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Editorial

Academic discourse as situated practice: An introduction☆

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ABSTRACT

This introduction systematizes previous research on academic language (AL), differentiating between communicative, epistemic and social functions of academic discourse. Pointing to some limitations of existing – mainly register-based – approaches to AL, such as the written language bias, the abstraction from actual language users and contextual realizations, we advocate a practice-based approach to academic discourse. We put forward a concept of academic discourse practices that is grounded in interactional sociolinguistics and ethnomethodological conversation analysis. It acknowledges the situatedness of academic discourse practices, their role in identity construction and stresses the importance of contextualization competence for mastering such discursive demands. Finally, we give an overview of the contributions to this issue and explicate their interrelations.

1. Introduction

The last decade saw a revitalized interest in academic language (AL), particularly in the context of schooling (cf. the special issues edited by Haneda, 2014; Schleppegrell, 2012). This was triggered by evidence for the decisive role of language in educational achievement as repeatedly provided by large scale international studies (OECD, 2004, 6–7), and by the growing acknowledgment of multilingualism in today's schools and universities. This special issue brings together a set of nine articles that examine and discuss AL as a situated discourse practice. All contributions are based on audio- and video-recorded interactions in educational contexts from primary to post-secondary education. The empirical objective of this special issue is to provide a rich picture of AL in its contextual realizations, institutional embedding and interconnections with community and identity aspects. In addition, the findings of these studies also add significantly to our theoretical understanding of how AL can be conceptualized and what competencies, norms and motivations come into play in its acquisition. The contributions also pave the way for a new explanatory account of the observation that some students do not succeed in managing the discourse practices relevant in educational settings.

In educational science as well as in language education discursive skills are regarded as key competences because they enable students to participate in classroom discourse, i.e., to receptively process and to productively compose oral and written texts across different subjects and disciplines (Quasthoff, Heller, & Morek, submitted for publication; Quasthoff, Heller, Prediger, & Erath, submitted for publication; Uccelli et al., 2014). In this respect, the notion of *academic language*[1] has been applied and discussed in educational science and psychology, sociology, language education as well as linguistics (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Henrichs, 2010; Snow & Uccelli, 2009).[2] Related terms are *cognitive academic language proficiency* (Cummins, 1979, 1980, 2008) and *academic discourse* (Bourdieu, Passeron, & de Saint Martin, 1994; Duff, 2010; Hyland, 2009).

☆ Some of the articles in this special issue were delivered in an earlier form at a symposium titled "Negotiating communicative practices in school: The case of academic language" at the 19th Sociolinguistics Symposium in Berlin, Germany in 2012.

[1] In the German-speaking scientific community the term normally used is "Bildungssprache" (cf. Feilke, 2012; Gogolin & Lange, 2010; Gogolin, 2009; Redder, 2012).

[2] Historically, the current debate on academic language resembles the proliferation of Bernstein's (1964) concept of the "elaborated code", which in the 1960s also served as an explanation of the perpetual reproduction of educational inequality (cf. Cook-Gumperz, 2009). Although only few authors today explicitly refer to Bernstein's research (cf. Gogolin & Lange, 2010, 110; Schleppegrell, 2004, 26–27), it seems legitimate to draw a parallel between the former discussion of codes and the recent debate about academic language.

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With a slightly different accentuation, Schleppegrell coined the term *language of schooling* (2001, 2004). All these terms serve to refer to a linguistic register that is assumed to be functional for the purposes of learning, knowledge construction and education.[3] As formal education starts in preschool and extends to tertiary education, AL is conceptualized as a continuum (Henrichs, 2010; Schleppegrell, 2004, 2012), ranging from precursory forms (e.g., narratives, cf. Scheele, Leseman, Mayo, & Elbers, 2012; show and tell in elementary school, cf. Kern, Lingnau, & Paul, 2015) to scientific language (Halliday, 1993).

Substantial work has been done to define more precisely the core of AL (Uccelli et al., 2014) and to determine the linguistic skills which should become integral parts of educational curricula (e.g., Feilke, 2012; Schleppegrell, 2004; Snow & Uccelli, 2009; Vollmer & Thürmann, 2010). In contrast to existing research which mainly focuses on structural aspects of written AL (cf. Brisk, 2012; Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Crosson, Matsumura, Correnti, & Arlotta-Guerrero, 2012; Gogolin, 2009; Halliday, 1993; Ortner, 2009; Schleppegrell, 2004; Uccelli, Dobbs, & Scott, 2013), our special issue takes a *practice-based approach* (Hanks, 1996) and aims at illuminating how *the actors themselves* instantiate and interpret, acknowledge or suspend linguistic norms and expectations for communicative practices in educational settings (Heller, 2015). In doing so, the *socio-symbolic functions of academic language* (cf. Section 2.3; see also Morek & Heller, 2012), mostly overlooked in previous research, are taken into account: the use of AL is linked with certain discursive identities (Preece, 2009; Rampton, 2006) which may be more or less compatible with social identities (Kotthoff & Spreckels, 2007) or milieu-specific practices and positionings (Bourdieu, 1991; Lareau, 2003; Michaels & Cazden, 1986; Solomon & Rhodes, 1995).

This introduction sets out, first, to systematize the existing research on AL, differentiating between communicative (Section 2.1), epistemic (Section 2.2) and social (Section 2.3) functions of academic discourse. In our critical review of the existing body of research, we discuss some shortcomings and limitations of current approaches to AL. Two aspects in particular will be emphasized: first, we question the abstraction from actual language users and from contextual realizations that underlies register-based approaches to AL; second, we stress the need to acknowledge the interconnections between AL and issues of positioning and identity. From our perspective it is therefore necessary to develop an understanding of AL as *situated practice*, i.e., as locally occasioned talk or text above the sentence level. In section 3 we thus put forward our notion of *academic discourse practices*, a concept that is meant to take into account the institutional and contextual situatedness of academic discourse practices, and which acknowledges their role in positioning practices and identity construction. Methodologically, our understanding of academic discourse practices is grounded in interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz & Cook-Gumperz, 2006) and ethnomethodological conversation analysis (Sacks, 1995; Stivers & Sidnell, 2013). Our final section discusses how future research on the learning and teaching of academic discourse practices may benefit from such a socially situated concept of language learning (Section 4), directing attention to students' *contextualization competencies* and to the empirical examination of practices and norms of academic discourse.

2. Mapping the field: conceptualizations of 'academic language'

'Academic language' and related terms have been of interest to scholars from sociology, psychology, educational science, second language acquisition and foreign language learning. They approach AL on the basis of their own methodologies and disciplinary cultures and also pursue distinct research questions and agendas. In the interest of systematization, we will distinguish three different functions of AL which we will explain below:

- AL as a *medium of knowledge transmission* (communicative function);
- AL as a *tool for thinking* (epistemic function);
- AL as a *ticket and visiting card* (socio-symbolic function).

This suggested differentiation has of course only heuristic value: in actual oral and written discourse the functions occur in parallel and overlapping ways; yet the studies reviewed in the following often foreground specific aspects of AL.

2.1. AL as a medium of knowledge transmission

A substantial body of research has focused on the linguistic structures of AL and their functional value for academic communication, i.e., for transmitting complex knowledge. Above all, this approach is put forward by Systemic Functional Linguistics (Halliday, 1978). Building on this perspective, Schleppegrell notes that the features of AL "are not just devices used to exclude the uninitiated, but are functional for the purposes for which these [academic, V.H. & M.M.] genres have evolved and which they serve." (2001, 454). To examine such relationships between linguistic forms and functions AL is construed as a *register* by a number of scholars (e.g., Cummins, 2008; Gantefort & Roth, 2010; Gogolin & Lange, 2010; Lengyel, 2010; Lesemann, Scheele, Mayo, & Messer, 2007; Snow & Uccelli, 2009).

Halliday (1978) uses the term 'register' to refer to the relationship between language (and other semiotic forms) and features of the context. He proposes that the use of a certain register is functional for the activity at hand. In this sense, registers are defined as "varieties according to use". However, as we will discuss below (Section 3.1), in such a register-based

[3] It is important to note, however, that academic language occasionally intersects with language for special purposes, but basically operates as a communicative interface across different domains and between everyday language and specialist varieties (Ortner, 2009).

Table 1
Features of academic language.

Lexical features
- Quality of lexis: diverse, subject-specific, e.g.
  prefix verbs (e.g., *to reverse*, *to preempt*, *to substitute*)
  nominal compounds (e.g., *bar graph*, *2-digit number*, *bottom line*)
  standardized technical terms (e.g., *rectangular*, *rule of three*)
- Lexical density, e.g.
  Content words instead of pronouns
  Nominalizations and elaborate noun phrases (e.g., *legilization*, *editing*, *average breath-holding capacity*)

Syntactic features
- Sentences instead of prosodic segmentation
- Local coherence by
  Cohesion markers (e.g., conjunctions)
  Complex sentences (e.g., relative, conjunctive, and disjunctive clauses; infinitival, participle clauses)
- Mode of representation:
  Declarative mood
  Impersonal expressions (e.g., agentless passives)

Discursive features
- Speaker roles and turn taking organization (pre)determined;
- Monological forms (e.g., lecture, presentation, essay);
- Subject-specific text types (e.g., minutes, report);
- Stylistic standards (e.g., objectivity, well-structured, adequate length of text).

perspective context is regarded as given and static and the exact (inter)relation between context and linguistic choices remains vague.

Yet functional approaches to AL have convincingly shown that lexical and morpho-syntactical forms prevalent in academic texts (e.g., nominalizations, expanded noun phrases, compounds), are linked to the specific communicative functions of texts or discourses (e.g., Halliday, 1993; Schleppegrell, 2001; Feilke, 2012). Basically, they are made for the purpose "of presenting information in highly structured ways, and in ways that enable the author/speaker to take an assertive, expert stance toward the information presented "(Schleppegrell, 2001, 451). The kind of the activity – knowledge transfer and knowledge presentation – requires the production of autonomous texts which are intelligible independently from the communicative situation at hand ('decontextualization'), the presentation of lexically specific and explicitely structured information ('explicitness') in a detached, concise ('complexity') and argumentative way (cf. Snow & Uccelli, 2009, 119f.; see also Ortner, 2009, 2228).

The high frequency of nominalizations and expanded noun phrases, for instance, often criticized in style guides, can be explained by their communicative functions which make them particularly suitable for knowledge transfer: in contrast to pronouns and deictic expressions which are typical of oral and dialogic communication, nominalizations and expanded noun phrases serve to avoid ambiguity (Schleppegrell, 2001, 2004). They also facilitate a clear structure by condensing previously given information which otherwise would have to be presented at greater length, i.e., by complete sentences or even larger units.

As an empirical basis for establishing the features of AL many authors use schoolbook and scientific texts, focusing mainly on written genres. At the heart of such an "inventorizing approach" (Snow & Uccelli, 2009, 121) lies the quantitative and contrastive analysis of language corpora (Biber, 2006; Hyland, 2012). Thus, the register is basically defined by the occurrence of lexical and morpho-syntactic features which are correlated with genres and situative variables. Table 1 presents a summary of the most frequently described features of the academic register (cf. Reich, 2008; Schleppegrell, 2001, 2004, in Gantefort & Roth, 2010; Gogolin & Lange, 2010; see also the concise summary in Snow & Uccelli, 2009) (Table 1).[4] The above inventory displays a clear orientation toward linguistic (and often sentence-based) surface features while discursive aspects above the sentence level are mentioned less frequently (but see Reich, 2008, in: Gogolin & Lange, 2010; Snow & Uccelli, 2009; Solomon & Rhodes, 1995; Uccelli et al., 2014).

Aiming at the description of learning objectives, register-based approaches implicitly assume an idealized concept of AL which is derived primarily from the subject matter and its complexity as well as from the communicative requirements of specialized academic genres. Complex information, for instance, in educational and scientific contexts would appear to require a language which enables learners to comprehend and express complex relationships:

> It is simply more difficult to explain the process by which cells replicate, or the theory of evolution or the various factors contributing to global warming than it is to negotiate the purchase of onions or respond to an addition problem; therefore, the language required must be more complicated. (Snow & Uccelli, 2009, 123)

[4] In this summary, we focus only on those linguistic features of academic language that are valid for both German and English.

While register-based approaches have successfully drawn attention to the formal characteristics of AL and its functional foundation, some theoretical and methodological limitations remain unresolved. These will be elaborated in Section 3.

2.2. AL as a tool for thinking

As has been explained above, AL can be described in terms of the communicative functions it serves to fulfill. Furthermore, several scholars (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Cummins, 1979, 2000; Halliday, 1993; Redder, 2012; Schleppegrell, 2004; Vollmer & Thürmann, 2010; Zwiers, 2007) assume that AL functions also as a 'tool for thinking': it is by means of AL that a person becomes capable of executing complex or higher cognitive operations (e.g., abstraction, generalization, logical argumentation). We call this the epistemic function of AL (cf. Morek & Heller, 2012). From this perspective, language, cognition, and content learning are closely intertwined. Examining the epistemic function of AL is a genuinely psycholinguistic object of research.

The epistemic function of (academic) language has been primarily considered from two ankles: from a developmental perspective and in the realm of educational approaches focussing second language learners' difficulties in schooling.

One of the first scholars to draw attention to the interconnectedness of language development and cognitive development was Vygotskij (1986). He argues that particular cognitive concepts and ways of thinking are enabled by language as experienced in social interactions with others (also cf. Schleppegrell, 2004, 22f.). As far as "scientific concepts" (Vygotskij, 1986) and systematic, generalizable, abstract and hierarchical thinking are concerned, children are assumed to require interactive support that helps them to articulate and develop these ways of thinking.

In a similar vein, Halliday (see Section 2.1), argues that "learning science is the same thing as learning the language of science" (Halliday, 1993, 84). He points out that the linguistic features typical of AL – in contrast to everyday language – are "not just another way of saying the same thing", but rather, they represent a special(ized) way of thinking about the world (Halliday, 1993, 82). Thus, it is only the use of these linguistic features that makes possible certain complex cognitive operations which lie at the heart of scientific thinking. The ongoing acquisition of certain grammatical, lexical and discursive structures of AL may even function as a bootstrap into the system of communicative and cognitive practices of scientific communities (Ortner, 2009). On the other hand, the inadequate use of certain linguistic means that are deemed 'academic' may suggest that a novice has not fully 'understood' certain academic concepts. Thus, psycholinguistic approaches to AL use learners' linguistic 'mis-takes' as a window into the development of scientific thinking.

In the field of educational science, Cummins' (1979, 1980, 2000, 2008) has introduced the notions of "cognitive academic language proficiency" (CALP) vs. "basic interpersonal communication skills" (BICS). Thereby he aims at accounting for empirical findings on the discrepancy between immigrant children's L2 conversational fluency and their constant, comparatively poor performance in academic tasks in their L2 (e.g., IQ tests, cf. Cummins, 2000, 55). Cummins (1980) elaborates the distinction between BICS and CALP as two intersecting continua which at their poles cover a) the contextual support available in a given language activity (context-embedded vs. context-reduced), and b) the degree of cognitive demands (cognitively undemanding vs. cognitively demanding). While contextual support refers to the (non)availability of interactive, situational, paraverbal and nonverbal clues, the dimension of cognitive demands relates to "the amount of information that must be processed simultaneously or in close succession by the student in order to carry out the activity" (Cummins, 2000, 58). Cummins thus assumes that learning situations and school tasks require students to use language mainly in such cognitively demanding and decontextualized ways. Apart from the fact that mental processes are by their very nature not directly observable (Garfinkel, 1967), the bipolar distinction between BICS and CALP is not unequivocally supported by what goes on in actual classroom interaction (see, for instance, Leung, 2014). For instance, scientific thinking is often interactively accomplished in discussions. Therefore, Leung makes an important point in arguing that "a good deal more empirical investigation is needed to explore the question of what counts as academic language, and the case for considering a wider 'academic communication' perspective is strong" (Leung, 2014, 240).

2.3. The socio-symbolic function of AL

There is yet a third complex of functions of AL which is of particular relevance when issues of educational and hence social inequality are concerned, namely the *socio-symbolic functions* of AL (cf. Morek & Heller, 2012). The exclusive focus on communicative (Section 2.1) and/or cognitive aspects (Section 2.2) of AL risks neglecting the fact that the mastery of academic discourse practices is not only a developmental matter but also a question of self-identification and 'belonging' to the respective community of practice (Wenger, 1998). First, academic discourse represents "cultural capital", to use Bourdieu's term (1986). Although its display is much-valued in "gate-keeping institutions" (Erickson & Shultz, 1981) like schools, it is seldom explicitly taught but rather taken for granted in the sense of a "hidden curriculum" (cf. Christie, 1985). Thus, we refer to AL's contribution to the reproduction of social inequality by drawing on the metaphor of a 'ticket' (e.g., to school careers, to good grades, to educational attainment, or to job prospects). Second – and this is the other side of the same coin – the use of AL serves as a 'visiting card'. These two aspects of the *socio-symbolic function* of AL are developed in more detail in what follows.

2.3.1. AL as a ticket

It was Bourdieu (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977; Bourdieu et al., 1994; cf. Grenfell, 2011) more than anybody else who, in his work on social reproduction, drew our attention to the role of language in teaching contexts and, above all, in the cultural manifestation of educational inequality. He – and his associates – employ different terms to refer to particular styles of language use which represent cultural capital on a society's linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1991) and which, therefore, serve to reproduce power relations: Be it "academic discourse", used with reference to higher education (Bourdieu et al., 1994), "bourgeois parlance" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977), "scholarly discourse" (ibid.) or "authorized language" (Bourdieu, 1991) – all these notions have in common Bourdieu's basic assumption that specific language styles are part of a particular "habitus" (Bourdieu, 1991) which represents internalized modes of perception, thought and action. From this perspective, a particular 'academic habitus' is linked to higher social classes and is 'inherited' by means of the social background.

Building on a Bourdieuian framework, ethnographic (Lareau, 2003) and linguistic studies of language socialization in the family have shown that the discourse practices expected and valued at school are not part of every family's habitual communicative repertoire (for argumentation: Heller, 2012, 2014; for explanatory discourse: Morek, 2012; Kern & Quasthoff, 2007). Due to differing underlying "cultural logics of child rearing" (Lareau, 2003, 3) in different social classes, milieus, or families, not all children are equipped with the language and literacy practices needed for successful participation in schooling (Heath, 1983; Michaels & Cazden, 1986). Thus, while privileged children's habitualized modes of language use, according to Bourdieu, bear an "affinity" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, 129) to the language norms of educational systems, non-privileged children experience a "gap" (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977, 127) between the language valued in their homes and that in school.

However, educational inequality arises not simply from the students' heterogeneous out-of-school access to academic discourse practices. Rather, the language-related expectations of schools for the most part remain implicit and opaque (Vollmer & Thürmann, 2010, 109). What linguistic and discursive skills students are supposed to bring along or to acquire, is seldom made explicit either in language classes or in subject teaching (Duff, 2010; Lucero, 2012; Schleppegrell, 2001; Snow & Uccelli, 2009). Thus, we regard AL as part of the hidden curriculum of schools: teachers presume that AL skills are usually (to be) acquired outside school (i.e., in pupils' homes), and that the remaining language competencies necessary for successful learning soak in as if by osmosis from classroom interaction and school tasks (cf. Gantefort & Roth, 2010, 575). Nevertheless, these implicit language-related expectations are reflected in teachers' student assessments. Consequently, educational inequality is actually not reproduced by children's and adolescents' different access to school-related language experience in their language socialization outside school, but rather by means of the implicit normative assumptions of schools in their function of gate-keepers (Cekaite, 2012; Sarangi & Roberts, 2002).

2.3.2. AL as a visiting card

Previous research on AL has hardly – or, at best only marginally – taken into account that 'talking academically' (or, for that matter, 'writing academically') also functions as a framing device (Goffman, 1974) and is closely linked to positioning (Wortham, 2006) practices. It serves to construct interactional situations, social identities and role relations (cf. Morek, 2015; Morek & Heller, 2012; Preece, 2009).

As social-constructionist approaches to identity have convincingly shown, language is *the* means for the interactive presentation of self and others (Bucholtz & Hall, 2005; de Fina, Schiffrin, & Bamberg, 2006; Kotthoff & Spreckels, 2007) and contributes significantly to a person's building of a sense of identity (Lucius-Höne & Deppermann, 2000). This holds not only for mechanisms of membership categorization (Kotthoff & Spreckels, 2007; Sacks, 1995) but also for the choice of particular 'registers' or the instantiation of particular discourse practices that are associated, for instance, with academia. Drawing on AL always expresses an interlocutor's particular situational framing and a particular sense of self: s/he presents herself/himself as an educated and erudite person and defines the situation at hand as one in which elaborately presenting or debating an issue is relevant. Thus, it is not a coincidence that the everyday notions of 'academic language' (Phillips Galloway, Stude, & Uccelli, 2015) are closely linked with the idea of a 'better' or 'higher' language variety and 'the language of the educated' (Gogolin & Lange, 2010, 107–108).

It needs to be emphasized, therefore, that AL cannot only be regarded and described as a means of transferring knowledge (see Section 2.1) and as a tool for thinking (Section 2.2), but also as a vehicle for social positioning in the accomplishment of social situations. We grasp this sociosymbolic function of AL by means of the metaphor of a 'visiting card', which serves to display not only one's identity but also one's belonging to particular societal circles.

Functional-grammar and pragmatic approaches to AL have – at least peripherally – pointed to the "social dimensions" (Schleppegrell, 2001, 433) of AL use. Halliday (1993) for instance, in his work on scientific English, hints at instances "where the writer is following a fashion by which he seeks [. . .] to give extra value to his discourse by marking it off as the discourse of an intellectual elite" (Halliday, 1993, 70). However, he classifies these efforts as symptoms of a 'bad' command of scientific language and of its 'unnecessary' use; thus, Halliday refers to these efforts as "jargon" (Halliday, 1993, 84). In contrast, more recent literature acknowledges the necessity of stepping into an "authoritative stance" (Schleppegrell, 2001, 434) as a constitutive task in producing AL. This includes presenting oneself as a knowledgable and reliable expert (Morek, 2014) who proves her/his expertise to a potentially critical audience, a job which is accomplished to a large part by means of the respective language choices (Schleppegrell, 2001, 444; Snow & Uccelli, 2009, 123).

3. Shortcomings and limitations of previous research on AL

As the above survey shows, AL is a complex phenomenon and has been studied from multiple perspectives. The analyses of the functional foundations of AL's linguistic structures (for a concise description see Schleppegrell, 2004) have contributed significantly to making AL an object of linguistic and educational research. Moreover they have given important directions for its teaching and learning (Schleppegrell, 2004; Snow & Uccelli, 2009). However, our review of previous research also brings to light some open questions and limitations of previous findings, three of which are of crucial relevance for our purposes:

(1) Register-based approaches – in their focus on systematic, generalizable features of academic language – run the risk of not sufficiently analyzing actual contextualized instantiations of academic language by language users themselves.
(2) While previous research has predominantly drawn on written texts as empirical basis for describing the functions and features of academic language, oral realizations of academic language have not only been neglected but rashly equated with written realizations of academic language.
(3) Largely neglected have also been the sociosymbolic aspects of academic language.

In the following, we will elaborate each of these aspects before we attempt to outline a comprehensive understanding of academic discourse as situated practice that aims at remedying the above shortcomings (Section 4).

3.1. Focus on AL's structures as an idealized, abstract register

Register conceptions approach academic language from a structural perspective and aim at identifying lexical, syntactic and textual features that are typical of academic, 'decontextualized', formal discourse (cf. Section 2.1). The underlying assumption is that academic language can be conceptualized primarily as linguistic competence which can systematically be taught in educational programs (Chamot & O'Malley, 1994; Gibbons, 2002; Lengyel, 2010; Schleppegrell, 2004). However, these approaches are premised on a rather static notion of context, i.e., they regard contexts as well as the corresponding linguistic norms or expectations as existing prior to or independent from the communicative activities of the interlocutors. The contexts, it is held, 'require' a certain register. In other words, registers are unidirectionally modeled as context-*dependent*. The linkage between situation and register, however, is not theoretically explicated (Agha, 2006, 36). Thus, the question remains how the "*becoming-a-context-for something*" (Auer, 1996, 20) is actually accomplished. In rigorously abstracting not only from actual instances of language use but also from the language users themselves (cf. Schleppegrell, 2004), previous research on academic language has ignored that contexts and language-related norms have to be regarded as interactive achievements (Gumperz, 2000).

When one starts from the question of what communicative demands and expectations students need to master to successfully participate in classroom discourse, the relation between situation and register is, however, anything but trivial. Therefore, a concept of *academic language* should be grounded in a social-constructive and dynamic understanding of context which proceeds from the assumption that the interactants themselves (e.g., teachers and pupils) contribute to the construction of contexts. They make their understanding of the context mutually available by providing contextualization cues (Gumperz, 2000). Thus, contexts are constantly shaped, maintained and sometimes changed.

With regard to academic language such a dynamic notion of contextualization opens up new analytical perspectives which do not merely focus on learners but also include teachers as important actors in educational settings. In particular, a dynamic notion of context draws attention to the question of how the actors themselves instantiate (im- or explicitly) and interpret, acknowledge or suspend linguistic norms and ideologies (cf. Davies, 2000; Kroskrity, 2006) for communicative practices in educational settings.

In a similar vein, Agha, in developing a dynamic notion of register, argues that the choice of a certain register presupposes that the interactants have been socialized into "systems of value", i.e., that they ascribe values to certain language uses. In conclusion, being a competent participant in academic discourse practices not only encompasses a certain repertoire of lexical and syntactic forms but also "metapragmatic models" (Agha, 2006, 26) about what kinds of language uses are generally expected by certain social/institutional actors. Thus, studying registers "requires attention to reflexive social processes whereby such models are formulated and disseminated in social life and become available for use in interaction by individuals" (Agha, 2006, 23).

3.2. Written language bias in AL research

Just as in general linguistics, the majority of previous research on AL has also been implicitly informed by a "written language bias" (Linell, 1982). It is often assumed that AL is characterized by a "written mode of language, even if the actual

discourse itself is oral; it shows characteristics of formal, monological and textual communication" (Gogolin, 2009, 97).[5] In most cases, however, this premise is not grounded on a systematic examination of oral academic practices (see critique in Leung, 2014). For the most part, inventories of AL features (cf. Section 2.1) have been empirically based on written data, e.g., math text problems (Gogolin & Lange, 2010), school book texts (Schleppegrell, 2004), student and expert essays including revised versions (Snow & Uccelli, 2009), and seminar papers (Ortner, 2009). However, Steinmüller (2008) analyses university classes in engineering with a focus on grammatical features and finds that spoken AL differs widely from written language as described by traditional research on language for special purposes.

Besides, the linguistic features of written materials are sometimes contrasted with oral interaction in informal, everyday contexts. Such as comparison may serve illustrative function. Yet it is, from our perspective, highly problematic since fundamentally different contexts, modalities, practices and participant constellations are compared. As a consequence, the assumption that AL is *generally* characterized by a written mode or conceptual literacy risks ignoring that talk, including classroom discourse, is always bound to the particular conditions of orality. These include the physical availability of the We-Here-Now (Bühler, 1934), i.e., the transitory and multimodal quality of oral practices, and also specific communicative mechanisms such as recipient design and mutual display (Sacks, Schegloff, & Jefferson, 1974). Studies inspired by conversation analysis on classroom discourse have reconstructed specific interactive practices, e.g., IRE-sequences (initiation – reply – evaluation; cf. Hellermann, 2003; Mehan, 1979) that do not require students to produce globally expanded explanations or arguments, but merely ask them to fill in the slot provided by the teacher. These interactive patterns are highly functional for maintaining the institutional roles of 'teacher' and 'student' and for dealing with the institutional purpose of evaluation. Since it is of great importance for students' education success to participate in such routines, such interactive patterns should be regarded as an important part of academic communication in the mode of orality.

3.3. Neglect of the socio-symbolic aspects of AL

The sociosymbolic function of AL has not been a major focus of most previous research. While educational linguistics has recently seen a growing number of didactic suggestions on what (future) teachers need to know about AL, a systematic *reflection* on the socio-symbolic value of specific modes of speaking and writing (see Section 2.3) remains yet to be encouraged. For instance, difficulties in acquiring and performing academic discourse practices may be rooted in the unwillingness or inability to adopt just such an expert stance and to identify with such a position (Benwell & Stokoe, 2002; Rampton, 2006; White & Lowenthal, 2011; also see Section 2.3). This has been impressively documented by ethnographic (Preece, 2009) and ethnomethodological studies (Benwell & Stokoe, 2002) on students' interactional positionings with respect to the language and literacy practices in higher education. Findings show how learners distance themselves from the language practices which are categorized as 'other' in order to preserve their 'non-academic' social identities (e.g., friendship, gender, etc.). For instance, Preece examined how black and ethnic-minority students participating in university special classes on academic writing ridiculed the technique of producing drafts (e.g., "and then you fucking read over what you wrote", Preece, 2009, 69), while at the same time performing laddish masculinity. Considering the numerous feelings of inadequacy that students – especially those coming from non-privileged backgrounds – experience, those positionings, according to Preece, have a face-saving and compensatory function.

As for secondary education, Harren (2011) observes how adolescents in biology lessons do not only draw on colloquial expressions instead of technical terms but also explicitly reject the use of 'complicated' terms. On the other hand, studies on classroom interaction have shown that teachers also distance themselves from AL (Harren, 2011; Rampton, 2006), e.g., by projecting this mode of speaking as a distinctly 'smart' or 'posh' language. In doing so, they characterize the use of AL as speaking with others' voices and invite students to an interlude of temporarily and markedly taking up academic stances (Morek & Heller, 2012, 81f.). Findings of this sort underline the sociosymbolic function of AL and point to the need to reflect upon this function for educational linguistics as well as (future) teachers.

In terms of the teaching and learning of academic writing, students' difficulty is not only – or not at all – to be located in their lack of sensitivity to stylistic differences or in their AL *skills* but in conflicting identities and norms of language use as characteristic of their homes and peers as opposed to educational institutions (Kotthoff, 2015; Morek, 2015). In this respect, Kamberelis (1995) has pointed out the interrelation of genres, social spheres and identity construction. "Learning the genres requisite for becoming a competent speaker and writer within a particular social formation seems to involve much more than the induction into a new set of discursive practices. Rather, it entails a process of identity reconstruction" (1995, 163). Thus, Kamberelis' and our perspectives are in line with a socially situated concept of (language) learning proposed, for instance, by Lave and Wenger (1991), who emphasize that learning "involves the whole person" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, 53), and therefore can not be separated from the building of identities.

In conclusion, the socio-symbolic function of AL deserves to be taken into account more systematically whenever issues of the teaching and learning of AL and the manifestation of educational inequality are concerned.

[5] As an equivalent for "written mode" the term "conceptual literacy" (Koch & Oesterreicher, 1994) is used. Koch and Oesterreicher distinguish a medial and the conceptual aspect of 'orality' and 'literacy'. The conceptual aspect refers to issues of linguistic variation, "pointed to in research hazily as 'colloquial language/literary language', 'informal/formal', 'levels of elaborateness', etc." (Koch & Oesterreicher, 1994, 587).

4. Academic discourse as situated practice

With regard to the interactive, discursive and institutional nature of what has usually been termed "academic language" (or "the language of schooling" and similar notions, cf. Section 1), we have recently suggested the notion of "academic discourse practices" (Morek & Heller, 2012). We draw upon the concept of *practices*, as put forward in ethnomethodology (Garfinkel, 1967), the sociology of knowledge (Bergmann & Luckmann, 1995) and anthropological linguistics (Hanks, 1996) and thereby relate to socioculturally evolved, routinized procedural solutions for recurrent communicative problems. Thus our focus, when considering academic language, shifts from a structural, system-based perspective to the actual language users, their communicative tasks in particular social and institutional contexts and the pre-patterned solutions to these tasks as part of a community's stock of knowledge. By distinguishing between written and oral practices we do not make a priori assumptions about the generalizability of AL features that have been established predominantly on the basis of written data (Section 3.2). Instead, we emphasize the need to pay more attention to spoken interactions in educational institutions (Solomon & Rhodes, 1995; Leung, 2014) as they represent the primary medium in which novices engage in exchanges with teachers. It is only once we know more about the nature of oral academic discourse practices – including the question what linguistic norms are actually and audibly established in the classroom – that we can determine parallels and differences between the oral and the written mode.

By *discourse* (instead of 'language' as in 'academic language') we point to the fact that participants do not – either in informal or in educational contexts – communicate with each other by simply producing words and sentences but by orienting to and accomplishing discursive activities above the sentence-level (Hausendorf & Quasthoff, 1996, 3). For instance, participants orient to the communicative task of negotiating divergent viewpoints and, for doing so, employ the discursive practice of argumentation. One seminal approach to describe the pre-fabricated structure and situated use of such discourse practices above the sentence-level on different analytical planes (e.g., interactive organization, internal structuring, particular syntactical and lexical choices) is the genre theory situated within the sociology of knowledge (Knoblauch & Günthner, 1995; Quasthoff, Heller, & Morek, submitted for publication). When it comes to academic discourse practices, genres that are geared toward knowledge construction and knowledge transfer play a particularly central role. Herein lies what we have called the communicative function of academic discourse practices (see Section 2.1).

Genres are never accomplished in an empty space, but are contextualized within and for particular tasks and settings. For example, the genre of argumentation is realized in different ways and with different local functions in and out of school (Heller, 2012). Starting from the question of what discourse skills are needed to successfully participate in learning and education, a practice-based approach allows for the inclusion of the rich functions and institutional embeddings that students need to become acquainted with. Figure 1 gives an overview of our concept of academic discourse practices, their functions and the different dimensions of their acquisition, which will be outlined in what follows.

No matter in which context a genre is realized, three general tasks have always to be dealt with by the participants: (1) contextualization, (2) textualization, (3) marking (Quasthoff, 2009). *Contextualization* refers to the task to deal with conditional relevancies, e.g., to discern – either in the oral or written mode – which kind of second turn/discourse unit/text is expected and to establish such communicative contexts oneself (e.g., self-initiate an argument; write an argumentative letter). *Textualization* refers to the necessity to build sequential and global coherence and to produce a certain genre-specific thematic organizational structure. *Marking* refers to the task of making visible for the co-participant (or reader) what type of genre is underway and establishing coherence by genre-specific verbal, paraverbal, nonverbal, or graphical means (i.e., direct speech in stories; conventionalized subheadings in a scientific article).

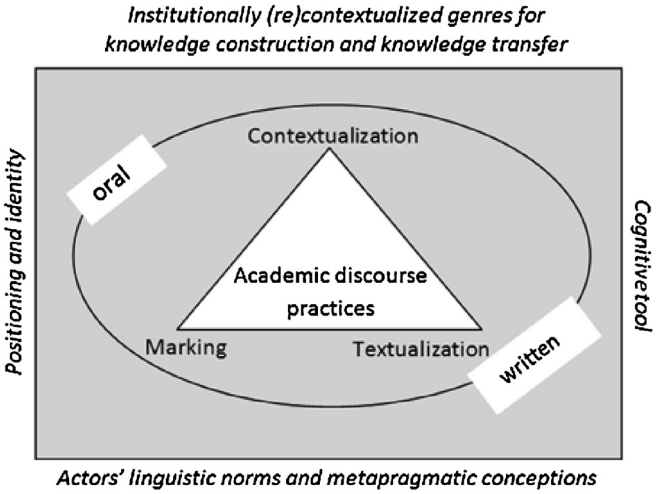

Fig. 1. Academic discourse as situated practice.

Most previous studies on AL have put a focus on the latter two dimensions. However, as we have shown elsewhere (Morek & Heller, 2012), some students' difficulties in participating successfully in oral or written classroom tasks is not only a matter of textualization or marking. Rather, these difficulties can be traced back to their inability to 'contextualize', i.e., to adequately interpret social and communicative contexts in terms of their local and/or global sequential implications for the utterances to be produced. Similarly, Schleppegrell (2004, 11) in her seminal work on the language of schooling has pointed out that while most school children are familiar with the linguistic means that are needed to create a decontextualized, verbally explicit discourse unit or text, some children lack the ability of realizing in what situation(s) explicitness and decontextualization are expected. *Contextualization competence*, therefore, should be given much more weight a) when analytically describing academic practices within educational contexts, and b) when modeling and teaching academic discourse skills (cf. Morek & Heller, 2012).

The above implies that the actors' linguistic norms and metapragmatic conceptions (Section 3.1) have to be taken into account as well. Methodologically it is important to acknowledge the fact that linguistic norms are established, negotiated, and contested in actual interactions. At the same time these norms are not accessible and cannot simply be examined through the use of questionnaires or interviews of the respective agents. Thus, what is needed is the empirical reconstruction of how teachers' and students' (divergent) norms and expectations manifest in interaction (Heller, 2015; Kern et al., 2015): What kind of linguistic expectations do teachers interactively make relevant and how do students recognize, i.e., contextualize these norms?

Finally, while taking into account the communicative and epistemic function of academic discourse practices, our conception attaches major importance to their socio-symbolic functions (cf. Sections 2.3 and 3.3 above) and acknowledges that social identities and positionings play a crucial role not only in the use of AL but also in its acquisition. The last four of this special issue's articles (Antilla-Garza and Cook-Gumperz, 2015; Kotthoff, 2015; Morek, 2015; Preece, 2015) provide empirical underpinnings of the relationship between academic discourse practices and positioning practices (see below). To sum up: By 'academic discourse practices' we refer to spoken and/or written communicative genres that are situated in educational activities and serve (institutional) purposes of knowledge construction and knowledge transfer. At the same time those practices can be used epistemically ('cognitive tool'), and they indicate social identities associated with a good education ('positioning and identity').

5. The articles in this issue

The contributors to this issue come from different disciplines, such as (socio)linguistics, educational science, and language teaching. They investigate academic discourse practices in such different age groups and contexts as classroom discourse, peer interactions and teacher–parent conferences. They all share the assumption that being able to participate successfully in academic language practices requires more than having lexical and syntactical means at one's disposal. Thus, they pursue a practice-based approach and explore interactive and linguistic structures of discourse activities (explanations, reasoned argumentation, debating, narratives) in actual contexts. The discussion section by O'Connor and Michaels (2015) rounds off the special issue.

5.1. Invoking and talking about norms of academic discourse

The first two articles of the special issue adopt a conversation analytic approach and investigate norms of academic language from the perspective of the participants. Both draw on rich sets of video recordings of authentic classroom interaction, focusing on morning circles as an interactional routine frequently found in grade one (Kern et al., 2015) and mathematics and language lessons in grade five (Heller, 2015). Both studies complement each other as they demonstrate that the norms teachers invoke differ with respect to age and curricular tasks. Complementing this perspective, Phillips Galloway et al. (2015) focus on students' concepts of academic discourse norms.

Starting from the observation that the form of students' explanations and argumentations frequently becomes an object of talk, *Heller* (2015) examines discursive norms, i.e., normative expectations concerning the global textual structuring and linguistic formatting of explanations or arguments. She analyzes in which conversational contexts and with what interactive procedures discursive norms are made relevant. Three procedures are reconstructed which lie along a continuum, from implicit to explicit variants: marking a norm violation, jointly developing a norm-congruent discursive practice ex negativo, and modeling a positive example. Heller argues that the procedures described are varyingly well-adapted for the students' heterogeneous discursive practices and experiences. Whereas previous research emphasized the relevance of formal linguistic aspects, Heller's results point to the fact that other discursive aspects such as certain practices of genre-specific thematic structuring are of equal importance.

Kern et al. (2015) reconstruct linguistic and social norms that occur in 'morning circles' in primary school. As opposed to Heller, who found genre-related norms, the linguistic norms made relevant in the context of the morning circle involve the production of grammatical, lexical or phrasal features and thus refer to superordinate norms of 'correct language'. In contrast, social norms concerned truthfulness, politeness and adherence to the given agenda. The authors argue that the situative actualization of linguistic norms has to be understood in close connection with the emergence of social norms. For instance, 'correct' linguistic forms, such as a 'complete clause', are employed to accomplish certain social norms. All in all,

the results indicate that children receive instructions which orient them to practices and norms relevant in other contexts and activities (e.g., writing) than the ones appropriate for everyday communication.

Phillips Galloway et al. (2015) draw on a pair of studies to explore the extent to which adolescents are able to talk about and reflect on academic language. Focusing on upper elementary and middle school students' written and oral reflections on the language of school, they examine which linguistic features of the academic register students attend to and whether metalinguistic skills play a role in the acquisition of academic discourse competence. Furthermore, they provide insight into students' internalized value judgments about language. Notably, the conversation analytic reconstruction of the multiparty discussions reveals that more elaborate oral reflections were the result of students building on the language of others. The authors discuss this finding with respect to the question of how classroom-based discussions of language might be improved and supported.

5.2. Academic discourse practices and social positioning

The remaining four articles of the special issue all address the interrelations between academic discourse practices on the one hand and social positionings linked to such discourse practices on the other hand. They thus put a special emphasis on the socio-symbolic function of academic language, i.e., its role in constructing interactional and social identities. Therefore, elder 'subjects' for whom issues of identity management are particularly vital, are the object of study in these articles, in fact preadolescents (Morek, 2015), university students (Preece, 2015; Antilla & Cook-Gumperz, 2015) and adults in the role of parents (Kotthoff, 2015).

Morek (2015) examines students' out-of-school experience in terms of academic discourse practices. Focusing on explanatory discourse in preadolescents' family talk and peer talk, she analyzes how interactants locally establish the need to provide explanations in conversation, and how they negotiate interactional identities, and take epistemic stances while explaining something to another. Drawing on fine-grained micro-analysis, Morek demonstrates how differences in communities' communicative repertoires are brought about in the local details of everyday talk. Findings show that for some discourse communities, explanatory talk is linked to the interactive disclosure of ignorance, irrelevance and inability to explicate knowledge. Others habitually draw on explanatory talk to establish knowledgeable, authoritative stances which are typical of academic discourse. Such differences indicate that being able to provide explanations in classroom talk might also be a question of identificatory (in)compatibility with regard to students' out-of-school interactional experiences and identities.

In her ethnographic study, *Preece* (2015) examines positioning practices of working class students from linguistic minority communities in higher education. She focuses on the socio-symbolic function of academic language for the participants in the context of an academic writing program. Her analyses of interactions in the writing class and interviews show how these students' mappings of their encounters with academic language (re)produce images of themselves as being deficient and 'remedial users' of academic language. Thus, as Preece points out, the ascribed institutional identities neglect these students' competencies as users of different languages and different varieties (e.g., London English; standard English) of English. Drawing conclusions from her empirical findings, Preece argues that higher education should attend to the multilingual and bi-dialectal identities of working class linguistic minority students in order to build bridges into the academic world.

Antilla and Cook-Gumperz (2015) also focus on bilingual high school students from low-income backgrounds. They examine students' discourse practices in the context of a bilingual debate program which aims at fostering public speaking and reasoned argumentation skills. Drawing on ethnography and interactional sociolinguistics, the authors show how bilingual students appropriate the monolingual norms of high school debates by introducing bilingual practices. They switch not only between languages (English/Spanish) but also between formal and informal registers with respect to the situation at hand. The authors argue that the minority students display competencies in handling the language expectations of debating while presenting themselves as bilinguals. Thus, the bilingual debating program does provide an example of building bridges between academic discourse practices and students' identities.

Finally, although *Kotthoff's* (2015) article does not explicitly deal with academic language it provides particularly interesting insights into the socio-symbolic function of discourse practices within the realm of education and schooling. From the perspective of ethnomethodology and interactional sociolinguistics, Kotthoff examines narrative practices in teacher–parent-interactions during school consultations. Fine-grained analyses show how teachers and parents establish common ground in assessing the absent child's competencies and behavior and how parents interactively perform a school-oriented habitus. However, findings suggest that such narrative accounts which portray the parents as achievement-oriented are primarily constructed by middle-class parents.

In their final discussion, O'Connor and Michaels (2015) discuss implications of the collected papers for language education in schools across subjects. Reflecting on the findings of the collected papers, they ask "What can micro-analysis tell us about fostering academic language?" They emphasize the value of fine-grained micro-analytic reconstruction to enrich our understanding of the complexities of academic language that go far beyond the management of lexical and syntactical learning. In this regard, they stress the fundamental role of the socio-symbolic dimension of academic discourse practices. They draw on findings from an intervention study in low-income urban schools that focusses on training teachers to use discursive techniques for academically productive talk. Their analysis demonstrates the difficulties some students might encounter in detecting and fulfilling the genre demands of providing reasons. Also they show how much interactive effort it takes to help students understand such discursive expectations and to adopt positionings that are linked to explaining and

providing reasons. However, their observations illustrate how teachers can help students to identify with the epistemic and social positionings relevant for situated academic discourse practices.

While previous research has mainly focused on AL in the written mode (see Section 3.2) the special issue at hand contributes to our understanding of *oral* practices of academic discourse. In exploring spoken interaction in knowledge-oriented contexts the present studies acknowledge the fact that a big part of time spent in classrooms is devoted not only to writing texts but also to *talking* about subject matters. Secondly, all contributions shift the focus from the products of academic language (e.g., written essays, textbooks, etc.) to the actors and their practices in dealing with academic language norms and demands. Consequently, individual positionings in the accomplishment of academic discourse come into view as well.

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