

## Submissions Abstract Book - All Papers (Included Submissions)

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Talking about talk: tutor and student expectations of oracy skills in higher education

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**Research Domain:** Learning, teaching and assessment (LTA)

**Abstract:** Although participation in academic speaking events is key to developing disciplinary understanding, students for whom English is a second language may have a more limited access to these learning events due to an increasingly dialogic higher education pedagogy which places considerable demands on their oracy skills. Drawing on the Oracy Skills Framework we explore disciplinary tutors' and ESL students' expectations of oracy skills required for disciplinary study. We found that disciplinary tutors placed importance on the cognitive dimension of oracy skills such as argumentation and asking questions, whilst students placed importance on linguistic accuracy. We argue that a divergence of expectations and lack of shared terminology can result in compromising students' access to valuable classroom dialogue. The presentation concludes with a number of practical suggestions through which both tutors and students can increase their understanding of oracy skills.

**Paper:** In this presentation we will report on a study in which we explored tutor and student expectations of the academic speaking skills required for developing understanding of disciplinary knowledge.

As we move to more interactive, dialogic teaching and learning approaches in higher education (Heron, 2019), expectations of students' academic speaking skills have never been higher and are therefore under considerable scrutiny. Academic speaking plays a key role in negotiation of meaning in learning (Mauranen, 2012), demonstrating understanding of the discipline (Arkoudis & Doughney, 2014) and socialising students into new disciplinary discourses. Academic speaking permeates all aspects of disciplinary practice and shapes and is shaped by the expectations of both the discipline and the academics (Neumann, 2001).

In a dialogic classroom, speaking activities can become 'high stakes' and whilst all students may find academic speaking contexts challenging (Remedios et al, 2008), academic speaking demands can be especially overwhelming for English as a Second Language (ESL) students who are often reluctant to participate for a number of sociocultural and linguistic reasons (Engin, 2017; Mack, 2012).

In this study we used the term oracy to describe academic speaking and to provide a more nuanced understanding of skills required for students to access the learning conversations in the higher education classroom. Oracy is widely understood in the compulsory school context (Gaunt & Stott, 2018), and is an emerging concept in the higher education (HE) literature (Dippold et al, 2019; Heron, 2019). In the study we drew on The Oracy Skills Framework, developed by Mercer, Warwick and

Ahmed (2017) to inform our conceptual framework and data analysis.

Whilst a number of studies have explored tutor perspectives, student voices in understanding oracy needs have been largely absent from the literature. The study on which we report illuminates tutor and student expectations of oracy skills to identify convergences and divergences of perspectives with a view to establishing key oracy skills required for access to the learning conversations and the development of disciplinary understanding.

Our research questions were:

Research question 1: What are tutor and student expectations of oracy skills in disciplinary studies?

Research question 2: Do tutors and students view oracy as oracy as competence or oracy for learning?

The participants were disciplinary tutors and former pre-sessional English course students from two UK universities. Data were gathered from a questionnaire which was based on the Oracy Skills Framework (Mercer et al, 2017).

Findings from the study revealed a divergence of tutor and student expectations of oracy skills, highlighting the need for explicit discussion of what disciplinary academic speaking involves, and what language skills students require to be able to participate in classroom dialogue. Students' access to the valuable learning classroom dialogue may be inhibited by their own linguistic challenges, a reluctance of tutors to support their language, a lack of awareness of both parties of the oracy skills required to participate in classroom dialogue and fundamentally a lack of shared terminology with which to discuss oracy these expectations.

The presentation concludes with a number of recommendations for practice for both disciplinary tutors and students. Of particular note is that the suggestions will support students from all backgrounds, regardless of linguistic background (Dippold et al, 2019).

## References

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