

Importance marking in lectures: confronting EAP coursebooks with real lectures

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No innocent bystanders: stance and engagement in academic discourse

24 2 2018, St Andrews, UK



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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

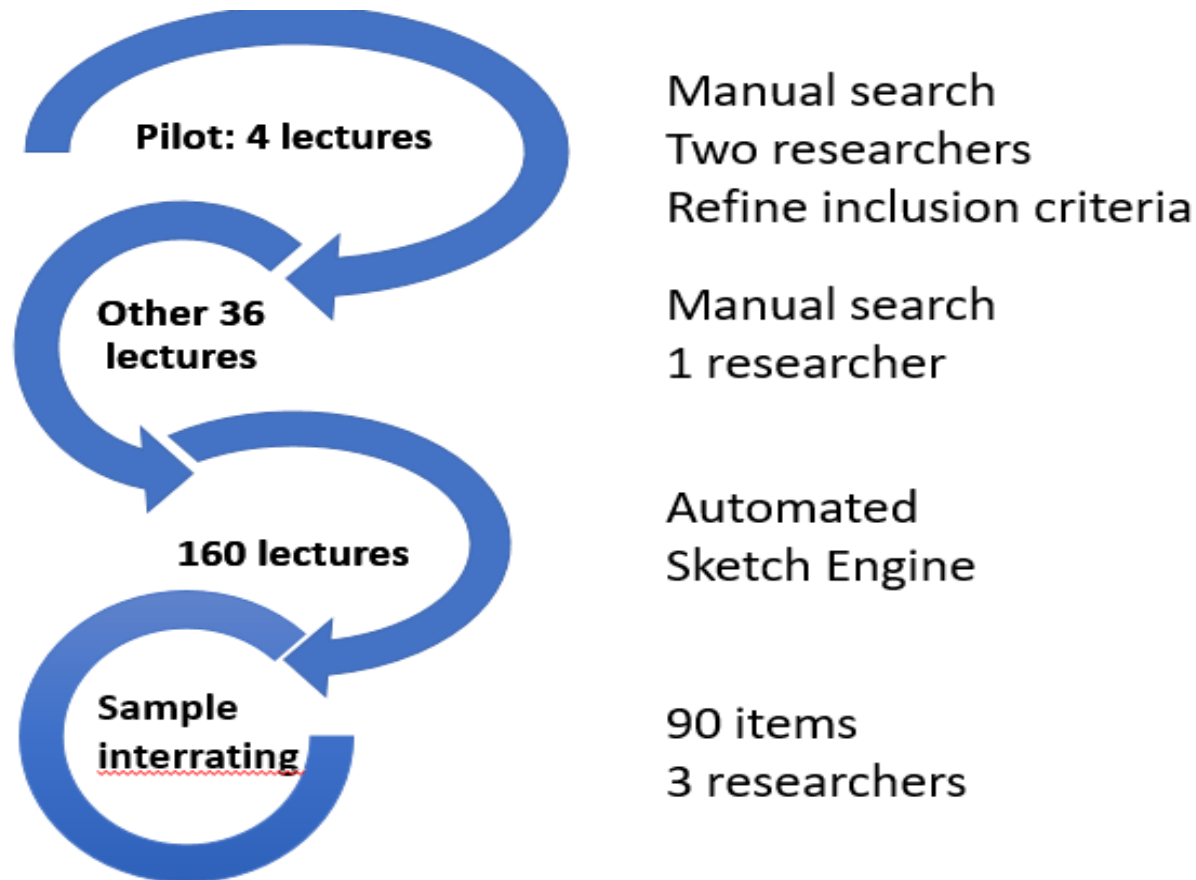
Lecture authenticity

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



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)

Defining importance markers

✓ **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)

Type	N	%
Remember/notice/note just remember this	264	33.7
The point/question is the point is by chance these two structures are similar	162	20.7
I want to emphasize/stress; (as) I (have) pointed out	70	8.9
The important/key point/thing is	64	8.2
You have to remember	41	5.2

Less explicit, multifunctional markers predominate

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Deroey & Taverniers (2012), Deroey (2015)

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)

Type	N	%
The important point is	11	21.2
I want to stress	7	13.5
Remember that	6	11.5
You have to remember	6	11.5
It's important to note that	5	9.6

Deroey (in press)

Coursebooks versus lectures

Type (coursebooks)	%
The important point is	21.2
I want to stress	13.5
Remember that	11.5
You have to remember	11.5
It's important to note that	9.6

Type (lectures)	%
Remember/notice/note	33.7
The point/question is	20.7
I want to emphasize/stress; (as) I (have) pointed out	8.9
The important/key point/thing is	8.2
You have to remember	5.2

Deroey (in press)

Lots of exercises on identifying main ideas;
little language to guide identification thereof

WATCH the lecture

A THINK ABOUT IT You are about to watch the unit lecture on success in the global economy. What characteristics are most important for a person to have in order to succeed in business?



B LISTEN FOR MAIN IDEAS Close your book. Watch the lecture and take notes.

Contemporary topics (2)

Markers are few

Signposting language

 **E.2** 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. I quote.

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.

Markers seem random

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.

PHRASES THAT INTRODUCE A NEW POINT

Now ...

Let's start with ...

First, ...

Next, ...

In addition ...

Finally, ...

PHRASES THAT GIVE AN EXAMPLE

One example is ...

For example, ...

For instance, ...

This is illustrated ...

Let's look at an example ...

PHRASES THAT EMPHASIZE A POINT

In fact, ...

It's clear that ...

Interesting, huh?

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.

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Academia edu; ResearchGate

Lecture listening materials

Deroey, K. L. B. (2017). How representative are EAP listening books of real lectures? . In J. Kemp (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 2015 BALEAP Conference. EAP in a rapidly changing landscape: Issues, challenges and solutions*. Reading: Garnet.

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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.