

English in Europe Network  
English as a scientific and research language, Zaragoza, 1-2 December 2012

## **Comparative and superlative constructions from a multimodal approach**

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## **Conference presentations: what we do and how we do it**

**Academic English: our corpus**

**An example: comparative and superlative constructions from a multimodal perspective**

## **Conference presentations**

Hard and demanding activity

Get the balance right:  
knowledge + delivery

Consider your audience

Organizing  
the  
message

Days, weeks, months...

summarized in just 30  
minutes

## **Different approaches**

Presenters who read  
(from notes, from the  
screen...)

Presenters who read  
specific concepts and  
then develop their ideas

Presenters who are able  
to (almost) improvise  
their speech

## Intercultural approaches

All possibilities can be right, depending on the appropriate context

- Origin
  - of the presenter
  - of the audience
- Educational background
- Professional background
- Field of research

**The presentation:  
communication  
“one-to-many”**

General rules about  
how to speak to a large  
audience

The knowledge is based  
on the message

The presentation itself:  
constrained by its own  
layout

**Discussion  
Session**

Dialogue. The rest of  
the audience act as  
listeners

Discussion Session:  
higher level of freedom

The knowledge is also  
transmitted by hands,  
eyes and body language

**Academic English**

**Trend:**

**academic writing rather than speaking**

- written language mostly assessed in higher education
- easier for EAP instructors and researchers to access written materials
- most EAP courses and workshops have focused on written discourse



Björkman (2011)

Mauranen, Pérez-Llantada & Swales (2010)

**New times**

- a decade ago, the focus shifted from written discourse to spoken discourse in EAP
- emergence of major spoken corpora of academic English
- first corpora of spoken academic English: MICASE
- mainly based on written transcriptions & audio files

**Our corpus**

- MASC: *Multimodal Academic Spoken Corpus*
- all components shaping communicative act: audio and video files, transcripts, and support materials (slides, handouts)
- complemented with the *John Swales Conference Corpus (JSCC)* integrated in the MICASE corpus (<http://jsc.elicorpora.info/>)



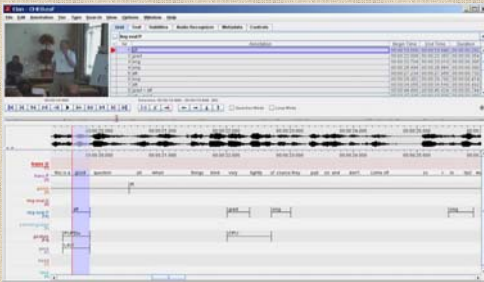
**Dealing with the corpus: ELAN**

- ELAN (EUDICO Linguistic Annotator) (Wittenburg et al. 2006) is an annotation tool that allows to create, edit, visualise, and search annotations for video and audio data.

<http://tla.mpi.nl/tools/tla-tools/elan/>  
Max Planck Institute for Psycholinguistics, The Language Archive, Nijmegen, The Netherlands

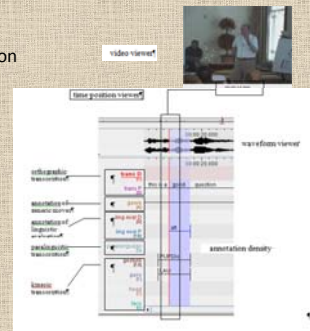
## ELAN: sample

Sample view of multimodal annotation in ELAN (Querol-Julián, 2010)



## ELAN: sample

Sample view of multimodal annotation in ELAN (Querol-Julián, 2010)



## Comparative and superlative constructions from a multimodal approach

- “adjectives and adverbs are extremely common in all registers” (Biber et al. , 1999)
- inflectional or phrasal marking
- superlative forms in “academic writing” are rare



We use comparative and superlative constructions:

- in speech, comparison can be stressed for emphasis
- most adjectives have evaluating meanings or descriptor meanings with evaluative overtones

- “In conversation, emotive and attitudinal stance meanings can be conveyed through a number of non-linguistic means (such as body posture, facial expressions, and gestures) and paralinguistic devices (such as pitch, intensity, and duration).” (Biber et al., 1999: 967)

- Conference papers are between an objective account (empiricist repertoire) and a more personal one (contingent repertoire), but more likely to be closer to the former. (Wulff et al., 2009)

### **Our research *in progress***

- Aim: comparing fields of research (Chemistry & Linguistics)
- Today: one well-known presenter in the Linguistics field
- Vijay K. Bhatia, June 2006 from *John Swales Conference Corpus (JSCC)*

### **Our research *in progress***

- Results:
  - 11 comparative forms (2 inflected / 9 phrasal)
  - 1 superlative form (phrasal)
  - 8 adjectives (1 repeated: *serious*)
  - 4 adverbs (1 repeated: *seriously*)

### Analysis

- No concluding remarks
- Diverse use of comparative and superlative constructions

### Analysis

- Not always for emphasis
- Not always with evaluative meaning
- Some are stressed by pitch or intonation
- Some are complemented by body language

### Teaching implications

- EAP courses, focusing on oral communication
- better understanding and use of comparative/superlative constructions in oral academic discourse: paralinguistic and kinesic features
- design of teaching materials
- use of this multimodal analysis in class as authentic material

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