Chapter 2

Demystifying the Process of Attending, Presenting at, and Reviewing for Academic Conferences:
Considerations for Graduate Students

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ABSTRACT

The "publish or perish" culture has put graduate students and faculty worldwide under increasing pressure to demonstrate their research productivity (i.e., producing and disseminating knowledge). Academic conferences, as a typical way of knowledge dissemination, offer chances for graduate students to socialize in the academic community and receive timely feedback from peers. However, those new to the conference experience may feel confused or even daunted. Drawing on the personal experience of an early career faculty in the field of applied linguistics, this chapter demystifies the whole process related to attending, presenting at, and reviewing for academic conferences. Mapping out the author's experiential trajectory as an active graduate student at academic conferences, the author details how the author has transitioned from a graduate attendee to an experienced presenter and a junior gatekeeper for academic conferences. Besides, the author offers a set of dos and don'ts to potential attendees, presenters, and reviewers at academic conferences.

INTRODUCTION: SETTING THE SCENE

The trending marketization of universities across the globe has brought the front graduate students and academic staff to publish in high-status international journals. In some countries (e.g., China), the international publication emerges as an increasing graduation requirement for doctoral and Master's

students (Flowerdew, 2013). Consequently, graduate students are under pressure to "disseminate their research findings in English" (Flowerdew & Habibie, 2022, p.13). The publication of research articles, however, is in concert with other genres. For example, research articles may be preceded by conference presentations (Flowerdew & Habibie, 2022); in a similar vein, Swales (2004) pointed out that conference presentations maintain an *intermediate* status between research work and the accepted manuscript.

As an integral part of research communities (Rowley-Jolivet, 2002), the conference presentation deals with research work across levels of completion, varying from work-in-progress to publication dissemination and promotion. More often, conference presentations showcase preliminary findings and offer only "provisional claims and explanations" (Swales, 2004, p.202). Though researchers have already emphasized that conference presentation is a critical skill for academic researchers (Rowley-Jolivet & Carter-Thomas, 2005), graduate students and early career faculty would still find it challenging, confusing, or even daunting, especially for those new to the conference experience. Such an emotional burden may be intensified by public speaking anxiety, time pressure, and/or intensive real-time information processing during the *Question-and-Answer* section. What is worse, presenters also represent their programs and universities.

Besides the said high-stake and high-pressure characteristics, conference presentations popularize nowadays with their unique advantages. They provide venues for graduate students and early career faculty to socialize into the academic community of their field; offer chances for presenters to receive timely feedback on their research from peers; keep attendees informed of peer research preferences, the latest trend within the field, and future research directions. As Ventola (1999) artfully put it, "the conference situation creates a momentary feeling of intellectual companionship and sense of common understanding and experience, but unfortunately its effects may remain very *short-lived and local* (p.122).

To make the most of those *short-lived and local* conference experiences, prospective attendees, presenters, or even reviewers should familiarize themselves with the conventions or 'behind the scenes' information of academic conferences. Applied linguists, as Rowley-Jolivet and Cater-Thomas (2005) advocated, should shoulder their responsibilities to help scientific researchers play the conference game with essential discourse practices knowledge. Discussions about such discourse practices knowledge are well-documented in the literature (e.g., Hood & Forey, 2005; Hyland, 2004, 2012, 2015; Ventola et al., 2002; Wulff et al., 2009). Hood and Forey (2005), for example, analyzed ways of building interpersonal relationships with audiences at the *set-up* stage during conference presentations. In addition, there are also published experience-sharing manuscripts (e.g., De Costa, 2020; Galer-Unti & Tappe, 2009) detailing considerations and recommended actions before, during, and after the conference. Drawing on his extensive experience in attending the annual conference of the American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL), De Costa (2020) proposed various ways of navigating the AAAL conferences from the perspectives of presenters, concluding that attending conferences does "raise your visibility within the field" (p.48) either as graduate students or tenure-track faculty.

However, very little is known about the near-mythical dynamic trajectories from the peripheral participation (i.e., attendee) to its full participation (i.e., gatekeeper) at academic conferences as far as ERPP (English for Research Publication Purposes) is concerned. Also informing this study is De Costa's (2022) advocation that established scholars and emerging applied linguistics should spend strenuous efforts to "foster greater diversity, equity, inclusion and access" (p.96) for the next generations of scholars within the field. As a matter of fact, thriving in academic conferences is a long and uncertain process, and developing presenting and reviewing skills is a journey of endless trial and error for most scholars. This chapter therefore aims to address the said research gap and advocation, demystifying the whole

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