

STRUCTURAL AND COMMUNICATIVE CHARACTERISTICS OF THE ACADEMIC DISCUSSION GENRE IN SPOKEN ENGLISH INTERACTION

Parashchuk V. Yu.

*Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor,
Associate Professor at the Department of Germanic Languages, World Literature and their
Teaching Methodology
Volodymyr Vynnychenko Central Ukrainian State University
Shevchenko str., 1, Kropyvnytskyi, Ukraine
orcid.org/0000-0003-4007-4437
v.y.parashchuk@cuspu.edu.ua*

Oliinyk O. S.

*Candidate of Philological Sciences, Associate Professor,
Associate Professor at the Department of Translation, Applied and General Linguistics
Volodymyr Vynnychenko Central Ukrainian State University
Shevchenko str., 1, Kropyvnytskyi, Ukraine
orcid.org/0000-0002-5701-7132
o.s.oliinyk@cuspu.edu.ua*

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This study aims to depict the structural and communicative characteristics of academic discussion as a spoken genre, with a focus on its relevance in educational contexts. Academic discussion is defined as a structured, interactionally complex genre that requires both linguistic proficiency and strategic discourse management. It is a critical but underexplored genre of spoken interaction in terms of structure and communicative function in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) contexts.

Drawing on genre theory, dialogic teaching, sociocultural discourse theory, and frameworks such as the CEFR and Accountable Talk, the study synthesizes recent literature (2010–2024) on discourse structure, talk moves, and interactional competence. A thematic analysis was conducted to identify recurrent features of academic discussion, particularly content-oriented and metacommunicative talk moves.

From the structural perspective, academic discussion as a communicative event exhibits a three-phase macrostructure: Initiation, Development, and Closure, each governed by distinct interactional norms. From the communicative perspective, academic discussion operates on dual levels: disciplinary knowledge-building through content-oriented talk moves (CTMs), and interactional management of communication via metacommunicative talk moves (MCTMs). CTMs explore, construct, or evaluate the academic content under discussion. MCTMs manage the discussion itself, thus guiding, repairing, or regulating the interaction. A taxonomy of MCTMs is suggested that incorporates talk moves as follows: pressing for reasoning and clarification, encouraging to support ideas with examples/evidence, building on and/or challenging a partner's idea/evidence, agreeing or disagreeing, revoicing/paraphrasing, keeping the channels open, marking good reasoning /contributions, and keeping the goal or topic in mind. They are mapped to the principles of accountability to critical thinking, accurate knowledge and discursive community.

The findings have wider implications for educational settings, where academic discussion is a pivotal genre of oral interaction. Future research should empirically validate the proposed taxonomy and develop assessment tools based on it.

СТРУКТУРНІ ТА КОМУНІКАТИВНІ ХАРАКТЕРИСТИКИ АКАДЕМІЧНОЇ ДИСКУСІЇ ЯК ЖАНРУ УСНОЇ АНГЛОМОВНОЇ ВЗАЄМОДІЇ

Паращук В. Ю.

*кандидат філологічних наук, доцент,
доцент кафедри германських мов, зарубіжної літератури
та методик їхнього навчання
Центральноукраїнський державний університет
імені Володимира Винниченка
вул. Шевченка, 1, Кропивницький, Україна
orcid.org/0000-0003-4007-4437
v.y.parashchuk@cuspu.edu.ua*

Олійник О. С.

*кандидат філологічних наук, доцент,
доцент кафедри перекладу, прикладної та загальної лінгвістики
Центральноукраїнський державний університет
імені Володимира Винниченка
вул. Шевченка, 1, Кропивницький, Україна
orcid.org/0000-0002-5701-7132
o.s.oliinyk@cuspu.edu.ua*

Ключові слова: усний академічний жанр, академічна дискусія, відповідальна розмова, типізовані риторичні дії, комунікативні ходи, орієнтовані на зміст, метакомунікативні ходи, підготовка вчителів англійської мови як іноземної.

Дослідження спрямоване на з'ясування й опис структурних і комунікативних характеристик академічної дискусії як жанру усної взаємодії з акцентом на її значущість в освітньому дискурсі. Академічна дискусія визначається як структурований, інтеракційно складний жанр, який вимагає як мовної компетентності, так і стратегічного менеджменту дискурсу. Вона є важливим, але не досить вивченим жанром усної взаємодії в аспекті структурної організації та комунікативної специфіки в контекстах вивчення англійської мови як іноземної (EFL).

Грунтуючись на теорії жанру, діалогічного навчання, соціокультурній теорії дискурсу, вимогах Загальноєвропейських Рекомендацій із мовної освіти (CEFR) та концепції Accountable Talk, дослідження узагальнює наукові джерела (2010–2024 рр.), які стосуються структури дискурсу, мовленнєвих дій та інтеракційної компетентності. Тематичний аналіз проведений із метою виявлення типізованих рис академічної дискусії, зокрема змістовно-орієнтованих і метакомунікативних дій (ходів).

У плані структури академічна дискусія як комунікативна подія має трифазну макроструктуру: ініціація, розвиток і завершення, кожна з яких регулюється специфічними нормами взаємодії. У комунікативному аспекті академічна дискусія функціонує на двох рівнях: побудові дисциплінарного знання шляхом використання змістовно-орієнтованих комунікативних ходів (CTMs) та управління комунікацією засобами метакомунікативних ходів (MCTMs). CTMs уможливають аналіз, синтез або оцінювання змісту, який обговорюється. MCTMs керують самою дискусією, спрямовуючи, коригуючи або регулюючи взаємодію.

Запропонована таксономія метакомунікативних ходів включає такі їх типи, як: прохання надати обґрунтування / пояснення, заохочення до підкріплення ідей прикладами / доказами, підкріплення або заперечення ідей / доказу співрозмовника, згода або незгода, переформулювання / перефразування, тримання каналів комунікації відкритими, відзначення якісного мислення / внеску до дискусії та тримання фокусу уваги на меті або темі обговорення. Вони співвідносяться з принципами діалогічного навчання й орієнтовані на критичне мислення, точне знання та учасників дискусії. Отримані результати мають значення для опису жанрів усної інтеракції, особливо в освітньому дискурсі, де академічна дискусія виступає як один із ключових жанрів усного мовлення. Перспективи дослідження вбачаються в емпіричному підтвердженні запропонованої таксономії та розробці інструментів для її оцінювання.

Introduction. In current research, genre theory has become a central framework for analyzing academic discourse, offering insights into how language use is shaped by social and communicative contexts [Hyland, 2004]. Hyland defines genres as “abstract, socially recognized ways of using language... to achieve specific communicative purposes in specific contexts” [Hyland, 2004, p. 5]. One underexplored spoken genre is academic discussion, defined as “a form of spoken interaction in which participants collaboratively construct knowledge through the exchange of ideas, arguments, and evidence” [Alexander, 2008, p. 92].

Despite its pedagogical importance, academic discussion remains relatively under-researched, especially in comparison to written genres like research articles or essays [Hyland, 2009]. Yet, academic discussions involve not only fluency and linguistic accuracy but also the ability to structure discourse, manage interaction, and facilitate meaning-making as moderators, skills critical for EFL learners and pre-service teachers.

The Companion Volume of the Common European Framework of Reference (CEFR/CV) presents various types of spoken interaction, including formal discussions and debates, which, while not labeled as genres in linguistic terms, serve genre-like functions in teaching [Council of Europe, 2020]. However, systematic descriptions of academic discussion as a spoken genre, namely, its structure, specific communicative tools, are scarce.

This study seeks to address that gap by analyzing the genre-specific discourse features of academic discussion in English. The **research objectives** are to characterize the academic discussion genre-specific structural phases, and communicative tools, thereby contributing to more effective frameworks for spoken academic interaction in EFL contexts. Thus, the **object** of this study is academic discussion as a genre of oral interaction in educational settings, while its research **subject** encompasses the structural and communicative characteristics of the genre under analysis.

Literature Review. In existing research, academic discussion is explored from dual perspectives as both a target for communicative development and a tool for dialogic pedagogy [Fernández-Fernández, 2021; Sánchez, & Athanases, 2023; Zhang, & Zhang, 2020]. Drawing on the CEFR’s model of spoken interaction, communicative competence involves managing turn-taking, maintaining coherence, and using language strategically to achieve communicative goals [Council of Europe, 2020, p. 71, p. 85]. These descriptors align with the structural and interactional demands of academic discussion, where facilitators must coordinate talk, guide transitions, and encourage participation.

Within a framework grounded in communicative competence, and interactional competence, academic discussions offer a platform to practice the discourse skills required for both spoken interaction and classroom teacher talk. From a dialogic teaching perspective, Alexander [Alexander, 2008] asserts that meaningful classroom talk is not merely about linguistic participation but about enabling students to engage in reciprocal, cumulative, and purposeful dialogue.

Michaels, O’Connor, & Resnick introduce the framework of accountable talk, defining it as “talk that is responsive to and builds on what others have said, demands evidence for claims, and uses rigorous reasoning” [Michaels, O’Connor, & Resnick, 2008, p. 2]. The idea of three kinds of accountability: to the discursive community, to standards of reasoning (critical thinking), and to accurate knowledge (explicitly based on facts, written texts, or other information) is especially relevant to academic discussion.

Mercer’s understanding of exploratory talk, in which “partners present ideas as clearly and as explicitly as necessary for them to become shared and jointly evaluated” [Mercer, 2000, p. 98], reflects the nature of academic discussion providing an ideal format for participants to co-construct understanding, build on each other’s ideas, and challenge assumptions respectfully.

Applying the rhetorical genre studies (RGS) definition of genre as “typified rhetorical actions based in recurrent situations” [Miller, 1984, p. 156–157] to academic discussion, the question arises what typical means of constructing knowledge and identity the participants resort to in academic discussion as a recurrent event.

According to the Social Pragmatic Model of talk-as-social interaction [Turnbull, 2003, p. 66], talk is orderly: it “proceeds over time, turn by turn with a sequential alternation of speakers/participants [Atwood, Turnbull, & Carpendale, 2010, p. 360]. Three orders of sequential relations are of particular importance for the analysis of academic discussion: the turn-taking (and turn-creation) system; question-answer adjacency pairs, and repair sequences (mechanisms by which participants manage mutual understanding) [op. cit.].

Within this interactional structure, typified rhetorical actions emerge as talk moves to realize the recurring communicative demands of academic discussion participants [Michaels, & O’Connor, 2012]. According to Michaels and O’Connor, talk moves are “specific ways of talking that teachers can use to help students participate in ...sense-making”, including revoicing a student’s contribution, pressing for clarification or reasoning, asking others to respond, and prompting elaboration [op. cit.]. Aligning this definition with Conversation Analysis and Speech Act Theory tradition, talk moves actually embody speech

acts with a definite pragmatic function embedded within turns at talk. Many talk moves (e.g. asking for evidence, revoicing as a question) form one part of an adjacency pair (e.g., question–answer, clarification–response). They serve to initiate or respond to adjacency pairs (e.g., *question* → *reasoning*, or *challenge* → *defense*). Thus, talk moves actively shape spoken interaction, reflecting the ordered turn-taking system. In case of academic discussion as a recognizable discourse genre, talk moves can be seen as its micro-level enactments/tools.

Michaels and O'Connor developed a taxonomy of nine talk moves (TMs) organized under four instructional goals: 1) Time to Think / Say More / So, Are You Saying..?; 2) Who Can Rephrase or Repeat? 3) Asking for Evidence or Reasoning and Challenge or Counterexample; 4) Agree/Disagree and Why? Add On, Explaining What Someone Else Means [Michaels, & O'Connor, 2012]. This talk move taxonomy is a valuable practical framework for analyzing how participants of academic discussion position themselves as critical thinkers, knowledge contributors, and accountable interlocutors.

Taken together, the studies reviewed above demonstrate that academic discussion can cultivate EFL learners' advanced language proficiency, and prepare pre-service EFL teachers for the dialogic demands of contemporary classrooms.

Methods. This narrative review aims to synthesize key theoretical perspectives and empirical findings that contribute to understanding of how academic discussions are organized and function communicatively in educational settings. The literature search was conducted using relevant journal articles, and book chapters published primarily between 2010 and 2024. Search terms included “academic discussion”, “discourse structure”, “genre analysis”, “spoken interaction in academic settings”, and “communicative tools”. Studies were selected based on their focus on spoken academic discourse, and their contribution to the understanding of structure, genre conventions, or genre-specific communicative features. The selected literature was analyzed through a thematic approach, grounded in discourse and genre analysis frameworks, with particular attention to the content-oriented and metacommunicative talk moves as key communicative tools in academic discussions. The findings are presented thematically with the view to identify the structural phases, and units of communication that define academic discussion as a genre of spoken interaction.

Results and discussion. Following from the premise that effective spoken interaction (especially in formal discussions or presentations) tends to follow a predictable pattern: initiating the topic, developing the content, and closing the interaction [Brown, & Yule, 1983, p. 127–130], the academic discussion

macro-structure can be presented as three-phase construct encompassing Opening/Initiation, Development and Closure. Let us describe each phase/stage in greater detail.

Academic Discussion Opening/Initiation Phase. A teacher or a discussion leader/facilitator introduces a topic and poses a launching question. A launching question is “an open-ended question that introduces a complex idea or problem, invites student reasoning, and sets the stage for sustained academic talk” [Michaels, & O'Connor, 2012, p. 3]. “Such questions invite explanation, justification, and elaboration and serve to shift students from passive to active engagement in constructing meaning” [Zwiers, & Crawford, 2011]. In dialogic teaching, questions are used “to stimulate thinking, fuel curiosity, and promote reasoning” [Alexander, 2008, p. 35]. A well-crafted launching question should stimulate cognitive engagement and inquiry [Alexander, 2008].

Academic Discussion Development phase. In brief, this stage consists of presenting and debating viewpoints, providing evidence. The understanding how interlocutors interact at this stage can be informed by Tannen's observation: “In any interaction, participants are simultaneously involved in doing two things: negotiating meaning and negotiating the social interaction” [Tannen, 1993, p. 3]. This leads to a core genre-specific feature of academic discussions: they operate on two interrelated levels, namely, communication about the subject matter (content level); and metacommunication about the discussion itself (interactional/organizational level). The academic discussion dual-layered structure of knowledge construction and discourse management conditions the participants' use of the two types of talk moves: content-oriented talk moves (CTMs) and metacommunicative talk moves (MCTMs). CTMs explore, construct, or evaluate the academic content under discussion, therefore their function is to ensure participants' cognitive engagement and enable the collective construction of disciplinary knowledge. MCTMs manage the process, structure, or norms of the discussion itself, thus guiding, repairing, or regulating the interaction.

Detailed description of CTMs and MCTMs deserves a separate study, here we will indicate their most relevant features. CTMs in academic discussions are predominantly questions that directly address the subject matter of the discussion. They are dependent on the topic of the discussion and discipline specific knowledge. To be effective in academic discussions, content-oriented questions must meet the following key requirements: 1) be relevant to the subject matter; 2) promote higher-order thinking (analysis, evaluation, creation) and be open-ended, allowing for multiple perspectives; 3) prompt the participants to justify their claim with evidence, examples, or the-

ory; 4) be phrased in a way to invite responses from others; 5) reflect awareness of ongoing discussion, helping clarification, connection or redirection of ideas discussed earlier; and 6) use appropriate terminology and academic discourse norms.

MCTMs are mainly questions directed at the regulation of how talk occurs. Building on the idea of three kinds of accountability in academic discussion (critical thinking, accurate knowledge and discursive community) [Michaels, O'Connor, & Resnick, 2008, p. 2], and talk moves taxonomy by Michaels, & O'Connor [2012], metacommunicative questions can be structured into two groups as follows: 1) accountability to critical thinking and accurate knowledge, and 2) accountability to the discursive community.

Accountability to critical thinking and accurate knowledge incorporates: pressing for reasoning and clarification TMs, e.g. *What makes you say that? Why do you think that?*; encouraging to support ideas with examples/evidence TMs, e.g. *Can you give an example? What evidence do you have to support that?*; building on (say more) and / or challenge a partner's idea / evidence TMs, e.g. *Would someone like to add? Can you think of any examples that wouldn't work?*

Accountability to the discursive community is realized with: agreeing or disagreeing TMs (asking participants to apply their own reasoning to that of other participants), e.g. *Do you agree or disagree with X and why? I see it the same way because...; I respectfully disagree because...; revoicing / paraphrasing TMs (rephrasing some of what participants said and asking them to verify), e.g. So you're saying that...? Let me see if I understand you. You're saying...; keeping the channels open TMs (asking the participants to restate their peers' reasoning), e.g. Can you repeat what X said in your own words?; marking TMs (confirming and appraising good reasoning / contributions), e.g. That's a great example of using evidence to support your thinking; You've made a strong connection between...; That's a really important idea, because...; keeping the goal or topic in mind TMs (getting the conversation back on track; maintaining focus), e.g. Let's go back to our main question...; How does this connect to what we're trying to figure out? Can someone remind us what we're trying to understand here?*

The above suggested taxonomy of academic discussion talk moves reflects the principles of Accountable Talk framework [Resnick, Michaels, & O'Connor, 2010], Dialogic Teaching [Alexander, 2008], Sociocultural discourse theory [Mercer, 2000], academic discourse studies [Hyland, 2004; 2009]. Encouraging the use of examples or evidence aligns with dialogic teaching principles [Alexander, 2008]. Building on or challenging a peer's idea encourage participants to dialogically engage with others' contributions, promote accountable argumentation [Mer-

cer, 2000]. At the Development phase of academic discussion, this taxonomy serves its genre-specific functions: the epistemic and the social-interactional.

Closure (wrap-up). The teacher or discussion facilitator summarizes key points, resolves questions, or assigns follow-up tasks. Closure may also involve reflection or metadiscussion (talking about the discussion). Various strategies can be applied at this stage: the *"One-Minute Summary"* [Angelo, & Cross, 1993]; the *"Whip-Around"* Final Thought closure [Brookfield, & Preskill, 2016]; the *"What? So What? Now What?"* [Rolfe, Freshwater, & Jasper, 2001].

One of the most productive strategies for reflection and synthesis can be the *4Cs Strategy* (Concept – Connections – Challenges – Changes) [Ritchhart, Church, & Morrison, 2011]. The discussion facilitator summarizes the discussion using four questions as guidelines: Concept: *What was the main idea or takeaway of the discussion?* Connections: *How does this idea connect to prior knowledge, other topics, or real-world contexts (our academic, professional, personal or public life)?* Challenges: *What still remains unclear?/What parts were confusing, controversial, or thought-provoking?* Changes: *(How) Has your thinking changed? Will you do or think about something differently now? What changes have occurred in your mind?* The Challenges and Changes parts of this scaffold might appear difficult for the facilitator to construct, as they are produced "online", in comparison with Concept and Connections, and require the facilitator's quick evaluation of what was said during the discussion and creation of a summative statement.

Conclusions. This study has investigated academic discussion as a spoken genre in educational settings. This genre presents a formalized and evidence-based conversation about a topic, text, or issue in which participants exchange thoughts, ideas, and questions on the subject of the discussion. From the structural perspective, academic discussion presents a distinct three-phase macrostructure, incorporating Initiation, Development, and Closure, each with typified patterns of interaction and specific communicative functions. From the communicative perspective, academic discussion operates on two interrelated levels: content level and metacommunicative (interactional/organizational) level. At content level, participants exchange and build disciplinary knowledge through content-oriented talk moves (CTMs). At the metacommunicative level participants regulate and facilitate the interaction, using metacommunicative talk moves (MCTMs). In general, talk moves are utterance-level resources used by academic discussants to perform specific interactional functions, such as clarifying reasoning, prompting elaboration, or managing turn-taking, etc., in order to guide participation.

In sum, academic discussion is not simply about speaking fluently or accurately but about strategically managing both content and communication processes to co-construct understanding. When aligned with the CEFR's descriptors for spoken interaction and framed through dialogic teaching theory, it supports the development of the structural, linguistic, and interactional competencies essential for competent EFL speakers in institutional settings. These findings also have wider implications for EFL pre-service teacher education, where academic discussion is a speaking activity and a professional tool.

Building on the theoretical insights of this study, several future research directions are proposed to further explore and operationalize the academic discussion genre in spoken English interaction, particularly in institutional (educational) settings: validating and refining the taxonomy of content-oriented and meta-communicative talk moves (CTMs and MCTMs) through empirical analysis, and designing assessment frameworks aligned with the talk move taxonomy and CEFR/CV descriptors.

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