Do pre-sessional courses prepare students for their disciplinary studies?

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Webinar outline

- Introduction, context and motivation for the study
- Key literature
- Oracy Skills Framework
- Research questions and methodology
- Participants
- Key findings
- Implications and recommendations for practice
- Discussion questions

What do you think?

- What types of academic speaking do students engage in as part of their disciplinary studies?
- What academic speaking skills are required for successful participation?
- What challenges might ESL students in an EMI context face?
- In your experience, what support is provided in the disciplines?
- In our study, a tutor stated: "*I teach Law, not English*". What might be the reasons for this view?

Add your thoughts on *Chat* (2 minutes) - we'll discuss some selected contributions.

Introduction

- Higher education pedagogy is becoming more active and interactive (including lectures)
- More demands placed on students' academic speaking skills
- Oral assessments are more prevalent than before
- Academic speaking through classroom interaction is central to learning (Walsh, 2011) and negotiation of meaning (Mauranen, 2012).
- Academic speaking therefore central to developing disciplinary understanding.
- Pre-sessionals aim to prepare students for their disciplinary studies in quick, efficient and effective ways (Alexander, 2012).
- Lack of studies which explore the transition of students from pre-sessional to disciplinary studies with respect to academic speaking.

Background 1

1. EAP teaching methodology

- Communicative approach
- Highly supportive, small classes
- Mismatch between pre-sessional environment and disciplinary context (Dippold, 2014).

2. Oral skills demand in higher education

- Challenges in interacting with native speakers
- Lack of linguistic resources, content knowledge, disciplinary terminology and unfamiliarity with participation norms (Engin, 2017)
- Challenges of asking questions (Halenko & Jones, 2011)
- Knowledge of disciplinary terminology key to developing disciplinary understanding (Basturkmen, 2018)

Background 2

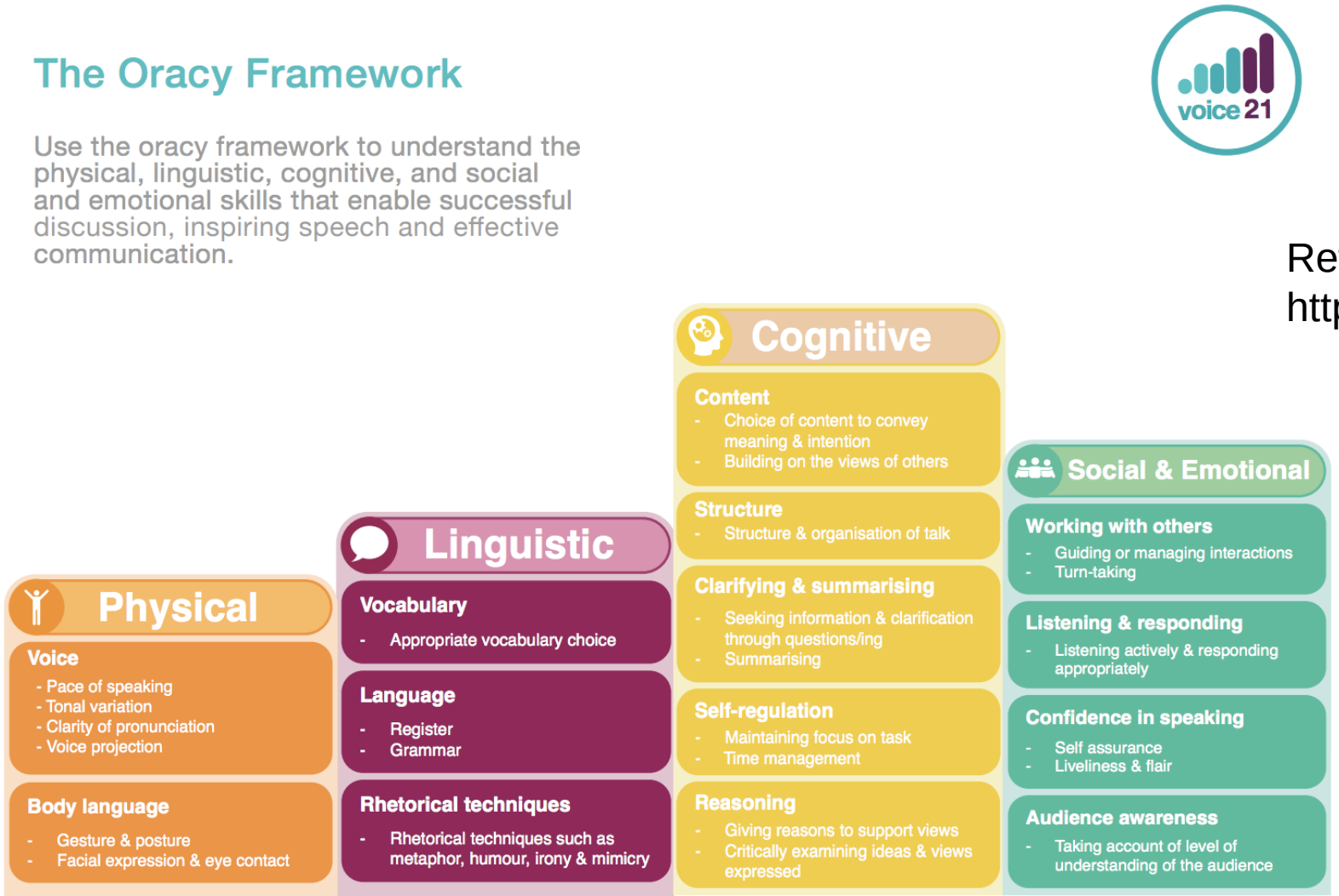
3. English as a lingua franca in EMI settings

- EMI is conducted in the context where English is used as a lingua franca for content-learning/teaching among students and teachers from different linguacultural backgrounds (Murato & Iino, 2017, p. 404).
- Ability of native English-speaking students to accommodate non-native English-speaking students has been questioned (Jenkins, 2011).

4. Key stakeholder perspectives

- Tutor concerns over English proficiency (Marcaro et al, 2018)
- Varying levels of linguistic awareness amongst tutors (Jenkins et al, 2019).
- Tutors unwilling or unaware of the need to support students' linguistic skills (Dearden & Marcaro, 2016).
- Students cite challenges of studying a discipline in a second language (UAE – Belhiah & Elhami, 2015; Turkey – Kilic, 2018; UK – Jenkins et al, 2019)

Oracy skills framework (Mercer, Warwick & Ahmed, 2017)



Retrieved from https://voice21.org/oracy/

Research Questions and Methodology

1. What types of speaking skills do pre-sessional EAP students need in their respective disciplinary studies (to include both in-class and out-of-class settings, seminars, presentations, group work, communication with lecturers)?
2. What are students' perceptions of their speaking skills (e.g. how successful/effective do they believe they are? Which factors facilitate and limit success and skills development?)?
3. What are students' perceptions of the effectiveness of the pre-sessional for preparing them for their respective disciplinary studies?
4. What are disciplinary tutors' perceptions of the speaking skills of former pre-sessional students (i.e. how successful/effective do they believe they are? How do they think students should be supported?)? Which factors limit or facilitate success?
5. What informs pre-sessional EAP tutors' practice in teaching and advising pre-sessional EAP students on speaking skills?

	UoSU	UoSO	BU	ZU
Research Question 1: Surveys				
EAP tutors	X	X	X	X
Disciplinary tutors	X	X	X	X
Students	X	X	X	X
Research Questions 1, 2 and 3: Interviews with students				
End of pre-sessional	X			
End of semester 1	X		X	X
End of semester 2	X		X	X
Research Questions 1 and 4: Interviews with disciplinary tutors				
	X	X	X	X
Research Questions 1 and 5: Interviews with EAP tutors				
	X	X		

Participants

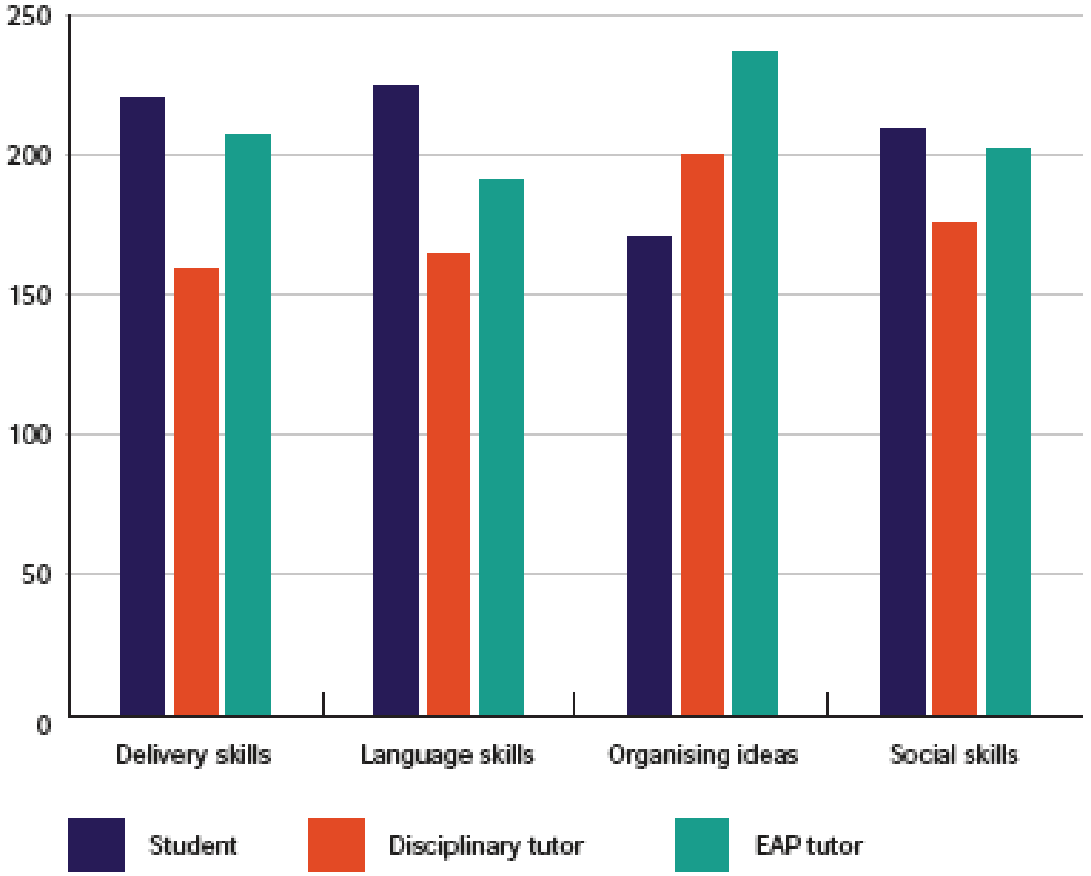
Questionnaire	Students	Disciplinary tutors	EAP tutors
Total	165	137	90
UoSU	10	55	17
UoSO	39	36	34
BU	23	21	24
ZU	93	25	15

Interview	Students	Tutors	EAP tutors
UoSU	8/6/3	5	3
UoSO	0	7	5
BU	7/5	4	0
ZU	5/5	5	0

Findings

What types of speaking skills do pre-sessional EAP students need in their respective disciplinary studies?

- **Delivery skills:** highly valued by students and EAP tutors, but not by disciplinary tutors
- **Language skills:** highly valued by students and EAP tutors, but not by disciplinary tutors
- **Organising ideas:** highly valued by EAP tutors and disciplinary tutors, but not by students
- **Social skills**: highly valued by EAP tutors and students, but not by disciplinary tutors



Findings

What are disciplinary tutors' perceptions of the speaking skills of students?

• Concern over students' proficiency – better speaking = better engagement in learning	*I don't think it's any more than that, to be honest with you, and normally the students who need that, if they don't have a good mastery of the language they rarely do very well*
• Multilingual groups key to encourage use of English	*I know we try at times to get them to mix in and I think if their speaking skills were more confident they might feel more ready to mix in with others.*
• Varying levels of support for use of L1; no official policy of language use	*They are not allowed to say it in [language]. Some of them because of this do not ask any questions, they only ask during the breaks where they can come to my office they can speak in [language[.*
• Language support seen as separate to disciplinary study by majority of tutors	*Yeah, so the main aim is the content really and you don't see that as your role, to look at the language unless it affected the communication and meaning, potentially?*
• Varying amounts of language support by disciplinary tutors	*Providing reading material, reference material, lecture notes, recorded lectures, glossary of technical terms. Speaking slowly, clearly, succinctly. No use colloquialisms, slang, metaphors, nuance and avoid black humour.*

Findings

What informs pre-sessional EAP tutors' practice in teaching and advising pre-sessional EAP students on speaking skills?

• Focus on students' needs, e.g. IELTS and future needs	*I think that the teaching needs to include authentic tasks (i.e. something that students see will be part of their future use of English, whether on campus or in future employment*
• (prescriptive) curriculum	*We mainly use materials from a book, we use a test book [name of book], and that's supplemented a bit with some of our materials written by the programme leaders. Then the tutors have a bit of flexibility, provided we are covering the scheme of work.*
• Academic goals / students' disciplines	*For example, with the [inaudible] we also used to have a look at different referencing systems because the one we use in pre-sessional isn't the one they're going to use in their target course, so we do sort of have a little look at things like that.*
• Group dynamics and teaching styles	*If students are from a teacher-centred style of academic culture, I am aware I must teach not only speaking skills in terms of grammar, fluency, etc., but also facilitate discussion in general*
• but: evidence and information gap	*I've never really asked them, you know 'Did you feel this really helped you with your writing? Did it help with your oral skills? Were you able to participate better in tutorials?*

Implications

- Different settings (Anglophone vs. non-Anglophone), but similar issues
- One core issue is the responsibility of different actors for supporting speaking skills development
- Recommendations:
  - ‘distributed responsibility’ for supporting speaking skills
  - Explicit recognition and acknowledgement of the key role of academic speaking
  - better policy and guidance for disciplinary tutors
  - Explicit training for disciplinary tutors in supporting non-native English speaking students in the disciplines

Discussion questions

- Imagine HE in 5 years. In your ideal HE world, what will have changed for oracy and academic speaking compared to today?
- In what way can the key role of academic speaking and the dimensions of oracy be made more visible in HE practice?
- What should an explicit (written) policy on spoken language use in HE encompass (and what not)?
- How can ‘distributed responsibility’ be made a reality despite the limitations of time, finance and engagement?
- What should every disciplinary tutor know about academic speaking?

Add your thoughts on *Chat* (2 minutes) - we'll discuss some selected contributions.

Feedback

- Download the project report and good practice guide – there is a comment facility: https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/article/oral-skills-development-pre-sessional-eap-classes

- e-mail us (d.dippold@surrey.ac.uk; m.heron@surrey.ac.uk) with any comments / thoughts, or if you are interested in speaking to us about how you have used / aim to use the research or 'good practice' suggestions

- Comment or interact with us on Twitter (@roadtobabel, @MarionHeron65, #AcademicSpeaking)

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