerning why it should be banned. How many points can you raise? And why it should not be banned. So two reasons. Give a number of reasons why it should be banned and then give a number of reasons why it should not be banned.
12. Well, I gave you an assignment so tell me about it. So I have got a group list here. I hope you have started working. Good.

The two extracts above are important in the cultivation of agency in the student in two ways. The first is that they construct the student's role within the discourse as activity-based. This activity-based role constitutes an important strand of the attempts at ensuring that the student is engaged within the process. It is also important to note that the activities that the students are being tasked to perform are activities that are subject epistemic. They are activities that are part of what is considered knowledge within the programme. By allowing the student to be at the forefront of activities that result in the construction of knowledge within the programme, agency is fostered within the student because s/he is no longer allowed to exist in the discourse as a passive subject.

The second way revealed in these extracts that is indicative of the attempts to foster agency in the student is in the collaborative nature of the activities that the student is tasked to perform. This collaboration allows for peer deliberations. The peer nature of the deliberations means that each student is afforded a speaking turn during group

discussions. Further, the peer collaborations mean that an asymmetrical relationship exists between the discourse participants. This asymmetrical relationship further enhances the development of agency in the student by positioning each student as an equal participant in the discursive event.

Again, since the collaborative activities are aimed at what constitutes knowledge within the programme, the activities provide a hint as to the nature of knowledge. This hint is that knowledge is socially constructed. The peer collaborative process therefore allows the student to understand that s/he has a legitimate role to play in the construction of knowledge. This is not however to say that whatever the result of the collaborative process is, that result becomes legitimate knowledge. In fact, the instructor's presence and role in the classroom ensure that not all claims made by the student can pass as legitimate knowledge. Despite this admission, there is still the fostering of agency within the student because the activities allow the discourse to position the student as an active participant.

It can be observed that, within the classroom interaction, instances in which the individual student is assigned a task to perform appear to be a running theme. A case in point is where students are asked to read out an assignment that had been given earlier in class. The task does not just end with reading out such assignments but includes the student having to respond to questions from both the instructor and fellow students regarding claims made by the student in their writeup. This strategy enables the student to develop agency by allowing the individual student to be positioned as a central force in the discursive event. This central position within the discursive event increases the student's participation threshold and therefore leads to an actualisation of the active participant position. Within the data also can be found interventions by the instructor that are aimed at the development of agency within individual students. The following two extracts are instances of such interventions.

13. **Lecturer**: Definition. Alright, tell us more. Why? Speak boldly and confidently.
14. **Lecturer**: Okay, what else did we learn last week?
    Student: We observed that if the modifier is not close to the subject, it is dangling.
    Lecturer: If the modifier is not close to the subject it is what?
    Student: Dangling.
    Lecturer: It is dangling. So, what do we have to do?
    Student: You have to change the position.
    Lecturer: You change the position so that it does what?
    Student: So that it is close to the subject

In the first extract, the lecturer is making a direct intervention. This intervention is important in fostering the development of agency in the student for two reasons. The first full clause realised in the imperative mood is demanding that the student holds a longer speaking turn on the speaking floor. Not only is the student being asked to remain a focal point of the discursive event for longer, but s/he is being asked to provide information that is part of the epistemology of the subject.

Agency in the student is therefore being enhanced since the student is being positioned as central to the learning process by the discourse in this instance. The third clause which constitutes part of the utterance that is the lecturer's direct intervention is also realised in the imperative mood. Although the imperative mood by itself indicates a vertical relationship between the instructor and the student and can therefore be argued

as counterproductive in the attempts at the development of agency in the student, agency in the student is still being nurtured even in the face of such an argument because of the meaning that is being conveyed through this imperative clause. The lecturer, through this clause, is demanding that the student demonstrates authority by speaking boldly and confidently. The imperative in this case is therefore used to directly and forcefully convey to the student the need to assume agency.

The second of the two extracts above that is indicative of the fostering of the development of individual agency through the classroom interaction is an instance of dialogue between a student and the lecturer. This dialogue is structured as a question-and-answer interaction. The lecturer poses a question to which the student responds which is then followed by another question and a response. In what ways is this dialogue structure significant in the development of agency in the individual student? The first part of the answer is that the dialogue functions as a means for evaluating the subject knowledge of the student in the public forum of the classroom. The public forum constituted as the classroom is itself significant because it compels the student to make subject epistemic claims that are clearly attributable to him. This situation contrives to make the student the agent of the epistemic claims being made; which allows him to be placed in a position of epistemic authority. Epistemic authority is conceptualised as authority arising from claims of knowledge of a specific subject. As the agent of these claims, the student is clearly assuming a position with agency.

Furthermore, the student's ability to provide the right answers to the series of questions posed allows the student to temporarily assume the discursive position of knowledgeable interactant. This position that the discourse imposes on the student results in a reversal of what can be characterised as the default subject positions of the student and the lecturer given that the subject position of lecturer as expert and of the student as novitiate is one that has been naturalised within pedagogical discourses generally. The subject positioning of the student within this dialogue as knowledgeable imposes unmistakable agency on the student.

Another strategy of individual agency development arising from the use of dialogue is one that relies on what can be termed a process of epistemic discovery. The following extract illustrates the use of dialogue to achieve epistemic discovery and by extension aiding the cultivation of agency in the student.

15. **Student**: How did it all started?
    Lecturer: Come again.
    Student: How did it all started.
    Lecturer: Come again!
    Student: How did it all started?
    Lecturer: Come again!
    Student: How did it all started?
    Lecturer: How did it all start? Good …

The first statement is an utterance that is a response by a student to a task set for the class by the lecturer. There is however a grammatical infelicity; namely that the student has combined the past tense form of the verb DO with the past tense form of the verb START instead of its bare form. Consequently, the dialogue between the lecturer and the student comes to be woven around this infelicity. Through a process of repetition

involving both the lecturer and the student as can be seen in the dialogue, the student comes to self-remedy the grammatical infelicity.

The lecturer in this instance has used the dialogue in a way that allows the student to self-discover what is wrong with his utterance. In other words, the student has come to achieve epistemic discovery, that is, discovered knowledge that is deemed as important to the programme and which the student ought to acquire. This aided and yet independent epistemic discovery fosters agency in the student (generic sense) in the sense that the student comes to associate more closely with the knowledge that s/he has acquired through a process of discovery. This argument is the clearer if one contrasts this process of epistemic discovery with a situation where the lecturer merely mentions to the student the grammatical infelicity of his construction. In such a scenario, the student will not have an affinity with the knowledge being made available because it originates with the lecturer, a second party. This argument is consistent with the constructivist theory of learning (Cooperstein and Kocevar-Weidinger 2004) which holds that learning should be such that 'through activity, students discover their own truths' (142) and that the job of the instructor 'is to facilitate that discovery' (142) of truths since discovery facilitates the internalisation of those truths.

Conclusion

The study has revealed that although there are attempts to position the student as an active participant in the pedagogical practice, the lecturer still remains the dominant participant of the process. This reality is manifested in the textual space distribution across the data and in the use of the interrogative mood in the discourse. The analysis has shown that there is a clear asymmetrical relationship between the interactants of the writing classroom. It has further pointed out that there are attempts in the enculturation process to develop agency in the student by imposing an activity-based role on the student. This is seen in the assigning of collaborative tasks to students which require students to engage in peer deliberations. These tasks have been identified to be subject epistemic tasks that lead the student to epistemic discovery.

Additionally, it is important that this conclusion explores the relationship between the positioning of interactants in pedagogical practice with the three approaches to academic literacies instruction. It is clear from the analysis that practice is underpinned by the study skills model and the academic socialisation approach. The lecturer has been observed to be involved in the kind of epistemic transfer consistent with the study skills pedagogical approach. Such epistemic transfer masks the contested nature of literacy practices and denies the student the space to critically engage with the literacies practices that are being acquired. The attempts to cultivate agency are also an indication of the influence of the academic socialisation model. There is, however, no evidence that the academic literacies pedagogical approach with its focus on power and the need to encourage the student to critically engage with the literacies conventions that they are being made to acquire has shaped pedagogical practice in this instance. In this regard, it is the position of this paper that the institution will have to consider ways of incorporating this critical dimension into their pedagogy. A starting point in this regard would be in ascribing greater agency to the student within the classroom to ensure that the dominance of the lecturer is diminished. This can be done by structuring lectures in a way

that allows the student to speak more in the classroom. The programme will also have to be redesigned to focus on discipline specific practices. Additionally, pedagogy will have to highlight the contested nature of the practices being taught.

Limitations

This study has a couple of limitations. First, there has been no space within this study for lecturer reflections on their practice. The question of what the lecturer makes of the positioning of students and indeed of themselves in relation to the overall goal of helping the student acquire the required literacies has not been resolved in this study. Secondly, the study has not explored what the students make of the identities that have been constructed for them through the classroom interaction. It will be worthwhile, for instance, to find out what students make of the attempts to cultivate agency in them through the literacies pedagogy adopted by the lecturers.

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