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Size Matters: An Exploratory Comparison of Small- and Large-Class University Lecture Introductions

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Size matters: An exploratory comparison of small- and large-class university lecture introductions

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Abstract

This exploratory study investigates the impact of class size on the rhetorical move structures and lexico-grammatical features of academic lecture introductions. From MICASE (The Michigan corpus of academic spoken English), two small corpora of lecture introductions of small- and large-class lectures were compiled. Using a genre-based analytical approach, the lecture introductions in the two corpora were compared to examine how the size of the audience influences the rhetorical and linguistic choices lecturers make in university settings. Findings of the comparative analysis suggest that class size does affect lecturers’ discursive decisions. A large audience seems to compel experienced lecturers to use more of certain discursive strategies as a way to create positive and friendly learning environments in settings that may not be particularly favorable for establishing such conditions. However, due to the nature of small classes in which the number of students is smaller and the proximity between lecturers and students is closer, reinforcing positive rapport seems to take less rhetorical and linguistic effort on the part of lecturers. The paper ends with a few tentative pedagogical implications for lecturer training.

1. Introduction

In university settings, academic lectures remain the principal genre of instruction, a crucial means to communicate to students the contents of the subject matter as well as other course-related issues (Flowerdew, 1994; Flowerdew & Miller, 1996; Thompson, 1994; Young, 1990,1994). Similar to other academic genres (e.g., textbooks), the primary purpose of academic lectures is to convey to the audience the knowledge base of a discipline; that is, university lectures are essentially a pedagogical process genre (Thompson, 1994). As such, the functions of lectures include, but are certainly not limited to, introducing key theories, concepts, and research (Young, 1990,1994), integrating ideas from previous lectures and readings to the current lecture (Thompson, 1994), providing information that may be unavailable in textbooks; and explaining complex

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1 In this paper, I understand genre to be “a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes” whose exemplars “exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content and intended audience” (Swales, 1990, p. 58).
concerns through various examples (Young, 1990, 1994). Thompson (1994), however, asserts that university lectures are more than a genre of information imparting. They are value-laden discourses in which lecturers not only present information to the audience, but they also express their attitudes and evaluation of the materials (Thompson, 1994; Young, 1990, 1994), critically examining “the information, methods and procedures...in terms of their validity, appropriacy, and relevance” (Dudley-Evans & Johns, 1981, p. 171). This genre places heavy cognitive and linguistic burdens on both lecturers and students. Students, on the one hand, have the demanding task of listening, processing, and making sense of often lengthy monologues (Thompson, 2003). Lecturers, on the other hand, have the challenging task of presenting and evaluating materials in a sequentially structured manner in order to assist the audience in creating “coherent mental representation[s]” of monologic talks (Brown & Yule, 1983, p. 17).

Given the importance of creating mental maps to help listeners process the information in lectures (Thompson, 1994, 2003; Young, 1994), a number of studies have investigated the ways in which lectures are structurally organized. Some studies have examined the overall structure of lectures (e.g., Dudley-Evans, 1994; Olsen & Huckin, 1990; Tauroza & Allison, 1994; Thompson, 1994, 2003; Young, 1990, 1994). For example, in one of the most comprehensive studies on the macrostructure of lectures, Young (1990, 1994) identified six “phases” (or discontinuously recurring discursive strands) that form the macrostructure of lectures: discourse structuring, conclusion, evaluation, interaction, theory or content, and examples. A particularly crucial strand is the discourse structuring phase, which signals linguistically to the audience the directional flow of lectures (e.g., What we’re going to start to look at today) and, thereby, assisting listeners in the processing of new information.

Looking exclusively at lecture introductions, Thompson (1994) used Swales’s (1990) rhetorical move analysis to describe their structure. She notes that lecturers appear to be “aware...of the need to set up a framework for the lecture discourse and provide a context for the new information to come” (p. 182); however, she points out that lecture introductions seem to lack a preferred rhetorical order and also vary in their move structure. She concludes that rather than having a typical move structure, lecture introductions are a largely unpredictable mix of two discrete functions (e.g., set up lecture framework) and their respective subfunctions (e.g., announce topic).

The rhetorical flexibility of lecture introductions is to be expected as university lectures display both features of spoken language and written text (Flowerdew & Miller, 1997). Some of the salient features of lectures include incomplete clauses, pauses, false starts, redundancies, repetitions, and discourses, which are more characteristic of conversations (Dudley-Evans & Johns, 1981; Flowerdew & Miller, 1997). While lecturers may plan and most likely utilize their notes in the delivery of lectures, these communicative events are nevertheless performed in real time. The online nature of this genre would then allow for a greater degree of flexibility in the number and sequencing of moves (Bhatia, 1993), and, in some cases, moves may occur in a cyclical pattern, with combinations of moves being embedded within other moves or repeating themselves (Bhatia, 1993; Thompson, 1994).

Other studies on lecture discourse have investigated more specifically the effects of discourse signaling cues (or discourse markers) in text structuring of lectures (e.g., Chaudron & Richards, 1986; Dunkel & Davis, 1994; Flowerdew & Miller, 1997; Flowerdew & Tauroza, 1995; Jung, 2003, 2006; Thompson, 2003). These linguistic cues signal to the listeners the structural organization of these communicative events by indicating the direction of the discourse, highlighting the relative importance of and relationship between ideas, and evaluating them as well (Jung, 2003, 2006). Although some of the findings have been mixed, much of the evidence points to the beneficial role of discourse signaling cues in facilitating listeners’ understanding of lecture discourse (Flowerdew & Tauroza, 1995; Jung, 2003, 2006; Tyler, 1992, 1994; Williams, 1992).

These studies have revealed a great deal about the complexities of academic lectures and the difficulties both lecturers and students face when dealing with lengthy, online monologues (Thompson, 1994). However, they have mostly not taken into account the impact of class size on the rhetorical organization and lexico-grammatical features of lectures, although the number of students in a class seems to be an important variable.

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2 According to Strodt-Lopez (1991), aside are temporary digressions from the main topic to inject attitudes, opinions, or other matters, having the potential to contribute to the overall coherence of lectures. They can also act as interpersonal devices to establish lecturer-audience rapport, through light comments that do not necessarily add pertinent topical information (Zorzi, 1999, cited in Crawford Camiciotti, 2005).

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influencing lecture discourse (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2005; Hansen & Jensen, 1994; Morell, 2004, 2007; Northcott, 2001). In her study of interactive and non-interactive lectures, Morell (2004) indicates that the major differences between the two types of lectures are the level of formality and the amount of student intervention. She found that interactive lectures tend to be characterized by a greater number of the pronouns you and we, elicitation markers (e.g., What do you think about...?), questions, negotiation of meaning (e.g., clarification checks), and lecturer-audience interaction. Non-interactive lectures, on the other hand, tend to be more formal and lack student involvement. The formality and interactivity, however, would appear to be influenced by the size of a class. As Crawford Camiciottoli (2005) points out, small classes can be conducive for more verbal interaction between lecturers and students than large classes, thus potentially influencing the rhetorical structure of the discourse. Other features of interaction (e.g., use of personal pronouns, asides, rhetorical questions) may also be affected by the size of the class (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2005; Northcott, 2001). The size of the class then would seem to be one of the variables that not only influence lectures, but also may have an effect on the rhetorical organization.

This exploratory study investigates the impact of class size on the rhetorical move structures and lexicogrammatical features of academic lecture introductions. Specifically, this study compares the move structures, pronouns, lexical phrases, and discourse markers in university lecture introductions of small-class lectures and large-class lectures (hereafter SCLs and LCLs, respectively). The remainder of this paper is devoted to the description of the study and the discussion of the findings.

2. The study

Before proceeding further, it may be constructive to discuss the motivation for exploring only the introduction section of small- and large-class lectures. The motivation for this is twofold. First, this is an exploratory study to examine whether class size would make a difference in the rhetorical organization and linguistic features of lecture discourse, as previous research on interactivity in lectures only partially sheds light on this issue. For this reason, before further investigating the impact of class size on entire lectures, it would seem prudent to explore whether such effects would emerge from analyzing a small segment of lecture discourse. Second, as mentioned earlier, to facilitate the comprehension of lengthy monologues, lecturers are responsible for establishing a mental map for students. As Thompson (1994) points out, listeners to academic lectures “suffer from problems of processing a densely related network of information delivered at relatively high speed” (p. 180). To aid listeners in processing the information, the introduction section of lectures serves as a framework and context for the remainder of the lecture, “laying out for the audience the formal and conceptual terrain of the [substantive part of the] lecture to come” (Thompson, 1994, p. 181). It is the job of lecturers to set the agenda during this stage, giving the listeners the schematic representation of the entire talk prior to diving into it, as it were. Therefore, this component is crucial in understanding the rest of the lecture.

2.1. The data

The data sets for the study consist of the introductions of authentic academic lectures in MICASE (The Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English) (Simpson, Briggs, Ovens, & Swales, 2002). MICASE is a large corpus of academic spoken discourse of approximately 1.8 million words consisting of various “contemporary university speech [events]...at a typical large public research university” in North America (Simpson, Lee, & Leicher, 2002, p. 2). For a full description of MICASE, see Simpson et al. (2002).

As this study is an exploratory comparison of lecture introductions of SCLs and LCLs, four criteria were used to select the two corpora from MICASE: the academic role of the lecturer, the speech event type, the academic status of the students (audience), and interactivity (i.e., “the predominant types of discourse characterizing the speech event” (Simpson et al., 2002, p. 7) (see Appendices A and B for a sample of a SCL and LCL).
LCL). For both SCLs and LCLs, only lectures given by lecturers who had “senior faculty” or “associate professors and above” (Simpson et al., 2002, p. 7) status were included. The rationale for this decision was that these lecturers are more likely to have considerable knowledge of the subject matter of the lectures as well as substantial teaching experience in their respective fields. Additionally, since there were no lectures in which 100 or more graduate students were the audience, lectures in which the target audience was only undergraduate students were chosen in order to compare SCLs and LCLs. Finally, only “highly monologic” lectures, or lectures in which “one speaker monopolizes the floor with occasional questions or comments from other speakers” (Simpson et al., 2002, p. 7), were chosen. The function “Browse/Search the On-line Version of the Corpus” on the MICASE website (http://legacyweb.lsa.umich.edu/eli/micase/index.htm) allowed me to select the specific criteria to obtain the lectures: senior faculty, large-lecture or small-lecture, undergraduate participants, highly monologic lectures.

Using these criteria elicited a few LCLs, and, unsurprisingly, no SCLs. This is the case because, as Crawford Camiciottoli (2005) points out, SCLs generally have more interactions between lecturers and students than LCLs due to the size of the audience. Therefore, I opted instead to use “mostly monologic” SCLs, or lectures that are primarily monologic with some interactive segments interspersed, but comparatively very few (Simpson et al., 2002). To make the comparison relatively equivalent, the LCL corpus also contained lectures that were classified as mostly monologic. The final data sets contained five SCLs (all mostly monologic) and five LCLs (two mostly monologic and three highly monologic) from four academic divisions: Biological and Health Sciences, Humanities and Arts, Social Sciences and Education, Physical Sciences).

Tables 1 and 2 show a full description of each of the SCLs and LCLs used in this study. Each of the lectures was a part of a series of lectures within a particular course. For convenience and analytical purposes, the SCLs are labeled SCL1 to SCL5 and the LCLs are labeled LCL1–LCL5, and will be referred to as such throughout the paper.

After collecting an equal number of SLCs and LCLs, I then, following Thompson (1994), used phonological criteria to identify the boundary between the introduction and main body of each lecture: a lengthy pause followed by a boundary marker (e.g., right, okay) produced with a falling tone (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). However, some of the lectures did not have clear boundary markers. In such cases, a lengthy pause or a

### Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lecture title</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Lecturer status</th>
<th>Interactivity</th>
<th>Class size</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Biology of birds</td>
<td>SCL1</td>
<td>F/NS/51+</td>
<td>MM</td>
<td>17 Students</td>
<td>411</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American literature</td>
<td>SCL2</td>
<td>M/NS/51+</td>
<td>MM</td>
<td>24 Students</td>
<td>798</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bio. and eco. of Fish</td>
<td>SCL3</td>
<td>M/NS/51+</td>
<td>MM</td>
<td>10 Students</td>
<td>221</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dynamic earth</td>
<td>SCL4</td>
<td>M/NNS/31-50</td>
<td>MM</td>
<td>19 Students</td>
<td>370</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Historical linguistics</td>
<td>SCL5</td>
<td>M/NNS/31-50</td>
<td>MM</td>
<td>12 Students</td>
<td>350</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2150</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a Lecturer status: gender/native speaker status/age; NS = native speaker, NNS = non-native speaker.

*b HM = highly monologic, MM = mostly monologic.

### Table 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lecture title</th>
<th>Label</th>
<th>Lecturer status</th>
<th>Interactivity</th>
<th>Class size</th>
<th>Tokens</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>History of Amer. Fam.</td>
<td>LCL1</td>
<td>F/NS/51+</td>
<td>MM</td>
<td>100 Students</td>
<td>472</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Biology of cancer</td>
<td>LCL2</td>
<td>M/NS/51+</td>
<td>HM</td>
<td>130 Students</td>
<td>722</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Drugs of abuse</td>
<td>LCL3</td>
<td>M/NS/31-50</td>
<td>HM</td>
<td>160 Students</td>
<td>807</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>General ecology</td>
<td>LCL4</td>
<td>F/NS/51+</td>
<td>MM</td>
<td>150 Students</td>
<td>896</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intro Psychology</td>
<td>LCL5</td>
<td>M/NS/31-50</td>
<td>HM</td>
<td>250 Students</td>
<td>965</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3862</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a Lecturer status: gender/native speaker status/age; NS = native speaker, NNS = non-native speaker.

*b HM = highly monologic, MM = mostly monologic.
lengthy pause followed by the lecturer writing something on a technological device (e.g., overhead transparency) was used to mark the boundary. In lectures in which there were no boundary markers or pauses, the boundary was set after carefully reading through the transcripts and identifying the point where the lecturers moved into the substantive part of the lectures.

2.2. Methods of analysis

In analyzing the lecture introductions of SCLs and LCLs, a Swalesian genre-based approach (Swales, 1990) was taken. Swales’s genre analysis framework is characterized by the recurrent generic features, or moves with a number of steps, of a genre and the lexico-grammatical features that realize the rhetorical movements (Swales, 1990). Thompson (1994), using Swales’s framework, analyzed academic lecture introductions and states that Swales’s model of analysis provides a strong framework for analyzing the rhetorical movements of target genres. Following Swales’s move analysis framework and the functions that Thompson (1994) found in her study, the data sets for this study were analyzed to identify the recurrent rhetorical moves and the linguistic aspects in the two corpora of lecture introductions. In Thompson’s (1994) study, she refers to these recurrent moves and steps as functions and sub-functions, respectively. However, in this analysis, Swales’s terms moves and steps are used instead to describe the rhetorical organization of lecture introductions.

In addition to a Swalesian rhetorical move analysis, the two corpora were also analyzed using the corpus linguistic software WordSmith Tools version 4.0 (Scott, 2004). Wordsmith Tools is a set of powerful programs for examining how linguistic items behave in electronically stored texts (Scott, 2004). The program allows users to investigate word lists, concordances, and key words, among other features. All of the lecture introductions of both SCLs and LCLs were transferred to WordSmith Tools as separate corpora in order to compare the lexico-grammatical elements in the two corpora. By using WordSmith Tools, the frequency, collocations, and concordances of the personal pronouns, lexical phrases, and discourse markers were identified and analyzed.

3. Findings and discussion

This section presents the findings and discussion of the comparative analysis of SCLs and LCLs. To mitigate the problem of analyst bias and to establish intercoder agreement, the data sets for the study were also analyzed and coded by a second rater 4. In those instances where there were disagreements between the raters on the rhetorical strategies identified in the lecture introductions, the raters reread the transcripts and discussed the discrepancies in the rhetorical categories until agreement was achieved. It is important to note here that any conclusions emerging from the analysis should be interpreted with caution as this a small-scale exploratory study.

3.1. The rhetorical move structures of lecture introductions

Analysis of the data sets suggests that unlike Thompson (1994), who found two moves (or functions), there were three emerging moves available to the lecturers to convey the communicative purposes of university lecture introductions in all of the SCLs and LCLs. The first move (move 1) is what is referred to here as Warming Up. In this move, lecturers warm up the audience prior to the actual lecture, offering them general course information and course-related asides (or digressions), looking ahead to future lectures, and/or telling an anecdote. Moves 2 and 3 are similar to those found in Thompson (1994) and observed in Morell (2007): Setting Up the Lecture Framework (move 2) and Putting the Topic in Context (move 3). Move 2, as Thompson (1994) states, provides the listeners information about the lecture discourse itself by pointing to the lecture’s topic, scope, structure, and aims. On the other hand, move 3 “establishes a context for the content of the lecture, by indicating the relevance and importance of the topic and relating it to what the audience already knows”

4 The second rater was a former teaching colleague, who has an M.A. in applied linguistics and training in move analysis.

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189 (Thompson, 1994, p. 176). Fig. 1 illustrates the emerging rhetorical structures of the two corpora of lecture introductions.

### 3.1.1. Comparison of move 1

As shown in Fig. 1, move 1 (Warming Up) which occurs in both SCLs and LCLs is realized by three strategies (or steps). Move 1 seems to act as a “buffer” to the forthcoming lecture, giving students time to settle in and allowing lecturers to attend to other matters about the course that may or may not be related to the current lecture. Interestingly, however, the steps are employed differently depending on the size of the audience. In LCLs, at least two steps are minimally used, with steps 2 (Housekeeping) and 3 (Looking ahead) occurring in all of the LCLs. In one lecture (LCL 5), the lecturer utilized all three of the steps. Unlike step 1 (Making a digression), steps 2 and 3 seem to be obligatory in LCLs. In SCLs, however, only step 1 is used, but it occurs in just three of the five SCLs. Therefore, step 1 in SCLs is regarded as semi-obligatory. One possible explanation for the greater number of obligatory steps used in LCLs is that in large classes it may be difficult for lecturers to know who attends the lectures regularly and who does not. For that reason, experienced university lecturers may find it necessary or even feel obliged to remind the students of some of the course-related issues (step 2); for example, office hours:

(1) I won’t be holding office hours Thursday morning but i will be, uh able to meet with anybody who feels desperate in need to meet with me in the late afternoon on Thursday so if you do, email me okay? (LCL 4)

Certainly, there are other course-related concerns dealt with in the LCL corpus, including announcing exam dates and other announcements (e.g., change of discussion section time and place). Additionally, to accommodate students with irregular attendance, experienced lecturers in the LCL corpus try to persuade students to attend upcoming lectures, perhaps indirectly (or directly) advising them to read the appropriate texts by looking ahead to future lectures (step 3):

(2) Then there’ll be four, lectures on opiates followed by two, uh periods of addiction and then we’ll finish up with sedative hypnotics. Okay? (LCL 2)

The experienced lecturers in the LCL corpus may also deliberately use these strategies to signal to students that they care about students’ learning and want to keep them informed of crucial course-related matters that may affect their success in the courses.

The optionality of steps 2 and 3 in SCLs may be attributed to the nature of small classes. In a small class, a lecturer may be more aware of who attends class and who does not. Furthermore, because the class size is small, students who are unable to attend may, perhaps, contact the lecturer beforehand informing him or
her of their absence from the class. The size of the class may make it less necessary for lecturers in small classes
to use such strategies, although one of strategies was used in two of the SCLs.

While steps 2 and 3 are less common in SCLs, step 1 appears to be a more prevalent strategy in the lecture
introductions in small classes; only one lecturer used this strategy in the LCL corpus (LCL 5). According to
Crawford Camiciottoli (2005), asides or digressions serve as a way for lecturers to create a relaxed environ-
ment and maintain a positive lecturer–audience relationship. She also adds that these digressions tend to occur
more frequently in lectures with a small class size, those in which the proximity between the lecturer and audi-
ence is closer. Therefore, it would seem reasonable that this step occurs more frequently in SCLs wherein there
are fewer students and the lecturer is already more familiar with the students or desires to become more famil-
iar with them. The example below illustrates a digression (step 1):

(3) we uh had to buy a motor from Cedarville Marine up in the eastern upper peninsula this year, and uh i
talked to Sally there who’s in charge of sales and so on, and she was you know we everything went
through and then Alice and the rest of the crew who’ve been working up there went through and she
said oh, um, your Mr York talks funny. and Alice says yes yes yes yes she’s she he he’s from England
she says well you’d think if he was from England he could speak English without an accent. <SS:
LAUGH> anyway (SCL 3)\(^5\)

In this example, the lecturer makes a digression by interjecting a self-deprecating, jocular anecdote to
lighten up the mood and to lessen the power distance between the lecturer and students. In large classes, how-
ever, with 100 or more students, the classroom setting may make it more difficult to establish and reinforce
such rapport through this strategy.

3.1.2. Comparison of move 2

Move 2 (Setting Up the Lecture Framework) is always the second move in the rhetorical structure of both
SCLs and LCLs. Regardless of whether the lecture is a SCL or LCL, move 2 begins with step 1—Announcing
the topic, as Thompson (1994) notes, sequential patterning of steps is not implied by the given ordering.
In the two corpora, this step seems to be obligatory because the lecturer’s use of this strategy clearly artic-
ulates to the audience the main topic of the lecture and provides them with a preview of the ensuing talk.
Interestingly, step 1 minimally occurs twice in the lecture introductions of all LCLs, and three times in
LCL 4 and four times in LCL 5. In SCLs, however, step 1 occurs just once in almost all of the lectures.
The multiple occurrence of step 1 in LCLs may be explained again by the size of the class. Owing to the large
number of students in a LCL, the lecturer may begin the lecture without knowing whether all of the students
are present. Being unaware of this, the lecturer may announce the topic of the lecture toward the beginning of
class, but possibly feel compelled to announce the topic several times to accommodate the late comers, keeping
them also informed of what the topic of the lecture will be prior to actually getting into the substantive part of
the lecture. On the other hand, SCL lecturers may be very aware of when all of the students are present. This
awareness of the audience seems make it unnecessary for a lecturer in a SCL to repeat step 1. After the initial
“buffer” move in a SCL, most of the students are most likely present in a SCL, thus allowing the lecturer to
proceed with the lecture of the day.

The other three steps in move 2 are messier. The steps often do not move in a linear sequence and in many
instances they are sequenced in reverse order. Moreover, in some lectures only steps 2 (Indicating the scope)
and 3 (Outlining the structure) are present while in others only step 2 occurs. Only in one lecture, SCL 4,
do all of steps occur, including step 4 (Presenting the aim). In fact, in LCL 3, none of these steps is present.
To add to the complexity of these steps, in some cases, these strategies appear after move 3 (Putting the Topic
in Context), which will be discussed below. Therefore, the findings indicate that there is no difference in how
these strategies are presented in either SCLs or LCLs, nor does the size of the class seem to affect the rhetorical
choices available to lecturers for these steps. These rhetorical strategies, unlike step 1, are considered optional
rather than obligatory.

\(^5\) Pseudonyms are used to maintain anonymity.

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3.1.3. Comparison of move 3

Move 3 (Putting the Topic in Context) is a rhetorical movement that prepares the listeners for understanding the new information that will be presented in the lecture and for activating students’ existing knowledge of the lecture’s topic. This move, as presented in Fig. 1, is realized by three steps. Similar to move 2, the steps are messy. The only obligatory strategy in move 3 is step 3 (Referring to earlier lectures), which occurs in all of the SCLs and LCLs. In both types of lectures, step 3 seems to be preferred as the first strategy, although as explained above, no sequential pattern is implied by the numbering of the steps. This step occurs first in three of the five SCLs and four of the five LCLs. The other steps – steps 1 (Showing the importance/relevance of the topic) and 2 (Relating “new” to “given”) – only occur in a few lectures. Step 1 occurs in one of the five SCLs and two of the five LCLs, and step 2 is present twice in the SCLs and none in the LCLs. Therefore, these two steps are considered optional. A possible explanation for the high occurrence of step 3, but not the other strategies, may be credited to the experience of the lecturers and not the size of the class. Step 3, a strategy used to refer to previous lectures, activates students’ prior knowledge about what they have learned and permits lecturers to build on what students already are familiar with. The size of the class, however, does not appear to have an effect on the rhetorical choices that lecturers make in utilizing the strategies of move 3 to achieve their communicative purposes.

The comparative analysis of the rhetorical moves in the two corpora of lecture introductions indicates that while all of the moves are obligatory, the strategies (steps) that realize these moves are influenced by the size of class, particularly moves 1 and 2. The size of the class seems to place certain constraints on the rhetorical choices that are available to lecturers. Unlike small classes, the large number of students in large classes may compel lecturers to repeatedly inform the students of course-related information and upcoming lectures, perhaps, throughout the semester. Furthermore, as indicated above, large classes seem to also require lecturers to announce the topic of the lecture multiple times before moving on to the substantive parts of the lecture. Because the presence of a large audience may make it more difficult for lecturers to promote the positive learning environment that often characterizes small classes, large-class lecturers may try to create these favorable conditions by using various rhetorical strategies that communicate their concern for the students’ academic success.

As found in Thompson (1994), after the initial move, the rhetorical move structure of lecture introductions are generally a combination of moves and steps that are largely unpredictable. Rather than moving in a linear sequence, moves 2 and 3 (and their respective steps) tend to progress in a cyclical pattern (Bhatia, 1993; Swales, 1990), with these moves and steps overlapping, repeating, and sometimes “inextricably bound together in the same stretch of speech” (Thompson, 1994, p. 180). Even though academic lectures share certain characteristic features with other types of written genres such as textbooks (Hewing & Henderson, 1987, cited in Thompson, 1994) – that is, lectures are generally planned and principally informational (Flowerdew & Miller, 1997) – they are nevertheless a spoken genre. As a spoken genre, they share features of other types of spoken discourse (e.g., conversations) which impose considerable processing constraints. The real time processing of this genre may make it difficult to present the discourse in a linear sequence typically found in written genres.

3.2. The lexico-grammatical features in lecture introductions

In this section, rather than discussing all the lexico-grammatical elements of the lecture introductions above, many of which have been well documented elsewhere (see Chaudron & Richards, 1986; Dudley-Evans, 1994; Flowerdew & Miller, 1994; Flowerdew & Tauroza, 1995; Morell, 2004; Thompson, 1994), I compare and discuss some of the most interesting of these linguistic features in the two corpora through a corpus-based analysis.

3.2.1. Comparison of personal pronouns

Earlier, it was mentioned that smaller classes are more conducive to establishing a relaxed and comfortable learning environment. The small number of students in the class and the close proximity between the lecturer and students create a favorable condition for developing a friendlier lecturer-student relationship. It was also stated that lecturers in SCLs utilize digressions as a way to develop a positive learning environment and rapport. Another means of establishing and maintaining rapport and audience involvement is with personal
pronouns (Rounds, 1987). As Fortanet (2004) explains, personals pronouns are important markers of how students are conceptualized by lecturers in academic lectures. The use of we for speakers and hearers indicates a positive politeness while I and you, on many instances, have a distancing effect, resulting in negative politeness (Brown & Levinson, 1987).

In academic lectures, successful lecturers were found to utilize we more frequently than I or you (Rounds, 1987). In the lecture introductions of the SCL and LCL corpora, however, we occurs less frequently than I and you. In fact, only two lecturers (SCL 3 and LCL 4) used we more than the other two pronouns, although the difference was minimal (i.e., 1 or 2 instances). Table 3 presents the number of instances of the first and second person subject pronouns and the frequency of these pronouns (which is normalized per thousand words). The table does not include object pronouns (e.g., me, us) or pronouns appearing with contracted verbs (e.g., I'm, we've) because these were not found in all of the lectures; that is, while some object pronouns and pronouns as part of contractions were used by all lecturers (e.g., me, I'm, we're), others (e.g., us, you're) were not. Therefore, these pronouns were excluded to maintain uniformity. Surprisingly, the frequencies of I (25.1 ptw) and you (23.7 ptw) are higher in SCLs than in LCLs (I: 15.9 ptw and you: 19.6 ptw). This can be explained through the lens of politeness theory (Brown & Levinson, 1987). In a small class, the relationship between the lecturer and students is generally closer, thus there may be less of a need to maintain positive politeness in a SCL as these individuals may be more familiar with one another (Fortanet, 2004). On the other hand, in a large class, the affective and physical distances between the lecturer and students are greater. Therefore, using fewer instances of I and you may be not only an advantage, but it may also be a necessity in order to mitigate the distancing effect engendered by these pronouns.

This need to mitigate negative politeness and enhance positive politeness is evident in the higher frequency of we in LCLs (8.6 ptw), which is almost double the amount found in SCLs (4.7 ptw). Since the distance between the lecturer and students is greater in a large class, a LCL lecturer may find that one way to create a friendlier environment is to use more we in order to create a sense of community. The higher frequency of we in LCLs can be a little misleading though. As Rounds, 1987 explains, there are two types of the pronoun we: "inclusive-we" and "exclusive-we". Inclusive-we specifically includes the audience as referent, as in the following example:

(4) we started last time thinking about food, and feeding, and the physiological capabilities of fishes, particularly in terms of the way they process energy (SCL 3)

In this example, we refers to both the lecture and the students. Exclusive-we, on the other hand, excludes the audience as referent, for example:

(5) the populations fluctuate within bounds. and this is what we mean by regulation. that is there's some factor that's causing the population, to stay within bounds rather than, completely crashing and going extinct, or going into exponential growth (LCL 4)

In example (5), we does not mean the students and lecture; instead, it refers to the expert members of the discourse community of which the lecturer is a part. In the LCLs, the frequencies of inclusive-we (4.4 ptw) and
exclusive-we (4.2 ptw) are nearly identical. Nevertheless, the more frequent use of we, including exclusive-we, may engender an illusory feeling of inclusion, creating a feeling of a joint endeavor between lecturer and students in constructing the lecture (Flowerdew & Miller, 1994). The need to create this impression may be less necessary in SCLs because the nature of the classroom configuration and the number of students potentially create a group-consciousness without the need of such explicit linguistic marking.

3.2.2. Comparison of pronoun-integrated lexical phrases

For further analysis, I also used the clusters function in WordSmith Tools to examine whether there were lexico-grammatical patterns associated with the three personal pronouns. Interestingly, we and you did not produce any patterns. On the other hand, I produced two lexical phrases (DeCarrico & Nattinger, 1988) appearing in all lectures: (a) that I + verb and (b) what I (modal) verb. The frequency of (a) is not very different between the SCLs and LCLs; however, (b) is distributed differently in the two types of lectures. There are 4.2 ptw of (b) in SCLs, but only 0.5 ptw in LCLs. Upon examining the concordance lines and the original texts, I found that the lexical phrase what I is frequently followed by would like to do and want(-ed) to in SCLs:

(6) Okay, all righty um what i want to do is continue with this discussion that we’ve been trying to show, between interaction of history and, language and change (SCL 5)

The lexical phrase appears at the onset of the class; that is, it occurs in the first or second utterance of move 2, mostly announcing the topic (step 1) of the lecture. Interestingly, the few instances of this phrase occur later on in LCLs, indicating the scope (move 2, step 2) of the lecture:

(7) what ia-will be emphasizing, is how cultural notions of womanhood, determine, women’s work Experience (LCL 1)

The higher frequency of the lexical phrase with the first pronoun in SCLs may be due to the size of the class. In a small class, the relationship between the lecturer and students may be friendly, sometimes too friendly, where students may misinterpret the power distance between the lecturer and them, undermining the authority of the lecturer. One way for a lecturer in a small class to reinforce authority is with the use the first person pronoun, indicating early on in the lecture that the lecturer is still the authority. However, in large classes, because the perceived distance between a lecturer and students is greater, explicit marking with the first person pronoun may not be favorable for establishing rapport.

Additionally, upon examining the personal pronouns appearing with contracted verbs (e.g., I’m), lexico-grammatical phrases of you with contractions was not present, but there were phrases with I’m and we’re occurring in all of the lectures. In the case of I’m, there was one phrase I’m gonna + verb which is distributed almost evenly in both SCLs and LCLs; however, analyzing the concordance lines showed that this phrase was used exclusively by one SCL lecturer and two LCL lecturers. In contrast, we’re produced a striking difference between the two lecture types. The phrase that occurs differently in the two lecture types are we’re gonna + verb and we’re going to + verb:

(8) today as you know from looking at the lecture schedule we’re gonna be talking about metastasis (LCL 2)
(9) today i’m gonna build on that, and we’re going to talk about, how the environment affects the way fish use energy (SCL 3)

In the LCLs, the reduced verbal phrase gonna appears with we’re 2.8 ptw, occurring in 4 LCLs, while in the SCLs there is only one instance of this structure. Conversely, we’re + going to + verb occurs 2 ptw in SCLs, occurring in 3 SCLs, but there is only one instance of this phrase in the LCLs. Celce-Murcia, Brinton, and

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6 As one of the reviewer pointed out, the following caveats need to be taken into consideration when interpreting the differences between the use of going to and gonna: (1) Individual speaking style is always a possible factor when working with small corpora that represent a limited number of speakers; and (2) the one nonnative speaker among the SCL lecturers could have also contributed to the overall lower frequency of the use of gonna.

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Goodwin (1996) inform us that reduced speech forms are common occurrences in everyday speech, often in more informal settings. It is surprising that the reduced phrase we’re gonna is more frequent in the LCLs. Because of the greater distance and level of formality between a lecturer and students in a large class, we would expect that there would potentially be less of these reduced forms in the LCLs. Surprisingly, however, gonna occurs with we’re more frequently than I’m in the LCL corpus. The use of inclusive-we + ’re + gonna by LCL lecturers may be their attempt to make the distance between the students and them closer:

(10) So, what we’re gonna do over the next couple weeks, is try to look at, different biological takes, on uh, on uh, behavior. (LCL 5)

By using this structure, not only do lecturers seem to be attempting to indicate that the students and they are going to co-construct the lecture, but they also seem to be trying to make the learning experience less formal. They may unconsciously realize the large distance between them and the students, whose names, for the most part, they might not even know. At least for the lecturers in this corpus, who are experienced teachers, the large class size may compel them to use such lexico-grammatical structures as a means of creating a friendlier learning environment.

3.2.3. Comparison of discourse markers

Lastly, I examined some of the discourse markers, or what Chaudron and Richards (1986) refer to as micro-markers (e.g., okay, so), to explore the differences in their use of these markers in the two corpora. These markers were frequently used in all of the lecture introductions, but there were no differences in frequency between the two corpora. Both so and okay are present almost evenly in the two corpora. However, to check whether okay is used as a discourse marker or an agreement marker (e.g. yeah?, okay?) (Flowerdew & Miller, 1994), I analyzed the concordance lines of okay in both corpora. What emerged from the analysis is that okay as a discourse marker occurs a little more frequently in the SCL corpus (4.1 ptw) than in the LCL corpus (3.3 ptw), and almost exclusively marking move 2, step 1 (announcing the topic):

(11) okay this afternoon uh, my plans are to talk to you about avian conservation and management in the United States (SCL 1)

As an agreement marker, okay appears more frequently in the LCL corpus:

(12) um i will discuss the midterm, for a while a little bit, to make sure that all of you understand, what’s expected of you in the midterm okay? i wanna remind you that we do not have class meeting on Thursday (LCL 1)

In fact, okay as an agreement marker occurs almost twice as much in the LCL corpus (2 ptw) as it does in the SCL corpus (1.1 ptw). Flowerdew and Miller (1997) inform us that an agreement marker acts as a “checking function” which allows a lecturer to establish rapport with the listeners by keeping in touch with them. Unlike in a small class where a lecturer can read the body language (e.g., head nods, facial expressions) to check whether students are following along and understanding the lecture, in a large class it would be very difficult for a lecturer to know whether the students are on the same page. Therefore, in large classes, it is assumed that experienced lecturers use the agreement marker okay? more frequently to make certain that the students are keeping up with the information in the lecture; a response by the audience, of course, is not always expected. Additionally, this may be another strategy used by experienced LCL lecturers as a means to discursively build rapport and maintain a friendly learning environment.

Comparing the lexico-grammatical features, particularly personal pronouns and lexical phrases in the two corpora, suggests that there is a difference in how lecturers in these two types of environments use linguistic features to achieve their communicative purposes. In an environment that is not readily conducive to developing rapport with students, experienced lecturers of large classes may find other means to create a friendly environment. Through their use of these linguistic devices, they seem to signal solidarity and informality, attempting to create the same type of environment that lecturers in small classes work less to achieve.
4. Concluding remarks

What emerges from this exploratory study of lecture introductions of small- and large-class lectures is that size matters. The size of the class appears to influence and constrain the rhetorical and lexico-grammatical choices that lecturers make. While the same rhetorical moves are present in both types of lecture introductions, the strategies that are used to realize these moves seem to be affected by the class size. Lecturers who teach a large audience are inclined to provide students with frequent reminders of class-related issues and upcoming lectures as a way to establish positive learning environments, while lecturers teaching a small audience tend to make digressions to reinforce teacher–learner rapport. Additionally, lecturers in large classes may announce the topic of the lecture repeatedly as a way to keep students who are tardy to class in the loop, as it were, indicating their concern for students’ academic success. The size of the class also appears to affect lecturers’ use of certain linguistic elements. Lecturers of large classes tend to use certain lexical and grammatical features more frequently to build positive learning environments in settings that are not favorable to establishing such conditions. These features, on the other hand, are employed less by small class lecturers who seem to prefer to use other means to establish similar types of conditions.

Several limitations of this small-scale exploratory study need to be pointed out. First, the data sets in this study are small. Future research could use larger corpora of lecture introductions to compare the differences between small- and large-class lectures. In addition, using a ready-made corpus like MICASE, from which the data sets are compiled, constrains the researcher’s ability to obtain ethnographic data, thus making it difficult to understand whether the senior lecturers in the two types of lectures were aware of their discursive choices. In other words, it is unclear whether their decisions were conscious or unconscious. Researchers investigating academic lectures could interview lecturers to determine whether they are aware of their discursive practices when lecturing to different audience size. In addition, using a ready-made corpus makes it difficult to obtain students’ attitudes toward these features in lectures and impossible to know if the students found the discursive choices in the two types of lectures effective or not. Future research could interview students to gain insights into the discursive features they find beneficial. Therefore, as Flowerdew (1994) points out, “before meaningful statements can be made about lectures which will have concrete effects on pedagogy” (p. 19), further research is needed to understand the complexity of the academic lecture genre.

Despite these limitations, tentative pedagogical implications can be drawn. There is evidence that programs such as the Preparing future faculty (PFF) program in the US, in which doctoral students are prepared for the different responsibilities of being a university faculty member including teaching, are spreading (see Seidel & Gaff, 2006). Furthermore, many universities in the US offer training for the growing number of international teaching assistants (ITAs) teaching undergraduate courses, labs, or discussion sections (e.g., Gorsuch, 2006). However, as Barr (1990), Morell (2007), Seidel and Gaff (2006), and Thompson (1994) explain, in many university contexts, lecturers are generally not trained in how to lecture, and may only pick up the discursive conventions of lectures incidentally through countless hours of observing and evaluating other lecturers, or through what Lortie (1975) calls “the apprenticeship of observation.” In fact, the National Association of Graduate and Professional Students found that less than half of the 32,600 Ph.D. students in their study agreed that they were adequately being trained to teach (Golde & Dore, 2001, cited in Seidel & Gaff, 2006). Therefore, as Barr (1990) states, “it should not be surprising that some of us [professors] are not good at lecturing” (p. 172).

One way to improve the quality of lecturers and lectures is for different academic departments to make it a requirement for their doctoral students, both native and nonnative, who plan to teach at the university level to take practicum courses, observing various types of university courses, such as the one Gorsuch (2006) offers to ITAs at her institution. These practicum courses could have specific guidelines, asking lecturers-in-training to focus on the linguistic and rhetorical structures that more experienced instructors (native or non-native speakers) use in realizing their communicative purposes. As this study suggests, the structural and linguistic choices are constrained by class size. Therefore, academic departments should provide practicum courses that require prospective lecturers to attend not only to the content of the lectures, but more specifically to their discursive features. This can be one way for university departments to help their new members deliver more effective lectures, thus benefiting the initiates themselves as well as the students they teach.
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Appendix A. Transcript of biology of birds lecture (SCL1)

A.1. Analysis of SCL 1

Uph first i brought the book that i thought that i had but didn’t have this morning, and uh, this is a, Atlas of Breeding Birds of Michigan, and, it’s a tremendous resource, and i i’m gonna put it up in the bird lab, because, it’ll be important for you to look at when you’re putting together the, the project, um paper.

And i’m just gonna show you for example, the Merlin. um this, side of the page has, basically a summary on biology ecology and so on, and this is a, map using breeding birds survey data, showing, um, what’s known about the distribution of Merlins in the state, so you can see from the blue dots that, you know there’s not a lot concentrated up here on Isle Royale, then if i just flip to uh_ give me another species. oh here i’ll do it i just wanted to, uh, here’s the cowbird for example <EXPRESSIONS OF AMAZEMENT> so, anyway, it’s very nice because each species is, is uh, has a record in here and you hafta remember from what i said this morning, there are some species where that_ the data are a lot better than, than others so, some of these are, probably, a lot more, accurate than for the more secretive species but (i wouldn’t even know about that)

S2: Speaker information restricted

S1: um, about ninety-one i believe or, ninety, or ninety-one... nineteen ninety-one <PAUSE:06> okay this afternoon uh, my plans are to talk to you about avian conservation and management in the United States,

Uh, there’s obviously a much, uh broader picture, that we could be looking at but, i wanna focus in the United States,

Um, for a number of reasons, and, i’ve done a couple things on the blackboard, this is uh, what i put together are some stages of conservation and management in the U-S and i’m gonna kinda go through these,

And talk about why these are important to birds, and, over here is um, our s- a list of some important pieces of legislation, as they resol- as they relate to, uh birds as individual species and populations,

and, the first thing that, i wanna do is kind of, go through and talk about these general stages and then i’m gonna show you some slides, with some selected examples < 4 SEC PAUSE>
Appendix B

Transcript of biology of cancer lecture (LCL 2)

B.1. Analysis of LCL 1

S1: let me remind you, one more time about the discussion sections tomorrow those of you who happen to be in the one o’clock, discussion session we’re moving from fourteen hundred, to thirteen hundred Chemistry Building, uh if by any chance you go to fourteen hundred Chem tomorrow i think you’ll end up in a P chem class, which i assume most of you would, prefer not to be at, some of you might wanna be there but, uh if you end up in a chemistry class remember we’re in the lecture room on the opposite side, of the building.

Also remember for tomorrow’s discussion that i gave you kind of a thought exercise, at the end of last Wednesday’s discussion after we had critiqued, um that article that i read you from the Ann Arbor News found all the things that were wrong with that study, i asked you to think, in this intervening week about the kinds of experiments you might do. uh, and do a better job of trying to find out whether there’s a relationship between birth control pill usage, and cancer risk, and i think i said there is no single experiment it’s not like there’s one right answer it’s a very complicated question how scientists go about, establishing cause and effect, uh so i would hope to hear a variety of approaches which you might come up with, in terms of trying to experimentally address that question so we’ll discuss those tomorrow, and see both the strengths and weaknesses of the various experimental approaches.

Today as you know from looking at the lecture schedule we’re gonna to be talking about metastasis, which uh, the process refers to the spread of, tumor cells from their primary site of origin where they originated, to another organ via body fluids and most of the time we’re talking about the blood stream. uh by now you have a pretty good idea of the importance of metastasis, um, as a phenomenon first of all it’s part of the inherent definition of cancer. remember the only defining characteristic of cancer, was the ability to spread by the process of engaging in metastasis. that’s the only thing that distinguishes it unequivocally from a benign tumor. so metastasis is part of the defining, features, of a cancer. also last time you learned that uh, metastasis is one of the main ways that, cancer uses to kill people.

Uuh the main cause of death is usually, not the primary tumor, but metastases spreading throughout the body and often getting into the one one of the vital organs, such as the, brain or liver or kidney, and this is often what cancer patients will die of. so this means that if we could do anything to interfere with the process of metastasis, in essence we could cure people of cancer, or we could at least cure people of the most debilitating and threatening life threatening, aspect of cancer which is the ability, of these cancer cells to metastasize.

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Appendix B (continued)

So today we’re gonna focus metastasis, and in essence we’ll be focusing on the question of what is it about cancer cells, that in fact, allows them, to metastasize, while the benign tumor cells, can’t do this nor do other, normal kinds of cells do this. in addressing this question, first of all you have to realize that metastasis is not a single event. and we talk about metastasis it’s not really, a single, process that we’re talking about it’s actually, a sequential series of events, all of which must take place, in order for this phenomenon, of metastasis to occur. we commonly we therefore divide, metastasis into a series of stages.

And I’m gonna use three major steps, to divide this process, today. <13 SEC PAUSE WHILE WRITING ON OVERHEAD>

References


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