

## SPOKEN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE: AN APPROACH TO RESEARCH ON LECTURES

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**ABSTRACT.** *Research on the discourse of lectures is becoming more and more relevant in recent years. This may be due to the increasing internationalization of higher education both from the point of view of students as from that of teachers. The aim of this paper is to present a state of the art of the research on lectures highlighting the studies developed by the Group of Research on Academic and Professional English (G.R.A.P.E.) at Universitat Jaume I (Castellón, Spain). It is part of a broader research project that aims at shedding some light on the features of lecturers in English in order to be able to establish a comparison with Spanish lectures. This research intends to be a contribution to a better understanding of academic discourse by both English and Spanish students as well as to an improvement of the lectures given in English by Spanish university teachers.*

**KEYWORDS:** *lecture discourse, spoken academic discourse, and internationalization.*

**RESUMEN.** *La investigación del discurso en la clase magistral ha ganado importancia durante los últimos años. La razón es sin duda el fenómeno de la internacionalización de la educación superior por parte no sólo del estudiantado sino también del profesorado. El artículo que aquí se describe intenta ser un estado de la cuestión en lo concerniente a la investigación de la clase magistral resaltando aquellos estudios realizados por el Grupo G.R.A.P.E. (Group of Research on Academic and Professional English) en la Universitat Jaume I (Castellón, Spain). Es parte de un proyecto más extenso que intenta contribuir al análisis de la clase magistral en inglés para posteriormente realizar una comparación con la clase magistral en español. Con ello pretendemos facilitar la comprensión del discurso académico tanto a estudiantes cuya lengua nativa es el inglés como a estudiantes españoles que estudian inglés como lengua extranjera o segunda lengua. Sin duda todo ello contribuirá también a la mejora de las clases magistrales impartidas en inglés por profesores españoles.*

**PALABRAS CLAVE:** *el discurso de la clase magistral, el discurso académico hablado, internacionalización.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Teachers involved in the field of academic study have a wide range of instructional material available namely, speech events such as seminars and tutorials; materials such as videos; or activities such as writing assignments, among others; but the lecture “remains the central instructional activity” (Flowerdew 1994). Waggoner (1984) characterises lectures as having “paradigmatic stature” and other authors such as Benson (1994) define lecture as “the central ritual of the culture of learning”. Lecturing is a widely accepted practice in higher education in American institutions and throughout the world (Dunkel and Davy 1989). However, lectures are not homogeneous. The lecture class is changing (Waggoner 1984), so that traditional methods of learning coexist with newer interactive methods; both lecturers and students feel the influence of a greater egalitarianism than in former times. Students see teachers much closer and the figure of a helper, a counsellor or a facilitator for the learning process better fits their perspectives. On the other hand, teachers seem to invite students to interact and participate more than in previous times, what may be understood as an attempt to narrow distances and avoid formalisms.

A great part of university discourse study focuses on the lecture (Johns 1981, Richards 1983; Benson 1989) and more concretely towards the lecture comprehension process. Knowing the best way for students to internalise and comprehend lecture content seems to be paramount for university success; that is why there is so much research on spoken academic language centred on different aspects of lectures (Flowerdew 1994; Chaudron and Richards 1986; Jones 1999; Khuwaileh 1999; Kerans 2001).

In the present paper we aim to review some of the most relevant contributions of research on lecture discourse. Most of this research tends to show the relevance of the *what* of teaching and learning (Flowerdew 1994: 14). Among the several studied features, we will focus on lecturing styles, the syntax of lectures, and lecture structural patterns. Later on in the paper we will present the current research on lecture discourse carried out by the Group of Research on Academic and Spoken English (G.R.A.P.E.) at the Universitat Jaume I (Castellón) in Spain. Following the line established by previous research, this group has analysed the use of personal pronouns, the verbal expression of stance, the references to background knowledge, delivery strategies, and the use of discourse markers. With this review we aim at shedding some light on the insights of EAP (English for Academic Purposes) courses as well as providing lecturers with valuable information in order to structure their own lectures in an effective way.

## 2. PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON LECTURES

### 2.1. LECTURING STYLES

Several studies have identified a number of lecture styles. Morrison (1974, reported in Jordan 1989: 153) studied science lectures and divided them into two kinds: i) formal

and ii) informal. The former refers to “close spoken prose”, and the latter is defined as “high informational content, but not necessarily in high formal register”. This first classification, although somehow useful, seemed too simplistic for such a complex speech event. More complete classifications of lecture styles are those proposed by Goffman (1981), Dudley-Evans and Johns (1981) and Dudley-Evans (1994). This last study points out that: “the key to the understanding of lectures is an appreciation of lecturers’ individual styles” (Dudley-Evans, 1994: 148). Goffman (1981) talks about three *modes* of lectures, namely, ‘memorization’, ‘aloud reading’ and ‘fresh talk’ whereas Dudley-Evans and Johns (1981:134) distinguish three styles:

- i. *reading style*, “in which lecturers either read the lecture or deliver it as if they were reading it” (Dudley-Evans 1994: 148). It is characterised by short tone groups, and narrowness of intonational range, in which falling tone predominates; although level tone may also occur.
- ii. the *conversational style*, “in which lecturers deliver the lecture from notes and in a relatively informal style with a certain amount of interaction with students” (Dudley-Evans 1994: 148). It is characterised by longer tone groups and key-sequences from high to low. When the lecturer is in ‘low-key’ at the end of a key sentence, the speaker may markedly increase tempo and vowel reduction, and reduce intensity.
- iii. the *rhetorical style*, “in which the lecturers give a performance with jokes and digressions” (Dudley-Evans 1994: 148). It is characterised by the wide intonational range. The lecturer often exploits high key, and a ‘boosted high key’. There are frequent asides and digressions marked by key and tempo shift-sometimes also by voice quantity-shift. (Dudley-Evans and Johns 1981: 134).

There is no written evidence about the frequency of use of lecture styles, but there seems to be a general agreement on identifying the informal conversational style –based on notes or handouts– as the predominant mode of lecture presentation not only for native, but also for non-native audiences (McDonough 1978; DeCarrico and Nattinger 1988; Dudley-Evans 1994). Along this line, Frederick (1986) talks about a “participatory lecture” closer to discussion. More recent work (Benson 1994) perceives a move towards a more interactive style of lecturing. This trend seems more predominant in the United States universities rather than in European ones; this fact may cause some problems for non-native speakers that have been trained in a much more traditional lecturing style, producing a default or precarious listening comprehension.

## 2.2. SYNTAX OF LECTURES

Regarding the syntax of lectures, these, as a type of spoken text, might be seen as characterized by typical spoken syntactic features rather than by written features (Tannen 1982, Halliday 1985/89). Far from this idea, Biber (1988) points out that there is no single parameter of linguistic variation that distinguishes spoken and written texts.

Instead, we find what he names dimensions, that is to say, clustering of features which work together to fulfil some underlying function within the various spoken and written genres, namely, formal/informal, restricted/elaborated, contextualised/decontextualised, involved/detached. According to these characteristics, spoken texts should be informal, restricted, contextualised and involved. Nevertheless, different types of spoken texts may vary their characteristics. In this sense, lectures as literate and strictly planned speech events, are thought to share many of the features of written texts, although this is not always so.

There are several mechanisms in spoken discourses which facilitate learners' comprehension; the use of linguistic repetition, as an example, plays an important role. Giménez (2000) points out that in ancient discourses, whether social or pedagogical “no sólo se enseñaba la repetición lingüística sino que también se utilizaba como mecanismo pedagógico y didáctico” (1998: 302). Some research on the linguistic repetition considers that this type of repetition is relevant as a means of cohesion and global structuring of the discourse (van Dijk *et al.* 1972).

In a recent study on lectures, Giménez (2000) analyses the effects of linguistic repetition on the academic genre of lecture within the discourse of Social Sciences. Giménez (2000) presents proven evidence of the importance of linguistic repetition in the genre of lecture for a comprehensible understanding.

### 2.3. LECTURE STRUCTURAL PATTERNS

The structuring and organization of a lecture plays an important role for the listening comprehension process. However, compared to other genres such as the research article (Swales, 1990), very little research has been carried out on this aspect. The main interest lays upon those aspects of lecture structure that might be relevant in training non-native speakers. Thus, much of the research done in the 70s examines how the information organised in a lecture is signalled (Cook 1975; Murphy and Candlin 1979; Coulthard and Montgomery 1981). Cook (1975) distinguishes two structural patterns within a lecture: the macro-structure and the micro-structure of a lecture. The macro-structure of a lecture is made up of a number of ‘expositions’. An exposition consists of different classes of episode, namely, an optional episode of expectation, an obligatory focal episode, an obligatory developmental episode together with optional developmental episodes, and an obligatory closing episode. Within the micro-structure, episodes are described in terms of ‘moves’. Just to illustrate it, a concluding move is a justificatory statement, a focal episode with a concluding function, or a summary statement. A summarizing move gives a summary of the immediately preceding discourse. Cook's (1975) attempt describes the boundaries of these units but fails to give detailed information about their internal structure.

More recent work by Young (1994) tries to “describe the macro-structure of university lectures and to identify some of the more prominent micro-features that contribute to this structure” (Young 1994: 159). Young departs from very scarce research

on the macro-structure of spoken monologic discourse. For the development of the study she gathers a corpus made of seven two-hour university lectures from third and fourth year courses. Three are lectures delivered to non-native speakers of English from a Western European university on disciplines such as Soil, Physics, Sociology and Economics. The other four lectures were delivered to native speakers of English in North American Universities. This specific selection of the corpus could give an identifiable macro-structure across disciplines and across levels. Young describes the macro-structure of a lecture in terms of ‘strands’ or ‘phases’. She distinguishes six phases split in two groups: three metadiscoursal-strands which comment on the discourse itself; and the other three which mark university lectures. The first three metadiscoursal phases proposed by Young (1994: 166) are:

- a) *Discourse structuring phase*: “addressors indicate the direction that they will take in the lecture”.
- b) *Conclusion*: “where lecturers summarize points they have made throughout the discourse”.
- c) *Evaluation*: “the lecturer reinforces each of the other strands by evaluating information which is about to be, or has already been transmitted”.

The two former metadiscoursal phases are more frequent than the latter. However, whereas these phases can be shared with other genres of academic discourse, the phases which mark university lectures are (Young 1994: 167):

- a) *Interaction*: “indicates an important feature of this registerial variety”.
- b) *Theory or Content*: used “to reflect the lecturer’s purpose, which is to transmit theoretical information”.
- c) *Examples*: it is in this phase in which “the speakers illustrate theoretical concepts through concrete examples familiar to students in the audience”.

In her study, Young reaches the conclusion that a more accurate schema of university lectures is presented when using phases rather than presenting the macro-structure of a lecture in terms of outlines (Woods 1978: 42), where the structure of a lecture is understood as beginning, middle and end configuration. As Young indicates when referring to the genre of lecture: “phasal analysis seems to offer a more realistic portrayal of the nature of this particular genre.” (1994: 173).

### 3. G.R.A.P.E. CONTRIBUTIONS TO LECTURE DISCOURSE

#### 3.1. THE USE OF PRONOUNS IN LECTURES

Pronouns, together with demonstratives, give reference points for the hearer to understand a speech event. Personal pronouns are by far most common in spoken English, mainly in conversation (Biber *et al.* 1999: 333). Many researchers have referred to the

importance of personal pronouns. Brown and Levinson (1994: 127) relate the use of ‘we’ including both speaker or writer and hearer or reader with positive politeness, whereas ‘I’ or ‘you’ are associated with negative politeness. Kamio (2001: 1120) also focuses on ‘we’ as a pronoun indicating a higher closeness between the speaker and the hearer than ‘you’ or ‘they’.

Rounds (1985) analysed in her dissertation, as well as in her two subsequent articles (1987a, 1987b), the use of pronouns in 5 native lectures from the University of Michigan. She found that in her corpus, ‘we’ appeared up to three times more frequently than ‘I’ and ‘you’ and that the most successful teaching assistants were the ones that made a greater use of ‘we’ (1987b).

Based on this research, and especially on Rounds’ results, Fortanet (2004a, forthcoming b) started a research on the use of personal pronouns in lectures. She selected the MICASE (Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English) (Simpson *et al.* 2002) for this study. Her first analysis (2004a), about the pronoun ‘we’ was based on 4 lectures from this corpus totaling over 40,000 words. There was a frequency analysis, and then a description of the referents and discourse functions of ‘we’. Her results showed that, contrary to what Rounds (1985, 1987a, 1987b) claimed, ‘we’ does not seem to be the most frequently used pronoun in lectures, since the results for the use of ‘I’ and ‘you’ almost doubled that of ‘we’. The explanation for this contradiction may be related to an evolution of academic speech from an extended use of ‘we’, to an increasingly more common use of ‘I’ and ‘you’. Some researchers have observed a tendency to substitute ‘we’ for ‘I’ in academic writing (Hyland 2001; Chang and Swales 1999) and this tendency may be expanding to academic speech.

A second finding of this research was associated to the referents and discourse functions of ‘we’ in lectures. Regarding referents, most occurrences of ‘we’ seemed to refer to a large group of people, of whom the speaker was the representative or spokesperson. In the following example, ‘we’ refers to people in general (Fortanet 2004a: 60).

*(1) ... lots of people talk of risk is a very colloquial part of the way we talk about, things that have to do, with health and illness (Lecture 4)*

This referent was not identified by Rounds’ studies, which did identify others such as

- ‘we’ for ‘I’ referring to the speaker/ teacher

*(2) ... it is because we’re going to be talking about it today... (Lecture 4)*

- ‘we’ for ‘you’, meaning the audience/ students

*(3) what are we missing? somebody, did anybody think there’s something missing? somebody, did anybody think there’s something missing? (Lecture 3)*

- ‘we’ including speaker and audience

*(4) ...when we read Mori Ogai, next we’re gonna read... (Lecture 3)*

With regard to discourse functions, Fortanet (2004a: 63) identified two categories: those related to the representation of a group and those related to metadiscourse. The first group of discourse functions of ‘we’ is closely related to the use of direct reported speech and the referent involved excludes the audience (exclusive-we), creating so more distance between speaker and hearer. On the other hand, the second category, that of metadiscourse frequently involves the hearer (inclusive-we) and helps the audience to understand, contextualise and follow the speech event.

With reference to the use of the pronouns ‘you’ and ‘I’ (Fortanet forthcoming b), five lectures also from the MICASE were analysed. The research process was parallel to that of the pronoun ‘we’. The frequency search showed that there was no noticeable difference in the frequency of the use of ‘I’ and ‘you’, though upon classifying the corpus into interactional/ dialogue and monologic/ lecture modes of discourse, ‘I’ appeared to be more frequent in the former and ‘you’ in the latter. The reason seems to be the need speakers have to identify themselves when taking their turn to speak, whereas ‘you’ is frequently used by a monologic speaker as an impersonal marker. In fact, impersonal ‘you’ accounts for most of the discourse functions of ‘you’, only preceded in number of occurrences by ‘you’ referring to the hearer. Impersonal ‘you’ was found to have four “hidden” referents, depending on the context:

– ‘they’ when the referent is a group of people identified by the context. Ex.

(5) *you can take care of camels, you can take care of cattle, you can take care of sheep goats (Lecture 1)*

In this example the impersonal ‘you’ could be substituted by ‘they’ meaning the Samburu group of people, which is the topic of the lecture.

– ‘people’, when the subject is indefinite. Ex.

(6) *if you come to the screen thinking, that all African-Americans are poor or criminals when you watch the Cosby show (Lecture 4)*

In this example, both occurrences of ‘you’ could have been substituted by ‘people’ (or ‘people’ and ‘they’, to avoid repetition) without any change in the meaning.

– ‘we’, when it could easily be substituted by this pronoun without variation in meaning. Ex.

(7) *but what you have at Michigan especially is that people actively seek out the absolute easiest class in the school (Lecture 2)*

Both lecturer and audience are at the University of Michigan, hence ‘we’ would also be possible here.

– ‘I’, when nobody else but the speaker can be the referent. Ex.

(8) *but the transcript of these meetings were was<sup>1</sup> really quite interesting because you can recognize even without the title (Lecture 3)*

The speaker here refers to a book he has read and forgot to bring to the class. It is only the lecturer who has read the book, hence 'you' could be substituted by 'I' without changing the meaning.

Regarding the discourse functions of 'I', the main ones are: metadiscourse, expressions of attitude by the speaker, subject of anecdotes and hypothetical 'I' as an example.

Summing up, pronouns are very frequently used words in lectures, mainly used to give cohesion to discourse but also with other functions that are used by the speakers to control their commitment with the audience or with their propositions. However, as Biber *et al.* (1999) pointed out, a pronoun often has a vague meaning that has to be figured out by the hearer from the context, being so one more element left to the dynamic and individual interpretation of the hearer.

### 3.2. VERBS EXPRESSING STANCE IN LECTURES

The aim of this research carried out by Fortanet (2004c) was to find out the verbs used in lectures to express stance. Stance has been related to 'connotation' (Hunston and Thompson 2000), 'attitude' (Halliday 1994), or 'evaluation'. Biber *et al.* (1999: 965- 986) distinguish a number of devices used in English to convey stance: grammatical devices (adverbials and complement clauses with verbs, modal auxiliaries and adjectives), word or lexical choice, paralinguistic devices (intonation, pitch, etc.) and non-linguistic devices (body posture, facial expressions and gestures).

In previous research, Fortanet (forthcoming b) had already identified the pronoun 'I' as a marker of stance, as one of its discourse functions in university lectures. However, under the assumption that the speaker's way of thinking is not usually expressed by one single marker, Fortanet conducted some research so as to establish the linguistic features of the verbs accompanying the pronoun 'I' in order to determine whether they also contribute to the marking of stance, creating in this way clusters.

Following Biber *et al.*'s (1999) taxonomy of markers of stance, it was found that most instances of attitudinal 'I' were accompanied by affective or evaluative verbs (lexical stance markers) followed by 'that-clauses'. Within this group of verbs, 'think' was highlighted with the meaning of 'giving an opinion'. The speakers seem to need some protection and present arguments as opinions, although 'I think' also appears to be frequently used as an expression of hesitation or as a pause-filler. Regarding the grammatical markers, modal auxiliary verbs, especially 'would', are also common.

In relation to the semantic classification of stance markers, epistemic stance is more common in academic speech than attitudinal stance, mainly due to the high frequency of 'I think'. Epistemic markers are used in American lectures to express a relationship between the speaker and what s/he says. On the other hand, attitude markers, though less frequent, are also present in this type of discourse, as a contribution to the speakers-audience relationship.



### 3.3. REFERENCES TO BACKGROUND KNOWLEDGE IN LECTURES

One of the most widely agreed features of lectures is the need the lecturer feels to approach the audience and, consequently, facilitate their comprehension by means of referring to common background knowledge. Even though shared or common background knowledge had already been pointed out as an important factor affecting comprehension (Hutchinson and Waters 1981), Fortanet *et al.* (2004) were the first to analyse how shared knowledge is referred to in lectures, making a contrastive analysis of American, British and Spanish lectures. Taking as a point of departure the taxonomy used for an analysis of a different genre of academic discourse in a previous research, the *Honoris Causa* speech, Fortanet (forthcoming a) identified the references to:

- Immediate context: references to the exact place and time of the speech event.
- Discipline: references related to acquired knowledge about the subject.
- Cultural background knowledge:
  - Local: references to the place where the lecture is delivered (Ann Arbor, Birmingham, Castelló)
  - Age group: knowledge shared by a generation, usually the students' age group.
  - National: references of information known to the inhabitants of the country (U.S., U.K., Spain)
  - Western civilization: knowledge shared by most people in this civilization, living in Europe, America, Oceania, and a few countries of Africa and Asia. It is frequently assumed to be shared by the whole world.

On the other hand, following the structures of lectures established by other researchers such as Murphy and Candlin's (1979), Strodt-López (1987, 1991) or Young (1994) she distinguished six interactive acts, which would help in locating the references to background knowledge:

#### B. Interactive acts:

- **metalinguage**, discourse used to speak about the lecture (order of presentation, what has to be done next, what was done last, etc.);
- **content**, information provided in the lecture;
- **anecdotes**, stories in first person, used by the lecturer to make a difficult point more comprehensive;
- **asides**, comments which do not share the same topic of the lecture (comments about something happening in the middle of the lecture, etc.);
- **illustrations**, examples used by the lecturer to illustrate some point;
- **jokes**, funny situations mentioned by the lecturer that usually have a double function: to relax the atmosphere, and to draw again the attention of the audience. They encourage audience to laugh. They may be related to some of the other interactive acts.

The results of this research showed that all lectures make use of references to background knowledge, mainly to introduce illustrations of the points in their expositions, although they can also be found in relation to the other interactive acts.

After analysing the referents of the shared knowledge, national cultural background knowledge seems to be the most frequently used in all lectures. One reason for this could be the mobility of students and lecturers that prevent their knowledge of the local environment. Another reason may be the difficulty to relate the topic locally in some subjects. The cultural references at a national level provide a framework where customs and laws are shared, which is usually broad enough to include the whole audience.

### 3.4. DELIVERY STRATEGIES IN CLASSROOM LECTURES

There are different strategies that teaching professionals use in order to deliver classroom lectures. Some of these delivery strategies reveal us different ways to connect information to aspects already observed in previous classes, introducing both the topic and the framework. Palmer (2004) carried out a study in which he worked with a total of thirty lectures compiled by Dr. Giménez, from Universitat de València. Palmer (2004) observed how authors carry out these four different steps:

- a) how the current message is connected to information already explained in previous lectures;
- b) how the current message is related to documents/data students possess;
- c) how the main topic of the lecture is introduced; and
- d) how the general layout of the lecture is established.

The aim was to analyse how authors develop the beginning of their lectures, for this reason different linguistic devices were taken into consideration: pronominalisation, verb usage (tenses and types of verbs), rhetorical questions, time related expressions and clarifying asides. Moreover, differences among the three disciplines were also analysed. Regarding the observation of the first step presented above, Palmer (2004) found that lecturers connect their current message to information already explained in previous lectures in three different ways:

#### a.1. Stating all the information observed in a prior lecture on the topic.

Lecturers recapitulate on the topic giving a step by step summary of the prior session normally by using the plural pronoun to bring speaker and hearer closer, and the past tense (Palmer 2004: 103). Ex.

- (9) (...) *Right. We started at the beginning getting our contract formed. Then, we had a look at what was in the contract, and how to exclude liability for breach of what was in the contract. We've now got a mixture of topics which you can group together... (Law, lecture 2)*

a.2. Stating specific ideas observed in a previous lecture on the topic.

Sometimes lecturers want to point out some specific information presented in a previous meeting but not in its whole, making students recall some aspects. To do so, a general framework to support the task is used. The lecturer will likely go back to the previously achieved concept at the initial part of the lecture, using mainly the pronouns 'we' and 'you' (Palmer 2004: 104). Ex.

*(10)(...) As we observed last week, not all cases should be taken for granted when dealing with this topic. In fact, private law can be seen as a fairly simple aspect of a somehow more complicated...uhmm, In any case, you must always remember that all the aspects comprised by the law have to be considered all through the legal process, as ... (Law, lecture 9)*

a.3. Stating that today's talk follows a previous lecture on the topic, without recalling any specific information on it.

In relation to this, Palmer found sixteen lecture introductions showing some reference to aspects commented in previous sessions. There were three of these examples in which teachers state the information offered in a previous lecture on the topic, giving a clear framework of important aspects presented. A larger number of examples (twelve) were found when giving specific references to one (or few) aspects commented in a previous session. Finally, there was only one example in which the lecturer states his speech follows a prior lecture on the topic, but without recalling any information on it.

Following the steps above, in b) How to relate the current message to documents/data students possess, Palmer (2004) analyses how lectures relate what is going on to be explained in the current session to some documents or any other type of data that students may either have or share. Therefore printed elements such as handouts, study guides, course books or reference books as well as visual elements (OHP transparencies, slides, board notes, etc.) were taken into consideration. Comparing disciplines (Business, Law and Sociology) the level of use of these external devices presented no significant differences. However, Business and Sociology lectures showed an extended use of OHP transparencies contrarily to Law lectures where printed materials seemed to be preferred.

Regarding the next step, that is, c) How to introduce the main topic of the lecture, Palmer (2004) observed four different ways:

c.1. Introducing the topic in the initial sentence.

It may happen that the main topic of the lecture is introduced in the very first sentence. In those cases, the speaker may also introduce a brief outline of the lecture.

c.2. Introducing the main topic by using some references to previously acquired knowledge.

Sometimes, lectures point out some specific knowledge explained in previous sessions, establishing a gap that will be hopefully completed in the lecture (Palmer 2004:

109). The aim is to recall information that students already possess, setting up the pace for the lecture to be delivered. This type of introduction is not as usual as the first option presented above, appearing in just nine of the lectures analysed in the study.

c.3. Introducing the main topic by establishing an example.

A lecture can be introduced by stating a case that will later be discussed in the classroom, in this way the main topic is established. In the four cases Palmer (2004) observed the lecturer states a case that may deserve some discussion in the classroom, trying to introduce the central concept.

c.4. Introducing the main topic by establishing a humorous remark.

This case could be just an exception as not many speakers decide to follow this trend. In the example below the author introduces the topic by means of a false expectation. The topic (registered land) is introduced by means of a humorous question, answered by the students' laugh. Ex.

*(11) Registered Land, have you been looking forward to it? [S laugh] At last, at last, we've come to it: Registered Land. All these little tiny references throughout the year to Registered Land, and kept promising we are going to do it right at the end. Well, today is the first of two lectures on Registered Land. Now, we've still got to bear in mind everything we did last week on Unregistered Land, we mustn't forget that. And another thing I have to tell you at the outset is that we mustn't confuse Unregistered Land with Registered Land, very easy to confuse, but we are not going to, are we? (Law, lecture 9)*

Regarding the last step presented: d) How to establish the general layout of today's lecture, Palmer (2004) found that, in general, lectures do not establish a general layout of the session that is about to state, disagreeing in this way with Laster and Pickett's (1996) recommendations.

The findings obtained in this study aim at providing some general guidelines when delivering lectures, since it can sometimes become a fairly hard activity for professionals. The need to start preparing professionals to deliver their lectures as successfully as possible can be concluded from the present study.

### 3.5. DISCOURSE MARKERS IN LECTURE DISCOURSE

Following lecture discourse literature, many researchers have suggested that an understanding of the role of discourse markers and the relationships between different parts of the text is fundamental for the comprehension of lectures (Morrison 1974, Coulthard and Montgomery 1981; Chaudron and Richards 1986).

However, most of the research carried out up to now has analysed signaling cues as they appear in written discourse; to our knowledge little or scarce attention has been paid to spoken discourse. Therefore, Bellés (2004), in her study, aimed at analysing DMs (Discourse Markers) use within spoken academic discourse. In this way, she tried to provide useful information for the better comprehension of lectures, not only for lecturers but also for learners who need to understand lecture discourse.

Bellés (2004) carried out a comparative analysis with a corpus consisting of twenty transcripts of university lectures within the academic division of Social Sciences. This general corpus was divided in two groups of lectures: the American corpus (CA) formed by ten American English lecture transcripts from the University of Michigan (United States); and the British corpus (CB), which was composed of ten British English lectures recorded at the University of Birmingham (Great Britain). The purpose of the study was to analyse and detect any similarities or differences in the use of macro (higher order) and micro (lower order) markers between the American and British lectures in the discourse of Social Sciences.

Micro and macro markers were divided in categories and divisions already presented in previous studies (Chaudron and Richards 1986; Murphy and Candlin 1979; Morell 2001). After comparing the use of micro-markers in the American and British lectures we realised that the results obtained in both corpora, although analogous at a glance, presented relevant differences, which made us think of divergences between American and British lecture discourse. The three outstanding semantic categories in both sub-corpora were the same: *Segmentation*, *Contrast* and *Causal*. Nevertheless, the semantic category of *Segmentation* in the American corpus doubled its frequency rate in the British corpus. That shows a trend in American lecturing towards making a higher number of pauses while the speech is going on. These pauses can be found in the lecturer's as well as in the students' speech; so American lecture discourse tends to segmentate discourse more often than British lecture discourse. Regarding *Contrast* category, the micro-marker per excellence was *but*. We could observe that *but* is more frequently used in the American corpus than in the British Corpus. A reason for this could be that in the American lectures more contrastive relationships along the discourse are established. Nevertheless, *but* can be used not only with a contrast meaning. Although the search for the development of the study was restricted to those instances of *but* before or after a pause or comma expressing contrast, even in such a delimited context *but* was found to be used more often as a *Segmentation* micro-marker to fill pauses than a purely contrast marker.

Regarding the analysis of macro-markers in both sub-corpora (American and British), Bellés (2004) found that the way macro-markers are used in American and British lecture discourse within the field of Social Sciences shows few differences. The three categories being mostly used in CA, proved to be the same in CB, namely: *Metastatement*; *Attitudinal* and *Starter*. We find that both American and British lecture discourse tend to use the same macro-markers. However, a thorough analysis revealed some relevant divergences especially regarding the *Metastatement* category. Bellés (2004) observed a significant difference between the American and the British corpora in the use of the

macro-markers *Let me (lemme)* or *let's*. Both macro-markers- *let me, let's*- showed a high frequency rate in the CA, surprisingly higher than the rate found in the British corpus, where there were no occurrences found in the case of *Let me* or *lemme*- in the relaxed form. The fact that the American corpus uses “less formal English”, and consequently, more colloquial forms is with no doubt significant in the American lecture corpus and marks a deviation from the British corpus. We could deduce that British lecture discourse uses more formal features as opposed to American lecture discourse which uses less formal speech features. This fact may confirm the trend towards a more interactive type of lecturing pointed by researchers such as Waggoner (1984) or Benson (1994).

Results from this study on the analysis of DMs (Discourse Markers) in American and British lectures proved that DMs use was quite homogeneous to a certain extent. Some singular deviations and differences between American and British lectures in the discourse of Social Sciences regarding the use of specific macro-markers such as *let me (lemme)* and *let's* in the *Metastatement* category and micro-markers such as *but* in the *Contrast* category were found.

Along this line, and given the importance DMs seem to have for lecture structuring, comprehension and classroom interaction (Bellés, forthcoming), the analysis of the use of these markers in different higher education systems can surely be a great aid to scholars who wish to implement effective lecture discourse especially when non-native faculty or student audience are involved.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

The aim of this paper was to present a perspective of the research carried out recently on spoken academic discourse, focusing mainly on lectures. Building on previous studies, the Group of Research on Academic and Professional English (G.R.A.P.E.) has analysed important features from the point of view of the non-native speaker of English student audience, as well as the non-native lecturer.

Pronouns are very often used in lectures and both reference and function may be misunderstood if not set clearly by the speaker. The research presented discloses the variety of references and functions the most commonly used pronouns in lectures, namely ‘we’, ‘you’ and ‘I’, can have. One of the most common functions of the pronoun ‘I’ is to introduce a marker of stance. Lecturers, and also students use a number of verbs to convey mainly epistemic stance, but also attitudinal stance towards their audience.

Another important factor to assure comprehension is the contextualization of the discourse. References to the shared background knowledge help the hearer understand a lecture. However, the misuse of this knowledge may be an obstacle difficult to overcome that is if speakers assume shared knowledge which is not known by the audience. The research hereby presented tries to classify the types of background knowledge that may be used as a reference in lectures in three different settings: universities in the United States, the United Kingdom and in Spain.

Other important aspects of lectures also studied by the G.R.A.P.E. are the strategies used by speakers to deliver a lecture, connecting it with previous lectures, relating it to written documents, introducing the main topic and outlining the points to be discoursed. A cross-disciplinary study of these strategies shows some differences between, Law, Business, and Sociology lectures.

Finally, in the most recent study carried out by the Group, discourse markers used in lectures were classified, comparing their use and frequency rate in British and American classroom speech. The markers showed American lectures tend to be more interactive and less formal than British lectures, supporting thus previous studies that made the same claim.

The Group of Research on Academic and Professional English has as an aim to facilitate the comprehension of lectures for Spanish students who wish to study in universities where English is the language of tuition. It also aims at helping Spanish lecturers who wish to deliver their classes in the English language. By means of the research presented hereby, and future projects in which we are currently working, we intend to establish principles that may guide other people so that they can achieve their objectives that is making an effective use of spoken academic discourse in English.

## 5. NOTES

1. Bona fide transcription

## 6. REFERENCES

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