Importance marking in lectures: confronting EAP coursebooks with real lectures

Katrien Deroey

No innocent bystanders: stance and engagement in academic discourse

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Is there a problem?

- For EAP practitioners, a key issue is how to provide as accurate as possible a model of lecture organisation and help their learners to develop the skills to interpret organising signals. (Thompson, 2003, p. 6)

- Listening material in an ELT classroom is rarely similar to academic lectures. (Alexander, Argent & Spencer, 2008, p. 224)

- [...] most EAP listening programs are based upon commercial textbooks. The downside of this is that these textbooks tend to present the structure and language of the lectures as simply organized and transparently coherent. Actual lectures, however, are a much less tidy form of discourse. (Rodgers & Webb, 2016, p. 171)

- Exposing students only to simplified lecture texts certainly does students a disservice. (Salehzadeh, 2013, p. xix)
What are we interested in?

Representativeness of language

Lecture authenticity

Research-informedness
25 coursebooks

- *Academic listening strategies* (Salehzadeh) (US)
- *Cambridge academic English* (all levels)
- *Contemporary topics* (all levels) (2017)
- *EASE volume one: Listening to lectures* (Kelly et al)
- *English for academic study* (Campbell & Smith)
- *Four point* (level 2) (Parrish) (US)
- *LEAP advanced* (Beatty)
- *Lecture ready* (all levels) (Sarosy & Sherak)
- *Lectures* (Aish & Tomlinson)
- *Oxford EAP* (all levels)
- *Study listening* (Lynch)
- *Unlock* (all levels)
160 lectures
British Academic Spoken English corpus

Pilot: 4 lectures
- Manual search
- Two researchers
- Refine inclusion criteria

Other 36 lectures
- Manual search
- 1 researcher

160 lectures
- Automated Sketch Engine

Sample interrating
- 90 items
- 3 researchers

Deroey & Taverniers, 2012b
Language: Importance markers

Deroey (2017; in press)
Defining importance markers

‘Lexicogrammatical devices that overtly mark the importance [...] of points that are presented verbally or visually.’

(Deroey, 2015, p. 52)
Defining importance markers

**Discourse organization**: hierarchy of importance of lecture points

+ 

**Evaluation**: ‘parameter of importance or relevance’ (Thompson & Hunston, 2000, p. 24)

- Of ‘discourse entities’ (Thetela, 1997, as cited in Hunston, 2000, p. 182)
- Lecturer as ‘text constructor’ (Hunston, 2000, p. 183)
✓ the most important thing to b bear in mind throughout the lecture really is pest is a human definition

× the first thing i want to do today is to is to formally er try and explain what the connection is

× mass warfare which is obviously such an important thing in the nineteenth century
Importance markers in BASE lectures (N=782)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remember/notice/note just remember this</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The point/question is the point is by chance these two structures are similar</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to emphasize/stress; (as) I (have) pointed out</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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</tr>
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Less explicit, multifunctional markers predominate

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Which are importance markers?

1. **the point is** that people can't do that
2. **the point is** for you to develop your own scholarship
3. **the thing** you have to remember **is** there’s no such thing as the heritability

4. if you forget everything else i say just **remember** that kidney failure causes high blood pressure
5. there is a class switch **remember**
6. **remember** slavery had already been legally abolished
## Importance marking in coursebooks (N=52)

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<td>11</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to stress</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remember that</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have to remember</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s important to note that</td>
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<td>9.6</td>
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# Coursebooks versus lectures

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Deroey (in press)
Lots of exercises on identifying main ideas; little language to guide identification thereof

Contemporary topics (2)
Markers are few

**Signposting language**

- **E2** Watch this part of the lecture again in more detail. Put extracts a–f in order.
  - a What we are interested in, of course, is the collective level.
  - b And here comes probably the most important sentence ...
  - c But we need a working definition to start from, I think ...
  - d ... and that brings us back to the programming of the mind ...
  - e That brings us already to the monocultural challenge.
  - f ... German philosopher Wolfgang Welsch tries to summarise here in the following words.

Think about the context for each extract in 5.1. Match them to functions 1–6.

1 introduce the next main section of the lecture
2 indicate a specific focus on an idea
3 indicate a specific focus on part of a quote
4 link back to an idea previously mentioned in the lecture
5 define a key word or concept
6 introduce a quotation

**Study tip**

Many lecturers use language that is similar to Professor Rings’ examples in 5.1. This aims to guide the person listening to the lecture, so you know what is coming next or what has been previously mentioned. Learning to listen for this language will help you to understand the overall structure of a lecture and also listen for what are key points.

*Cambridge academic English (C1)*
## FOCUS your attention

### Signal Phrases

Speakers can use signal phrases to introduce a new point, to give an example, or to emphasize an important point. Listening for these phrases can help you understand what is coming next. This will help you better organize your notes.

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<th>PHRASES THAT GIVE AN EXAMPLE</th>
<th>PHRASES THAT EMPHASIZE A POINT</th>
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<tr>
<td>Now ...</td>
<td>One example is ...</td>
<td>In fact, ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Let's start with ...</td>
<td>For example, ...</td>
<td>It's clear that ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First, ...</td>
<td>For instance, ...</td>
<td>Interesting, huh?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Next, ...</td>
<td>In addition ...</td>
<td>Finally, ...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>This is illustrated ...</td>
<td>Let's look at an example ...</td>
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*Contemporary topics (1)*
Explicit markers predominate

Lecture language: Importance markers
One vital listening skill is the ability to recognise and exploit the importance markers with which lecturers underline or emphasise points in their argument. They can do so in any of three ways.
1 By speaking about the subject matter itself
   The central problem is that ...
   A(n) basic point
   One essential fact
   Another key issue is the ...
   (etc.) crucial difference
   (etc.) (etc.)

2 By speaking to the audience
   It’s important to bear in mind that ...
   (etc.)
   It’s worth(while) …ing that ...
   Remember that ...
   Don’t forget that ...
   You shouldn’t lose sight of the fact that ...

3 By speaking about themselves
   I want to stress/emphasise/underline ...
   My point is ...
   What I’m getting at is ...

SIGNALING EMPHASIS
To highlight what I’ve said so far ...
I want to emphasize that ...
I want to stress ...
It’s important to understand ...
The fundamental point is ...
What I’m saying is ...

Contemporary topics (2)

Study listening (p. 39)
The language presented to students in textbooks is a poor representation of the real thing. (Gilmore, 2007, p. 98)

The evidence suggests that textbook authors are not yet habitually checking their materials against relevant corpus data to ensure that the language models they provide are as naturalistic and pedagogically useful as possible. (Gilmore, 2015, p. 517)

Corpus linguists now often point out how radically intuition and use may converge. (Stubbs, 2001, p. 151)
Authenticity

Deroey (2017; in press)
Authentic lectures are rare

Authentic lectures

*Academic listening strategies*

*Cambridge academic English*

*EASE*

*Lectures*
Uninformative descriptions

The speakers you will be listening to come from six different countries. This will help you to get used to some of the international accents of English, including English as a second language.

Study listening (2004, p. 5)
Vague descriptions

‘For this course, a variety of lectures were recorded at the University of Cambridge.’
‘The lectures [...] are delivered by experienced lecturers and researchers.’

_Cambridge academic English_ (2012, p. 6)
Misleading descriptions

‘[T]he lectures [...] feature engaging instructors in a variety of settings including offices, lecture halls, and classrooms, many with live student audiences.’

Contemporary topics (2017, p. vii)
Research-informedness

Deroey (2017; in press)
Research-informed

Academic listening strategies
Cambridge academic English
EASE
English for academic study
Study listening
So why?

**Applied linguistics** researchers often energetically pursue their own narrow fields of interest with **minimal concern** for the **accessibility** [...] to other stakeholders [...]; **language teachers** are rarely encouraged (or able) to keep up to date with theoretical advances [...]; **materials writers** seem to rely more on replication of previous successful models, [...] and their own creative muses than theory-driven, principled design criteria [...], and **publishers** appear to show more concern for their **bottom dollar** than the provision of innovative textbooks, in tune with contemporary theory [...].

Gilmore (2015, p. 521)
So what?

We may be training students with unrepresentative language.

We may be failing to prepare students for the challenges of their lectures.
So how?

Supplement
Recordings of discipline & institution specific lectures
Invited lectures
TED talks?

Compared to lecture discourse, TED talks [...] are spoken at a faster pace on average and have a lower levels of academic vocabulary on average [...]. Essentially, **some TED talks are suitably similar** to lecture discourse to be used as semi-authentic academic listening materials but **on average they are not**. (Wingrove, 2017, p. 93)
So how?

Working with authentic lectures
   Pre-listening work (vocabulary, content)
   Support (skeletal notes, transcript)
   Simplify tasks
   Increase length, speech rate
So how?

Do your own research.

Approach coursebooks critically.
Lecture listening materials


Importance marking


References


References


Acknowledgement
The recordings and transcriptions used in this study come from the British Academic Spoken English (BASE) corpus. The corpus was developed at the Universities of Warwick and Reading under the directorship of Hilary Nesi and Paul Thompson. Corpus development was assisted by funding from BALEAP, EURALEX, the British Academy and the Arts and Humanities Research Council.