

New directions in academic discourse: A literature review

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最近の大学キャンパスで録音されたいくつかのスピーチコーパスが容易に利用できるようになったことがアカデミック談話の新たな一面を開発したという結果になった。それはアカデミック英口語である。本稿が一般的なアカデミック談話、及びその研究の一つであるアカデミック英口語に関する論文をまとめたものである。そして、二つの主な研究問題を取り上げている。一つ目は、アカデミック英口語が、どのくらいアカデミック英文語、または普通の会話に似ているかという点である。二つ目は、アカデミック英口語は学生達の勉学を助け、また学生達との関係を円滑にするために使われている点で

The availability of several corpora of speech on university campuses has led to the development of another dimension in the study of academic discourse: academic spoken English. This literature review focuses on new research in this area within the context of academic discourse in general and with reference to two main research questions. The first of these is the extent to which academic spoken English resembles academic written English and ordinary conversation. The second is the ways in which academic spoken English is used supportively.

Introduction

Until recently, the study of academic discourse remained largely focused on written rather than spoken discourse. It is easy to see why. In addition to the fact that academic written discourse as data is readily available to anyone involved in academia, written discourse is what we think of as academic English. Written academic English is used to make high stakes decisions on hiring, tenure, and assessment and thus occupies a "special place" in academic discourse (Lindemann & Mauranen 2001:459). With the development of the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE, Simpson et. al., 2002) as well as other corpora, the focus is turning to the spoken form of academic English. This has obvious benefits for international students and graduate teaching assistants as well as faculty who deal with such students. But, in addition to this, it can help teachers understand what we are doing when we use academic English. As we learn more about academic spoken English (ASE), we get a clearer picture of academic discourse as a whole, what it is and what it is used for, which may make the teaching of English for academic purposes more focused and beneficial to students. Although in the popular imagination academic discourse is a tool to indicate in-group status and confuse the uninitiated, in reality it is being shown that such discourse, in its spoken form at least, can be used for nurturing novices and making concepts clearer for them. If international students are made aware of this, it will put them on a more equal footing with native-speaking students. It is also more clear that academic English differs considerably across discipline, and level of instruction. Students of English for academic purposes should also be made aware of the interpersonal component of academic discourse.

Since the development of MICASE and other corpora, a great deal of research has been done on ASE. In this literature review we will deal specifically with two subjects that have emerged from this research. The first is the extent to which ASE resembles academic written English as opposed to ordinary conversation. The second is the positive nature of ASE and how it is used to support students.

About MICASE

Although not all of the works here deal specifically with the MICASE corpus, the way that MICASE has defined ASE informs our understanding to a great extent. MICASE comprises a number of speech events in different academic settings, and is not limited to those one would think of as “academic” (lectures and seminars, for example). The compilers define academic spoken English as any speech event which occurs on the university campus except those that might be expected to be the same if they occurred in a different place (buying something in the bookstore, for example). It includes lectures, office hours, seminars, student presentations, lab sessions, study groups, tutorials, advising sessions, and service encounters. MICASE includes four academic divisions: humanities, social sciences, physical sciences, and biological sciences. The speakers are also differentiated according to academic level, from undergraduate to senior faculty. The corpus also includes visitors and staff. This paper will define ASE the same way that it is defined for MICASE—as discourse that occurs on a college campus, except for discourse which we would expect to be largely the same in a different context.

Comparison with academic written discourse and ordinary conversation

One of the main uses to which the study of corpora of academic spoken English has been put is to explore the question of whether it shows the same features as academic written English, or of everyday conversation. As Swales & Burke (2003) express it, does the purpose of academic spoken discourse, intellectual activity, make it more like academic writing? Or does the fact that like other types of speech it is made to some extent under time constraints make it more like ordinary conversation (p. 1)? Answering this question is one of the goals that Swales (2001) has for studies based on MICASE. The answer to this question is not at all clear. Different studies have obtained different results depending on the area of study, level of instruction, and other factors. The extent to which academic spoken discourse resembles written discourse or ordinary spoken discourse seems to depend a great deal upon context.

Many English for Academic Purposes courses, attempting to prepare international students for the English-speaking classroom, focus heavily on such things as writing research papers and comprehending articles. However, understanding a university-level lecture or participating in a discussion might also pose a significant challenge. By increasing our understanding of how these things differ from ordinary English that the student is already familiar with, and from the written academic English that they are learning, we can help students in their adjustment.

Some differences between academic speech and academic writing have been set out in general terms. Swales (2001) has pointed out following Dudley-Evans & Johns (1981) that academic speech shows more variety than writing, in structure, function and style (p. 34). He also points out that academic speech is more “contingent,” in Gilbert and Mulkay’s (1984) term (Swales 2001: 35).

The concept of contingency is important in examining the differences between academic speech and academic writing. Gilbert & Mulkay (1984) in a study of scientists' written and spoken discourse, contrast what they call the "empiricist repertoire" with the "contingent repertoire." The empiricist repertoire "portrays scientists' actions and beliefs as following unproblematically and inescapably from the empirical characteristics of the impersonal natural world" (p. 56). The contingent repertoire, in contrast, represents things as being more dependent on outside events; that is, it tends to show the steps leading up to the finished paper, lecture, etc. The empiricist repertoire, Gilbert & Mulkay find, tends to be used in writing scientific articles, where the contingent repertoire is used when scientists talk about their professional actions. Lindemann & Mauranen (2001) echo Swales's evaluation of academic speech as contingent, describing it as more "heterogeneous, contradictory, and varied" than written academic prose (p. 460).

Institutional Discourse

An important reason why academic spoken English might differ from ordinary spoken English is the fact that it can be described as "institutional discourse," thus carrying a number of purposes and constraints that non-institutional discourse does not. Drew and Heritage (1992) define institutional discourse as that which is oriented to a "core goal, task or identity" which is connected with the institution. It has specific constraints on what is allowable in the discourse, and it may have particular institutional frameworks (p. 22). A few researchers have examined how institutional constraints affect academic spoken discourse, making it less like everyday conversation.

Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig (1992) show that conversational closings tend to be different in academic speech from in ordinary speech because of institutional constraints, in this case, time constraints, in a study using transcripts of advising sessions. They found that closing sequences in this situation tend to be different from those of ordinary conversation, as described by Schegloff and Sacks, (1973). In an ordinary conversation, a previous topic can be felicitously reintroduced during the closing sequence. However, in academic conversations it is precisely this sort of topic which is infelicitous, although other topics, which orient the speakers to other, non-institutional identities, were allowed. Hartford and Bardovi-Harlig determine infelicity by looking at subsequent turns as well as by interviewing the advisors.

Thonus (1999) refers to Agar's (1985) idea of discourse ecology to interpret conversations between tutors and NS or NNS tutees in a writing center. Agar defines discourse ecology as the "circumstances around the institutional discourse over which neither the institutional representative nor the client have any control" and they include time constraints and differing levels of background knowledge (p. 156). The tutoring session must be conducted efficiently, requiring the tutors to choose sometimes between politeness and the institutional goal of being a good tutor. "Being a good tutor" is defined by the guide for tutors as not giving direct advice on the paper but instead encouraging the tutee to find it herself. Thonus finds that this is a common dilemma in institutional settings. In the case of writing center tutors, this is complicated by the fact that NNS tutees might misunderstand more polite constructions.

Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford (1993) have looked at a different effect of institutional speech on spoken discourse, which they term congruence (1990, cited in Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford, 1993). Congruence describes the extent to which participants act according to their own and their interlocutor's relative status during an encounter. In another study looking at conversations between advisors and NS or

NNS advisees, they find that sometimes it is necessary for the participants in this sort of encounter to act in a noncongruent manner. Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford examine how NNS advisees' pragmatic competence develops by showing the extent to which they are able to mitigate noncongruent speech acts in a native-like manner. Making a suggestion, for example, is a noncongruent speech act for a lower status person in an institutional encounter, but it can be necessary in the advising session as a way of the student to control his own class schedule. Native speakers are able to mitigate this by such measures as forming the suggestion as a question.

The studies above highlight the interpersonal dimension of academic English. It is important for students to know that pragmatic routines that are acceptable in ordinary English are not appropriate in an academic context. Another facet of the interpersonal dimension is hedging and boosting, which will be treated in the next section.

Differences according to characteristics of the course

One of the things that is becoming clear from studies comparing ASE to ordinary conversation and academic written English is that ASE shows a great deal of variance depending on discipline, instructional level, and degree of interactivity. The following studies illustrate ways in which the disciplines can differ.

One significant study involves hedging and boosting. Hedging and boosting are ways of showing a writer's or lecturer's attitude toward either the subject matter or the reader or listener (Holmes, 1984), and these have been extensively studied in the context of academic discourse. Holmes (1984, 1988a) has shown how hedging and boosting are used in ordinary conversation, for politeness, as well as for the purpose of making a statement stronger or more hesitant. Hyland (1996, 1998a) points out the necessity of boosting and hedging in the context of academic discourse. He shows that, in addition to expressing the amount of confidence the writer has in the ideas she expresses, they also allow the expression of solidarity with and membership in a group of scholars.

Poos and Simpson (2002) have the intention not specifically to show differences between academic and ordinary speech, but to counter the idea that hedging is a characteristic of women's speech; an idea which has been reported mainly in studies using data from ordinary speech. They refer to Lakoff (1975), who postulated the idea of a "women's language" which shows women's lower social status; and Holmes (1986, 1988), who shows a more varied use of hedging than Lakoff.

Poos & Simpson (2002) concentrated on two of the most common ones: "kind of" and "sort of." It should be noted that these words can be used as hedges, as in "This is kind of difficult," as well as acting as pause fillers, which speakers use to indicate to the listener that they are not finished with their turn. Poos & Simpson investigated these terms in all but the literal meaning of "one type of," so both of these uses are discussed. This was done in two parts, the first by concordancing the two terms and the second by making a close investigation of one outlier who used more hedges than other speakers in the corpus. They found that hedges in academic speech do not depend so much on sex but rather on academic discipline. Speech events in the hard sciences use less hedging overall than those in the humanities and social sciences, regardless of the sex of the speaker. The authors postulate that this may be because the language of those disciplines is less precise than that used in the hard sciences, thereby more often necessitating the use of a pause filler when the speaker is thinking of an appropriate word to use. They also put forth the related idea that in the humanities and social sciences, "there is more to hedge about" since

these are less precise and also offer more opportunities for stating different opinions and points of view which might be hedged (2002:14). They support this with evidence from other studies, in which the number of vocabulary items and the number of times the lecturer used a filled pause (such as “um”) were compared across different academic disciplines. It was found that lecturers in the humanities use more filled pauses than those in the sciences, and that a higher number of vocabulary items were used in humanities lectures (Schachter et. al 1991, 1994). Although more research needs to be done before we can say with confidence that the humanities and social sciences are in fact “fuzzier” than the hard sciences, the evidence as yet is that they are.

Poos & Simpson (2002) also briefly compare hedging in spoken discourse with hedging in written discourse, as was investigated in Hyland 1996, 1998b, and 1999 (page 3). Poos & Simpson find their own results “similar” to those of Hyland in that hedging is used to show caution and modesty, but it is not clear in what way they are similar. This is a point worth pursuing further.

A study which compares ASE levels of instruction and degree of interactivity was done by Csomay (2002), which builds from studies by Biber (1995, 1998), Biber and Conrad (2001), and Biber and Jones (2005) who take what they call a “multidimensional” approach to studying differences in register. This approach involves applying multivariate analysis to computer corpora. By doing this, Biber was able to find clusters of linguistic features which tend to occur together (or tend rarely to occur together). He then analyzed the functions that these dimensions serve in various registers. For example, one group of features which occur together includes private verbs (such as “think” and “know”) personal pronouns, and contractions, among many others. These features constitute the dimension of “involved production,” often found in conversations (Biber & Conrad 2001: 185). Each register might contain a number of different dimensions. Analysis of conversations shows the interactive dimension as well as the dimension of production under time constraints, for example.

Csomay, (2002) used some parameters from Biber’s (1998) initial study to compare low-interactive and high interactive¹ undergraduate lower division (first and second year), undergraduate upper division (third and fourth year), and postgraduate classes to find grammatical features associated with academic writing and conversation. These five parameters were informational focus; involved production; elaborated reference; abstract style; and on-line informational elaboration. Language that shows a high degree of informational focus has a high frequency of nouns and passive constructions. The second parameter, involved production, shows an interpersonal focus and is characterized by affective language. Elaborated reference is characterized by relative clauses, used to elaborate information. Abstract focus, which refers to a quality of impersonality, shows a high degree of passive constructions. The last parameter, online informational focus, refers to speech with an informational focus that has not been prepared before speaking. These parameters occur in various registers of spoken and written discourse. For example, involved production, as mentioned previously, is characteristic of conversational style, whereas abstract style occurs mostly in writing. Csomay found a great deal of variation depending on the level of interactivity, with highly interactive classes, unsurprisingly, exhibiting more features typical of conversational style. However, he also found that level of instruction and also, in some cases, discipline, have an influence on these differences, echoing the results of Poos and Simpson (2002). Another influence was the academic level of the

¹ This was judged by counting the frequency of turn-taking.

students. Graduate classes demonstrated a high level of features from the on-line production circumstances set, which might indicate that in the graduate classes participants in discussions are transmitting a great deal of information under on-line circumstances, without preparation. This contrasts with undergraduate classes where participants are not required to transmit as much information.

We can see from the examples above that as yet there is no consensus about whether academic spoken discourse resembles academic written discourse or everyday spoken discourse more closely. Perhaps academic spoken discourse cannot be treated as a single entity, since a great deal depends on context: the nature of the speech event, the level of the students being taught, and the discipline. It would stand to reason if prepared lectures, for example, showed more characteristics of written academic English, and if discussion groups were more like ordinary conversation. This poses new challenges for teaching EAP since it suggests that the English that students will encounter in their classrooms, and the skills they will need, might differ greatly depending on the level of the student and their field of study.

Spoken Academic Discourse as a Way of Supporting Novices

Metadiscourse

Both of the two main questions which have emerged from the research emerge mainly in the context of metadiscourse in academic spoken discourse (Swales & Malcezewski 2001; Swales 2001; Lindemann & Mauranen 2001; Fortanet 2004; Swales and Burke 2003; Mauranen 2003). Both the definition of metadiscourse and its usage are the subjects of some controversy. Hyland (1998b, 1999) discussing metadiscourse in written contexts, defines it as, "those aspects of the texts which explicitly refer to the organisation of the discourse or the writer's stance toward either its content or the reader," and he further mentions its non-propositional nature as one of its essential aspects (1998b:438). In his research about metadiscourse in research articles, he points out that it serves an interpersonal function in helping situate the writer as part of the academic discourse community. In his conception, writers use metadiscourse to achieve the two main goals of the research article: to have the reader understand the article, and to have them accept its premise (1998b:440). The studies cited above use a definition in line with Hyland's, treating mostly non-propositional lexical items. (It should also be pointed out that metadiscourse does not always consist of lexical items, but can also include prosodic features, such as phonological paragraphs (Thompson, 2003)).

The definition of metadiscourse set out in Hyland (1998b, 1999) is not entirely unproblematic. Ifantidou (2005) believes that Hyland is mistaken in some of his characterizations of metadiscourse, particularly that metadiscourse is non-propositional in nature. Using the framework of relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson 1986), Ifantidou shows that some items which would be characterized by researchers such as Hyland as metadiscourse do in fact contribute to the truth condition of the utterance and as such are propositional.

One of the main institutional goals of academic discourse is to support novices in their socialization into the academic speech community. Several studies using corpora have shown how this is done, and there seems to be agreement that academic spoken discourse is generally supportive in several ways. Rudolph (1994) shows that academic discourse is used by experts (professors) to socialize apprentices, and she compares this with a Vygotskian perspective on child

language development. Academic discourse, she feels, is used to create an important bond of trust between the expert and the novice. In her study of conversations during office hours. She found that students and teachers construct a "positive affect bond" by several means. Teachers use confirmation checks to, at least theoretically, invite a contribution by the student into the conversation. Students in turn, echo the professor's use of language.

In addition to a study such as the one above which deals with discourse, evidence of supportive speech has been shown in studies of single lexical items. Swales (2001), in his study of the words "point" and "thing" as used to refer to discourse produced during academic encounters, shows that they are usually used in supportive, rather than antagonistic, speech. Positive adjectives were used in the overwhelming majority of cases, even if the person they were discussing was not in the room. He found almost no instances of negative adjectives such as "poor" and "weak," used to modify those words. However, it might be noted here that "poor" does not usually collocate with "point" or "thing" in this sense.

Fortanet, (2004) studied the use of the lexical item "we" in university lectures, and also found ways of use that could be considered supportive. First, as might be rather intuitively obvious, the use of "we" serves to suggest some sort of bond between the speaker (the lecturer), and the hearer (students). It can suggest that the hearer is somehow involved in the action, as in, "Today we're going to talk about" Also, she believes that "we" has a metadiscourse function. Fortanet found that the "we" clusters very frequently with "know that," and this cluster is used often in metadiscourse as a summarizing device (p. 61).

Swales and Burke (2003) studied the use of adjectives in academic speech. They hypothesized that academic speech would show more polarized adjectives than academic writing, thereby making it more like ordinary conversation. Polarized adjectives are more extreme, for example "huge" rather than the more centralized "big." They did not find that speech in academic contexts showed more polarized adjectives than writing to a significant degree, but they did find some interesting usage which adds to the discussion on the supportive use of academic speech. One of the polarized adjectives with the highest frequency was "weird," and other adjectives expressing deviance, which Swales and Burke felt could be used to decrease the power differential in the professor-student relationship (p. 12).

Poos and Simpson (2002), in the study cited above, show that hedges can be used for various interpersonal functions. In addition to the frequency counts already mentioned, Poos and Simpson performed a pragmatic analysis on the data and noticed that they were often used in mitigating negative feedback. They also found that "kind of" and "sort of" are also frequently employed when using difficult vocabulary or jargon, as a way of the instructor distancing herself from the material and demonstrating solidarity with the students (p. 17). They also found, in a close analysis of one speaker, that "kind of" and "sort of" when used in front of metaphors, have a metadiscourse function in that they signal the student that the utterance is not being used literally (p. 17).

Hyland has also treated the subject of metadiscourse in writing for novices in the community (1999). Hyland makes the point that metadiscourse in introductory textbooks serves the function of making the writing easier to understand, but, as the texts tend to deal with established facts in the field, does not show the persuasive function as much as research articles do. Hyland also points out that the metadiscourse in introductory textbooks tends to position the author as the expert, in contrast to research articles which are more egalitarian (1999:20). Hyland believes that this might fail to properly initiate novices into the discourse community.

Although academic spoken discourse is often evaluated as supportive, it has also been pointed out that, because of its supportive nature, it may fail to properly socialize in certain aspects. Mauranen (2003, 2002b) feels that spoken academic discourse, more than written, is used to socialize novices, because written discourse usually describes a finished product, while spoken discourse describes the process. She found that metadiscourse in academic discourse is often linked to evaluative speech, which tends to be positive. Negative evaluations in metadiscourse were found, but they were usually hedged and less repetitive than positive evaluations. In a study specifically dealing with the way criticism is marked, she found the markers to be “so banal as to escape notice” where positive criticism is explicitly stated (2002b:9). She wonders how novices can become accustomed to more negative evaluation if they have so few chances to be exposed to it (2002a, 2003).

These studies do support the fact the ASE is positive and supportive, although it may be necessary to do studies with several different methods to really determine what is happening in the classroom. It also remains to be shown that the supportive nature of ASE is detrimental to students’ development as scholars.

Conclusion

Many things remain to be discovered about academic discourse in general, but studies in Academic spoken English have changed the rather simplistic notion of academic discourse on which many courses on English for academic purposes are based. It has become clear that courses that focus solely on grammar and vocabulary are ignoring the interpersonal aspect of academic discourse. It would be safe to say that unless a course in English for academic purposes addresses this aspect of academic English, it is not serving the students well. It is also clear that academic discourse is used in various ways to support students, and international students need to be made aware of this. More research needs to be done on the positive nature of ASE, in what ways this is manifested in the classroom and what effect it has on students’ learning.

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