

## BEYOND AN EXCLUSIVELY LEXICON-ORIENTED APPROACH TO ESP: A COMMENTARY ON SOME RECENT RESEARCH

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Unfortunately, due to a wrong approach both in the teaching and learning of ESP—in this case, English for academic purposes—the teaching of this language as an instrument for academic/scientific research has, in several countries and no doubt in Spain, been practically limited to the acquisition on the part of the learner of a specific terminology and more concretely, the specialized lexicon of the discipline that the learner is interested in. This, we believe, is due, in the first place, to the lack of English teachers trained in this new and fast-growing area of EFL; and secondly, because in many cases, the prospective learners themselves very often demand and expect nothing else but an artificially limited segment of the English language—‘English for biologists’, ‘English for geographers’, ‘English for lawyers’, etc.— by which they almost always mean lists of lexicon which might help them translate publications in their professional fields. Paradoxically, the specific vocabulary of most scientific and technical disciplines can be easily acquired by the learners; and this is, of course, due to the great similarity of technical words, often of Greek or Latin origin, in most languages. (Furthermore, most of these words are practically identical in both the source and the target languages).

It goes without saying that a language can by no means be reduced to isolated lists of vocabulary. It is for this reason that any ESP research or publications which put the emphasis on other aspects of the language such as the organization of discourse are refreshing and therefore welcome. This is indeed the case with Jeanette DeCarrico and James R. Nattinger’s article «Lexical Phrases for the Comprehension of Academic Lectures», published in *English for Specific Purposes*<sup>1</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Jeanette DeCarrico and James R. Nattinger, in *English for Specific Purposes*, VII, 2 (1988), 91-102.

It offers a fresh analysis of the function of discourse markers within the framework of what the authors call the 'Lexical Phrase Approach' in ESP, aimed at facilitating the comprehension of academic lectures and discussions carried out in English, and is therefore a positive step towards overcoming the prevailing exclusively lexicon-oriented methodology already referred to. Indeed, it opens new possibilities to the comprehension by the non-native student of academic lectures and discussions carried out in English. In this article Jeanette DeCarrico and James R. Nattinger isolate, identify and classify those lexical phrases that most frequently occur in academic lectures. These phrases operate as macromarkers (or macro-organizers as they call them) of academic discourse which 'function ... as important directional signals for working one's way through the information in the lecture, and so indicate how the information in the lecture is organized and how it is to be evaluated'<sup>2</sup>. These macro-organizers are more deeply related to the global content of the lecture than other markers already identified in previous research in discourse analysis<sup>3</sup> and which operate at the level of smaller segments of discourse or simply affect the structural organization of the language. As the authors state, they are a very useful means which facilitates the 'basic processes of perception and segmentation'<sup>4</sup>. James Nattinger defines these lexical phrases as 'conventionalized structures that occur more frequently and have more idiomatically determined meaning than language that is put together each time'<sup>5</sup>. Therefore, as they add, a deeper understanding of the role and function of these lexical phrases as macroorganizers 'can ease problems of perception, for it relieves second language learners of having to attend to each individual word as it is used and allows them to focus attention on the larger structure of discourse'<sup>6</sup>. The authors base their conclusions on their observation of different types of lectures on a variety of topics<sup>7</sup>, in which there were many examples of such formulae whose function goes beyond that of the mere filler: as we have seen, they actually serve to organize the content of the lecture and facilitate the listener's comprehension and even evaluation.

The most substantial contribution of this work is therefore the table of global and local macro-organizers classified, firstly, according to their function (topic markers, topic shifters, summarizers, exemplifiers, relators, evaluators, qualifiers and aside markers); and secondly, according to the register, distinguishing between conversational, rhetorical and reading style. Here are some of the macro-organizers which are most frequently used in lectures<sup>8</sup>:

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 92.

<sup>3</sup> Jeanette DeCarrico and James R. Nattinger acknowledge the research carried out by L. Young and B. Fitzgerald in their *Listening and Learning Lectures* (Rowley, MA: Newbury House, 1982).

<sup>4</sup> Jeanette DeCarrico and James R. Nattinger, *op. cit.*, 91.

<sup>5</sup> See James R. Nattinger, «Lexical Phrases Functions and Vocabulary Acquisition», *The ORTESOL Journal*, VII (1986), 1-14 (quoted by Jeanette DeCarrico and James R. Nattinger in *op. cit.*, 92).

<sup>6</sup> Jeanette DeCarrico and James R. Nattinger, *op. cit.*, 92.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>8</sup> These macro-organizers have been selected from Table I of Jeanette DeCarrico and James R. Nattinger, *op. cit.*, 95-6.

*Topic markers:* 'Let me start with', 'The first thing is...', 'I'll be talking to you about', 'Today we're going to hear'; *Topic shifters:* 'Let's look at...', 'Now...' (falling intonation + pause), 'Let me talk a little bit about...', 'Now I'd like to give you...'; *Summarizers:* 'So the theory goes...', 'To tie this up...', 'You can see...', 'What I'm saying is that...', 'We've suggested that...', 'My point is that...'; *Exemplifiers:* 'Take X for example', 'One of the ways this can be seen is...', 'For example/instance', 'As we'll see...'; *Relators:* 'You might say that...', 'This ties in with...', 'It has to do with...', 'As we just talked about...', 'Along the same lines...', 'In fact...', 'We will see from X that Y...'; *Evaluators:* 'As X would have us believe', 'X might not work', 'X is worth noting', 'And this is really the key to...', 'I suggest to you', 'But as a matter of fact...'; *Qualifiers:* 'The catch/problem here is...', 'That's true, but...', 'It doesn't mean that...', 'It depends on how you define...', 'So far as I know...'; *Aside markers:* 'I guess/think I got off the track here', 'Where was I?', 'I'd like to pass over...'.

This kind of research opens new horizons for the development of ESP methodology and contributes to the elimination of long-established routine teaching practices which have retarded this development.

