Corpus-based materials design for EAP listening: the road less travelled

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Importance marking

• if you forget everything else i say just remember that kidney failure causes high blood pressure

• ignore that 'cause it’s totally irrelevant

• Lexicogrammatical devices
• marking the comparative importance of
• verbal or visual points

✓ the most important thing to bear in mind throughout the lecture really is pest is a human definition
✓ so we're interested in the gradient here at two-seven-three
✓ mass warfare which is obviously such an important thing in the nineteenth century
‘For EAP practitioners, a key issue is how to provide as accurate as possible a model of lecture organisation and help their learners to develop the skills to interpret organising signals.’

EAP books

• Lebauer, R. (2010). *Learn to listen, listen to learn, Level 2: academic listening and note-taking* (3rd ed.).
EAP books

Authentic lectures/corpus-informed

The importance of importance marking

‘One of identified skills by interview of staff in lecturing is
• L2.1.9 Cope with con-current note-taking and listening
• L2.1.10 Assimilate information and take full and effective notes
• L2.1.11 Identify ‘big’ ideas; dismiss less relevant detail’
The importance of importance marking

Preparation for lectures

Lectures are often used to introduce the main points of a particular subject before you go on to study them in more depth, for an essay, a seminar or exam question. It will help you understand topics of lectures if you prepare in advance.

1.1 Think about why the following strategies might be useful to follow before you attend a lecture.

1. Know what the general topic of the lecture is and how it relates to the other lectures in the course.
2. Read any recommended texts before the lecture and highlight the key points.
3. If there is no recommended reading for that week, spend some time researching the topic yourself to get an overview of the key ideas.
4. Review previous lecture notes.
5. Find out if the lecturer has a website.

Lecturers will usually give some kind of clue as to what the key points are. These include:
- Text and graphics presented on slides or written on a board
- The use of tone of voice and body language to emphasise a point
- Repetition and paraphrasing of key points
- Discourse markers (language used to help guide the listener through the lecture) and rhetorical questions e.g. So what are the three elements to this theory? First, ....
- Summaries of what has been said.

Firth (2012)
The importance of importance marking

- Step 1: What is being said.
- Step 2: What it means (how it relates to what has been said).
- Step 3: **Whether it is important and whether to note it down.**
- Step 4: How to write it in note form.

Lynch (2004)
The importance of importance marking

- Students should
  - Record ‘instructor emphasis’
  - Highlight key ideas in notes
  - Listen for the ‘big picture’ = main ideas

- Students’ job to understand what the ‘comprehension cues’ are

Salehzadeh (2006)
Corpus & tools

- British Academic Spoken English (BASE) Corpus
- 160 lectures
- Arts & Humanities; Physical Sciences, Life & Medical Sciences, Social Studies

- Sketch Engine, Corpus Query Language
- FileMaker Pro
Retrieving the markers

(Deroey & Taverniers 2012)

- Manual analysis 40 lectures
- Markers from other studies
- ≥50 BASE

Subcorpus + literature + BASE word list

Whole corpus

Cross-searches + Related items

- Concordance co-text
- Synonyms & derived words
# Main markers of importance points (patterns)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pattern type</th>
<th>Example</th>
<th>Frequency (N=782)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Adjective</td>
<td>it’s <strong>important</strong> to note this is further subdivided</td>
<td>7%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noun</td>
<td>that’s the key <strong>point</strong> here</td>
<td>± 36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verb</td>
<td>i want to <strong>stress</strong> this point</td>
<td>± 54%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adverb</td>
<td><strong>significantly</strong> this is made out of virtually one block of Carrara marble</td>
<td>± 2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exam-related expressions</td>
<td>it's something we can sort of ask <strong>exam</strong> questions on</td>
<td>1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Predominant markers

- V n/clause
  - and **remember** that most developing countries are small
- MN v-link
  - **the point is** that people can't do that
- 1s pers pron V n/clause
  - **i want to stress** this point
- adj MN v-link
  - **the key point is** they do not give up those natural rights
Surprised?

- Markers with explicit evaluation in the minority
  - adj MN v-link ± 8%
    - **the key point is** they do not give up those natural rights
  - it v-link ADJ clause ± 4%
    - **it’s important** to say that it’s actually quite rare
  - deic v-link adj MN ± 3%
    - **that’s the key point** here

- Exam expressions rare
  - it's something we can sort of ask **exam** questions on
Surprised?

• Multifunctional, formulaic markers predominate
• V n/clause
  • ✗ there is a class switch remember (BASE)
  • ✗ the papilli remember are part of a drainage system of the kidney (BASE)
  • ✔ and remember that most developing countries are small (BASE)
• MN v-link
  ✔ the point is that people can't do that
  ✗ the point is for you to develop your own scholarship
  ✔ the thing you have to remember is there’s no such thing as the heritability
  ? the thing is that the one of them is not good
Representation in EAP books

• Belgar & Murray (2002):
  • advice on organising main ideas and supporting details
  • no markers of this distinction

• Lebauer (2010); Phillips (1999); Sarosy & Sherak (2006)
  • few & prototypical markers

• Practice in listening for main ideas but do not really provide many devices to help recognise them

• Source?
Representation in EAP books

- Hewings & Thaine (2012) (CAE C1 Student’s book)

**Study tip**
Notice how Professor Crystal outlines an example which provides a context and background information in support of the point he is about to make. Background information can include a story or anecdote. If a part of a lecture begins with an example or story of some kind, it is likely that you will need to listen to the key point that follows the example.

**Study tip**
Many lecturers use language that is similar to Professor Rings’ examples in 5.1. This aims to guide the person listening to the lecture, so you know what it coming next or what has been previously mentioned. Learning to listen for this language will help you to understand the overall structure of a lecture and also listen for what are key points.
Representation in EAP books

• Firth et al. (2012) (CAE C1 Teacher’s book)

1a Ask students to brainstorm ways in which they can identify *questions that introduce ideas or topics* – e.g. rising tone or question words, and *key points* – e.g. repetition of words or lecturer emphasis. Provide the students with a very brief overview of what *ECT* means – i.e. treatment for psychiatric disorders which uses electric shocks. Then play 😁(d.6). Students take notes appropriately.

• Firth (2012) (CAE C1 Lecture skills)

Watch another ten minutes of the lecture that you have chosen. Pay attention to any strategies the lecturer employs to highlight any particularly important points. Note down the key points, and compare your ideas with a partner.
Representation in EAP books

Salehzadeh (2006)

• ‘Emphasis’ cues: ‘the important thing here is’; ‘what you don’t want to forget’; ‘be careful about’; ‘here’s the tricky part now’
• Few, prototypical
• From authentic lectures?
Representation in EAP books

Kelly, Revell, & Nesi (2000)

• Chapter ‘Attitudes and significance’
• Practice distinguishing between more and less important information by asking to identify importance markers
• Importance markers: phrases to convey relative significance of a point
Representation in EAP books

Kelly, Revell, & Nesi (2000)

- Examples from BASE
  - ‘The key point is; One of the most important points is; What’s crucial is; An important point is; The main point is; A point worth noting is; That’s the main point here; The big question is’.

- All containing adjectives ➔ explicit, fairly prototypical
- ➔ Not the predominant markers
Representation in EAP books

Lynch (2004)

• Listening macrostrategy ‘evaluating’; includes listeners assessing whether they have understood the main points

• Lecturers may stress a point by speaking about
  • subject matter (adjectives & nouns): ‘the central problem is that’, ‘a basic point’, and ‘another key issue in the’
  • audience (adjectives, cognitive verbs, listener pronouns): ‘it’s important to bear in mind that’, ‘it’s worth(while) …ing that’, ‘remember that’, ‘don’t forget that’, ‘you shouldn’t lose sight of the fact that’
  • themselves (communication verbs, speaker pronouns): ‘I want to stress/emphasise/underline’, ‘My point is’, ‘What I’m getting at is’
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Representation in EAP books

Lynch (2004)

- Most extensive list
- Includes predominant markers (BASE) (Deroey & Taverniers 2012)
- Reflects BASE findings regarding interactive orientation (Deroey 2013)
- From authentic lectures?
Markers of important points: conclusion

- Great variety, not reflected in EAP materials
- More intuitively obvious/more prototypical markers vs predominantly multifunctional and less explicit marking in BASE
- Frequency & multifunctionality: Training targets
Markers of lesser importance

- my cat is a demon i don't know why i put that down as a metaphor you only got to look at me to see that that's true but never mind
Markers of lesser importance

- Message status
- Topic treatment
- Lecturer knowledge
- Attention & note-taking directives
- Assessment
Message status

• Few ‘irrelevant’
  the detail is **not pertinent** to the rest of what i’m going to say

• Partial, ‘lesser’ relevance
  but what the hell do we do [[laughter]] anyway that's a complete **aside**
  okay it’s just a final piece of **entertainment** in the conclusion to the lectures on Descartes

• Boundary marking
  but what the hell do we do [[laughter]] **anyway** that's a complete aside
we're not going to look at that in great detail
what i'd like to do now is to say a little bit about water
i’m just going to quickly give you some examples okay
then you do a few more operations which i will not drag you through right now and why this is so et cetera et cetera
Lecturer knowledge

- I can’t remember it’s in the textbook but ignore that ‘cause it’s totally irrelevant for the actual what I’m going to tell you.
- It’s no coincidence that the number of phonemes in languages ranges between I don’t know fifteen to seventy or something like that whatever it is I’m not quite sure with most probably being forty or fifty or som or something like that phonemes I suppose.
Attention and note-taking directives

• and for reasons which again i’m not going to go into these cells or some of these cells are important in things like allergy but never mind that’s by the way

• i’ll be giving you a handout which gives you these quotes so you don’t need to write these down verbatim just take in the general gist
Assessment

- it won't come up on an exam paper
- and don’t get tied up in learning too many of those numbers just remember the basic principles
Representation in EAP books

• Lynch (2004)
  • no markers of lesser importance
  • relatively quick and quiet speech may signal less important information;

• Salehzadeh (2006)
  • marking of lesser importance not discussed/exemplified
  • warns against not paying attention to digressions and anecdotes

• Kelly, Revell, & Nesi (2000)
  • lecturers may tell students if they think a point is less important
  • Identify less important point & cue (exercise): ‘the third question i i want to ask which i think is probably less less less crucial less fundamental in some ways but no no no nevertheless of interest to you’
In sum

• Examples of importance markers are generally:
  • few
  • prototypical
  • not reflecting what really happens, i.e. what students have to work with
  • not (obviously) corpus-derived
Acknowledgment

- The recordings and transcriptions used in this study come from the British Academic Spoken English (BASE) corpus. The corpus was developed at the Universities of Warwick and Reading under the directorship of Hilary Nesi and Paul Thompson. Corpus development was assisted by funding from BALEAP, EURALEX, the British Academy and the Arts and Humanities Research Council.
Further reading


