The representativeness of lecture listening coursebooks: Language, lecture authenticity, research-informedness

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1. Introduction

This paper examines how representative published lecture listening materials are of ‘real’ lectures with a view to helping EAP teachers make informed choices in materials selection and development. The features examined are the representativeness of discourse signposts, the ‘authenticity’ of the lectures, and the extent to which materials draw on research into lecture and listening discourse. To this end, 25 coursebooks and a corpus of 160 lectures were analysed.

Following key tenets such as authenticity, specificity and needs analysis, EAP materials development should be guided by an understanding of target genres and their communicative demands. Yet, lecture listening coursebooks have been criticized for the lack of realistic lecture models (Alexander, Argent, & Spencer, 2008; Field, 2011; Flowerdew & Miller, 1997; Flowerdew, 1992; MacDonald, Badger, & White, 2000; Nesi, 2001; Salehzadeh, 2013; Thompson, 2003). While these criticisms have not usually been based on systematic analyses of lectures or materials, it is interesting to note materials commonly include unnaturally explicit and heavy discourse structuring, artificially slow and clear speech, and the use of short, scripted texts. We may therefore wonder to what extent training with such materials prepares our students for their...
content lectures. As Salehzadeh (2013, p. xix) remarks, ‘exposing students only to simplified lecture texts certainly does students a disservice’.

To evaluate the representativeness of the language in the coursebooks, I compared signposts of important points with those attested in a large corpus of authentic lectures. While the focus on these ‘importance markers’ naturally limits the generalizability of findings, this feature of lecture discourse is arguably a very useful one to train our students to recognize. To my knowledge, this study is only the second systematic comparison of a language feature in authentic lectures and coursebooks. Twenty-five years ago - before the advent of large lecture corpora - Flowerdew (1992) examined the language of definitions. He concluded there was a mismatch between coursebooks and lectures: the language of definitions in the books tended to be prescriptive and formulaic, and was not representative of the variety of ways definitions were performed in lectures.

Another feature which I report on is the ‘authenticity’ of the lectures in the coursebooks. I will here simply define authentic lectures as those delivered as part of a degree programme without having been adapted for EAP training. Admittedly, however, although this fairly intuitive definition has been used by various researchers, it belies the complexity of what constitutes an ‘authentic’ text (for a more detailed discussion of this concept, see Charles & Pecorari, 2016; MacDonald et al., 2000; Gilmore, 2007; Rost, 2011; Tomlinson, 2012). Factors limiting the authenticity of lecture corpora for use in the EAP classroom include the fact that the lectures were not delivered as part of our students’ degree study. Students and texts are thus removed from the original context (Clavel-Arroitia & Fuster-Márquez, 2014; Joy, 2011; Mishan, 2004; Rost, 2011; Widdowson, 1998), affecting the purpose of the interaction and rendering the discourse less authentic.

The materials were also analysed for their use of primary or secondary research into listening and lecture discourse. As Harwood (2005, p. 150) warns, ‘[a]lthough teachers may be under the impression that a textbook is the product of a careful collaboration between theoreticians and practitioners, this is a dubious assumption (Richards, 1993)’. In fact, it has been found that coursebook writers tend to rely on an ‘educated hunch, rather than empirical research’ (Williams, 1988; as cited in Flowerdew, 1992, p. 204) and on ‘retrieval from repertoire, cloning successful publications’ (Tomlinson, 2012, p. 152). This may affect the representativeness of materials and hence their usefulness in preparing students for the demands of real lectures. Stubbs (2001), for instance, stresses how corpora can reveal language use that radically differs from intuition.

The paper concludes with pedagogical recommendations on the selection and development of lecture listening materials.

2. Methods

Twenty-five lecture listening coursebooks were examined for their representativeness in terms of language, lecture authenticity and research-informedness.

2.1. Coursebooks and analysis

Table 1 surveys the materials analysed; in all cases, accompanying teacher’s books and audiovisual materials were also examined. The selected coursebooks include those dedicated to EAP listening skills as well as integrated skills. They represent a variety of language levels although most are aimed at students from CEFR B2 upwards. While the selection is fairly large and varied, most books are by UK publishers, representing books which were commonly in use in the UK and available to the author at the time of the research.

The student’s and teacher’s books were manually examined for phrases presented as signalling key points, whether occurring in phrase lists or exercises. The authenticity and length of lectures was established from the coursebook introductions, lecture transcripts, and audiovisual materials. I have considered as authentic those lectures which were delivered on degree programmes and were not adapted for listening training. Therefore, those which were not part of degree programmes or were especially scripted and/or acted have not been considered authentic. Whether this was the case was sometimes clear from author statements about the nature of the listening excerpts, for example noting that they were ‘researched’ and/or lecture scripts were not authentic.

To be counted as research-informed, authors had to state they researched listening or lectures. Vague statements about materials having been ‘researched’ were discounted, as these can instead refer to market research or materials trials. Alternatively, literature references to listening and/or lecture research were also taken to mean the materials were research-informed.
2.2. Lecture corpus and analysis

For the analysis of language, importance markers in the books were compared with those retrieved from a corpus of 160 lectures. The corpus used is the British Academic Spoken English (BASE) Corpus.\(^1\) Its 160 lectures are from four broad disciplinary groupings (arts and humanities, social studies, physical sciences, and life and medical sciences) and are mostly delivered by native speakers of English in a fairly monologic style.

I have here used the definition of ‘importance markers’, as proposed in Deroey, 2015 (p. 52):

> Importance markers (a term adopted from Lynch 2004) are lexicogrammatical devices that overtly mark the importance, relevance, or significance of points that are presented verbally or visually. They combine discourse organization with evaluation (Deroey and Taverniers 2011): the lecturer establishes a hierarchy of importance of points while conveying an attitudinal evaluation of these along a ‘parameter of importance or relevance’ (Thompson and Hunston 2000: 24). The lecturer thus acts as ‘text constructor’ rather than ‘informer’ (Hunston 2000: 183), as (s)he evaluates ‘discourse entities’ (e.g. an important point) rather than ‘world entities’ (e.g. an important philosopher) (Thetela 1997; as cited in Hunston 2000: 182).

Examples (1) to (3) from the corpus illustrate importance markers matching this definition:

(1) **the point is** by chance these two structures are similar
(2) the most important thing to bear in mind throughout the lecture really is pest is a human definition
(3) I ought to stress that i’m talking about vectors here

I excluded instances where real world entities rather than lecture discourse was evaluated (4) or where it was unclear whether a real world or text entity was being evaluated (5). Instances serving only to organize discourse (6) were also disregarded. Although these types of instances can have a highlighting or attention-getting effect, they were excluded to keep this study manageable and focused.

(4) now then so we have metal-hydrogen metal-hydrogen is a very important reaction and it’s really based on the fact that the organometallic compounds let’s say of lithium are very sensitive
(5) they certainly haven’t got any hair nude mice have no hair but that’s not the important thing the important things about nude mice is that they don’t have a thymus
(6) so one of the questions that arises what do i really mean by better adapted

I will here summarize how importance markers were retrieved (for details see Deroey & Taverniers, 2012). First, a subcorpus of 40 lectures was manually examined for phrases that could signal important points. After examining their cotext and interrating a sample, the inclusion criteria were refined: only instances which evaluated verbal or visual discourse were retained (e.g. ‘the important point is’). Next, the concordancing tool Sketch Engine was used to automatically retrieve all instances of these importance markers from all 160 lectures. Sketch Engine was also used to find instances of other importance markers that had been found in the cotext of the examined concordances, along with those reported in previous corpus studies involving such markers (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2007; Crawford Camiciottoli, 2004; Crawford; Swales & Burke, 2003). Finally, synonyms or derived forms of all these markers were also retrieved. This procedure allows us to be reasonably confident that the attested instances were sufficiently representative of the variety of importance markers in this corpus.

3. Results and discussion

The lecture listening materials were examined to establish the representativeness of language (importance markers), the authenticity and length of lectures, and the integration of research on lecture discourse and listening. The findings are summarized in Table 2 and discussed below.

It is worth noting that authors tended to be uninformative or vague about the source of lectures, the language presented for listening practice and whether or how materials were informed by corpus or listening research. This is unfortunate, as EAP practitioners could use such information to make principled decisions about the coursebooks that best cater to their students’ needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Materials</th>
<th>Importance markers</th>
<th>Authentic lectures (Approximate max. length in minutes)</th>
<th>Research informed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic listening strategies (ALS)a</td>
<td>Explicit; few; mainly signposts without evaluative force</td>
<td>✓ 50</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cambridge academic English (CAE)</td>
<td>Very few</td>
<td>✓ 7</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contemporary topics 1, 2, 3 (CT)</td>
<td>Mainly signposts without evaluative force</td>
<td>✗ 6 (CT1); ✗ 7 (CT2 &amp; 3)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EASE: Listening to lectures (EASE)</td>
<td>All with importance adjectives</td>
<td>✓ 9</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>English for academic Study: listening (EAS)</td>
<td>Includes predominant BASE markerb; others mainly signposts without evaluative force</td>
<td>✗ 8</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Four point: listening and speaking 2 (FP)</td>
<td>Explicit</td>
<td>✗ 17</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LEAP advanced: listening and speaking (LEAP)</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>✗ 21</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lecture ready 1, 2, 3 (LR)</td>
<td>Varied; explicit</td>
<td>✗ 17</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lectures: learn listening and note-taking skills (Lectures)</td>
<td>Few; explicit</td>
<td>✓ 6</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oxford EAP</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>✗ 13</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Study listening (SL)</td>
<td>Varied; explicit; includes two predominant BASE markers</td>
<td>✓ 23</td>
<td>✓</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unlock 1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>✗ 6</td>
<td>✗</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

a The abbreviations in brackets are used to refer to the materials in the full text.
b BASE marker: importance markers in the British Academic Spoken English corpus.
c Excluding lectures provided online.
3.1. Language

To gain insight into how representative the language is of authentic lecture discourse, importance markers in the coursebooks were compared with those found in the BASE lecture corpus.

3.1.1. Importance markers in the lecture corpus

The lecture corpus yielded 782 instances of importance markers. These were classified into four major pattern types depending on their main constituent, viz. noun, verb, adjective or adverb markers. Further subtypes were distinguished to reflect the various lexicogrammatical patterns formed with nouns, verbs and adjectives (see Deroey & Taverniers, 2012). Table 3 presents and exemplifies the five main subtypes, accounting for roughly 77% of all markers.

The main findings from the corpus were that the lecturers used a great variety of markers to stress points but that the most popular subtypes, namely V n/clause (e.g. remember that …) (c. 34% of all markers) and MN v-link (e.g. the point is …) (c. 21%) are relatively implicit, formulaic and multifunctional (Deroey & Taverniers, 2012). From the listeners’ point of view, such markers may be comparatively difficult to recognize as they require contextual disambiguation. For instance, ‘remember’ could also mean ‘recall’, and ‘thing’ without an adjective could also mean ‘problem’ (Deroey & Taverniers, 2012). It would thus appear important to train our students to recognize such markers. More explicit markers which signal the lecturer’s intention to highlight a point through ‘I’ (1s pers pron V n/clause) (c. 9%) (10), attribute importance through an adjective (adj MN v-link) (c. 8%) (11), or direct students’ attention by using ‘you’ (2 pers pron V n/clause) (c. 5%) (12) are relatively rare.

(7) so this is what this paper is about but also remember that this paper was finally published in nineteen-ninety-one
(8) you’ve got two images there you’ve got one here and one there and indeed you’ve got two images formed in holography
the thing is that the one of them is not good and i’ll show you later why
(9) the point i’m just making then in terms of workplace training comes back to a lot of the issues we talked about in terms
of familiarizing staff with new procedures
(10) so i emphasise what we discussed in session three that when you have twelve plots in an experiment the layout of the
data for a statistics package is to have twelve rows of data
(11) now next point extremely important point that i want to make is this issue of safety
(12) you have to remember that

3.1.2. Importance markers in the coursebooks

Table 4 shows which marker types predominated in the coursebooks; note that I have only taken into account those expressions which conformed to the definition of importance markers detailed above. Following this definition, the coursebooks contained 52 instances of importance markers. More usually, expressions that were said to signal key points or to be emphatic either signposted lecture structure without evaluating the importance of points or evaluated real world entities rather than lecture points. While the quantification in Table 4 allows for a quick comparison with findings from the lecture

### Table 3

Main importance marker types in lecture corpus BASE (N = 782).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>V n/clause (e.g. remember that …)</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MN v-link (e.g. the point is …)</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1s pers pron V n/clause (e.g. I want to stress …)</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>adj MN v-link (e.g. the important point is …)</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pers pron V n/clause (e.g. you have to remember …)</td>
<td>41</td>
<td>5.2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Capital letters denote the key element in the pattern.
V = lexical verb; n = noun/pronoun; MN = metalinguistic noun; v-link = linking verb; 1s pers pron = first person singular pronoun; adj/ADJ = adjective; 2 pers pron = second person pronoun.

### Table 4

Main importance marker types in the coursebooks (N = 52).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>adj MN v-link (e.g. the important point is …)</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1s pers pron V n/clause (e.g. I want to stress …)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>V n/clause (e.g. remember that …)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 pers pron V n/clause (e.g. you have to remember …)</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>11.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>it v-link ADJ v-link n/clause (e.g. it’s important to note that …)</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>9.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Capital letters denote the key element in the pattern.
V = lexical verb; n = noun/pronoun; MN = metalinguistic noun; v-link = linking verb; 1s pers pron = first person singular pronoun; adj/ADJ = adjective; 2 pers pron = second person pronoun.
corpus, we naturally have to be careful in drawing conclusions from comparing a corpus with 782 instances to the 52 markers from the coursebooks.

The lecture corpus and coursebooks share four main marker types, viz. adj MN v-link, 1s pers pron V n/clause, V n/clause, and 2 pers pron V n/clause. However, the coursebooks prefer more explicit markers with importance adjectives: adj MN v-link (e.g. the important thing is) is the most common importance marker (c. 21%) and another marker with adjectival evaluation, it v-link Adj V n/clause (e.g. it's important to note that), also makes it to the top five. In fact, the most striking difference between the lecture corpus and coursebooks is the popularity of the idiomatic, implicit marker MN v-link in the former and the prevalence of its more explicit counterpart with adjectival evaluation in the latter.

What now follows is a comprehensive overview of phrases described as emphasizing or highlighting important information in the coursebooks. I will conclude by highlighting the main findings from the comparison with corpus-derived importance markers.

LEAP, Oxford EAP and Unlock do not present language which stresses points. In Academic Listening Strategies (ALS), the following phrases are said to help students ‘see the forest for the trees’ (p. 49): ‘today I’m going to talk about X because’; ‘first I want to talk about’; ‘so, let’s get on with today’s topic’; ‘I’m gonna illustrate three reasons for’; ‘so why is this important?’; ‘ok, next I wanna talk about’; ‘let’s move on to the other aspect’. Salehzadeh also includes ‘emphasis/evaluative comment[s]’ that can signal a new topic is coming (p. 106): ‘the important thing here is’; ‘what you don’t want to forget’; ‘be careful about’; ‘here’s the tricky part now’; ‘this causes some very serious problems’; ‘some people think that we have too many specialists’; ‘what I’m interested in and hoping for is that China will play a major leadership role’. The markers in ALS are either explicit or signal different points rather than evaluating their importance.

Cambridge Academic English (CAE) offers only two examples of ‘signposting language’ resembling importance markers (Cl I, p. 152). They ‘indicate a focus on an idea or quote: ‘what we are interested in’; ‘and here comes probably the most important sentence’. In the Contemporary Topics (CT) series, CT I provides three apparently random examples of phrases ‘emphasiz[ing] a point’ (p. 25): ‘in fact’, ‘it’s clear that’, and ‘interesting, huh’; CT 3 contains no importance markers. CT 2 is limited to signposts without evaluation which introduce ‘main ideas’ (p. 5): ‘in the first half, you’ll hear about … ‘; ‘in the second half, we’ll discuss … ‘; ‘today’s lecture will focus on … ‘; ‘this afternoon we’ll look at … ‘; ‘I’d like to begin with the first category … ‘; ‘Today’s lecture will be divided into two parts … ‘. It should be noted that while such phrases may make points prominent, I did not regard them as importance markers in my lecture study because they lack evaluative force (see above, 2.2).’

English for Academic Study (EAS) lists the following phrases performing a highlighting function: ‘finally’, ‘this brings me to my last point’, ‘just as important’, and ‘you also need’ (p. 26). Additionally, those that ‘indicate a key point’ (p. 31) are ‘firstly’, ‘another thing is’, ‘for example’, ‘in addition’, ‘finally’, ‘the important point here’, ‘one advantage is’, ‘so’, and ‘remember’. Of all these phrases, ‘the important point here’ and ‘remember’ are the only ones that can be considered importance markers; the rest is a rather mixed bag, again mainly of phrases signalling new points.

EASE draws on the BASE corpus for functional language items but surprisingly provides only explicit markers with adjectival evaluation: ‘the key point is’; ‘the main point is’; ‘one of the most important points is’; ‘an important point is’; ‘a point worth noting is’; ‘that’s the main point here’; ‘the big question is’; and ‘what’s crucial is’. Since the analysis of importance markers in BASE detailed above creates a very different picture, the markers selected for presentation in EASE seem to illustrate what happens when we examine corpora with an intuitive, preconceived notion of the language which may serve a particular function. Because of their prototypical adjectival evaluation, these instances stand out as importance markers even if in the corpus from which they derive barely one fifth (ca. 19%) of all importance cues contain adjectives.

Four Point (FP) provides the following phrases ‘focusing the audience on important information’ (p. 5): ‘These are some of the questions I wanted to research’; ‘[Basically], my research question is/was … ‘; ‘The main point of my research is … ‘; ‘What I’m stressing is … ‘; ‘What you need to remember is … ‘; ‘The important thing is … ‘; ‘The primary reason is … ‘; ‘Most importantly/Most important … ‘; ‘A major [development] is … ‘; ‘The [crucial] difference is … ‘; ‘What is [critical, necessary, vital, paramount, significant, essential, mandatory] … ‘; ‘So, what do these results tell us?’; ‘As you can see … ‘. Again, some merely introduce new points; others do not evaluate discourse or are explicit.

Lecture Ready 1 (LR1) contains these signals of important information (pp. 109, 111, 112): ‘this is important’; ‘this is very important’; ‘the idea … is very important’; ‘here is a key question’; ‘this idea is key to’; ‘step one is the most common and important’; ‘it’s important to note that’; ‘I want to point out’; ‘I’d like to focus on’; ‘you should write this down’; ‘it is important to write these in your notes now’; ‘I’ll say that again’; ‘let me repeat that’; ‘let me repeat that idea’. LR 2 similarly lists the following signposts (pp. 83, 85, 86): ‘this is important’; ‘one important point is’; ‘another important finding was’; ‘the bottom line is’; ‘here’s the bottom line’; ‘the point I want to stress the most is’; ‘it’s important to note that’; ‘pay attention to this’; ‘I want you to notice that’; ‘listen to this’; ‘I want to point out that’; ‘I want to stress that’; ‘you should write this down’; ‘now write this down’; ‘let me repeat that’; ‘I’ll say that again’; ‘this will be on the test’. While markers in LR 1 and 2 are more varied and numerous than in most other materials examined, including idiomatic language (‘the bottom line’), note-taking directives (‘you should write this down’) and exam reference (‘this will be on the test’), all are explicit and most are of types that are rare or virtually non-existent in the lecture corpus. LR 3 provides ‘expressions that signal repetition for clarification or emphasis’ (p. 43) which do not fall under what I have defined as importance markers: ‘in other words’; ‘what I mean is’; ‘so what I’m saying is’; ‘that is’; ‘as I said’; ‘let me say that another way’; ‘in other words’; ‘which is to say’.

Lectures contains few signposts ‘showing importance’ (p. 28): ‘in particular, we’ll see’; ‘at the heart of this problem is’ and ‘I’d like to draw your attention to’ (p. 29). Only the last can be considered an importance marker but again is not representative of typical marking in authentic lectures.
Finally, Study Listening (SL) presents a variety of importance markers that ‘can underline or emphasise points in their [lecturers’] argument’ in three main ways according to their interactive orientation (p. 39). These three types incidentally correspond to a classification derived from BASE by Deroey (2015). According to Lynch, points can be emphasized by (1) speaking about the subject matter itself: ‘the central problem is that’; ‘a basic point is that’; ‘one essential fact is that’; ‘another key issue/crucial difference is the’; (2) speaking to the audience: ‘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’; and (3) speaking about themselves: ‘I want to stress/emphasise/underline’; ‘my point is; what I’m getting at is’. Although most markers are again rather explicit and relatively infrequent in the lecture corpus, a great variety is presented, including the predominant importance markers attested in the BASE lectures, viz. ‘remember that’ and ‘my point is’.

An examination of the language presented as emphasizing points in the coursebooks revealed two main issues. First, some offer practice identifying main points but do not present phrases signalling such points. In this regard, it is interesting to note that the authors of English for Academic Study motivate de-emphasizing ‘listening for discourse markers as a means of identifying key ideas to note down’ because an ‘informal analysis’ of lectures from the BASE corpus showed ‘a substantial use of informal and idiomatic language by lecturers’ and ‘less use of (and consistency in the use of) discourse markers to organize information than we might have expected’ (teacher’s book, p. 7). This is an interesting observation, as the main importance markers in BASE are indeed idiomatic. However, while we would not want to train students to listen out for markers they are unlikely to encounter, not presenting any is also unhelpful. Importance markers are a common feature of lectures and the fact that the predominant ones in the corpus are idiomatic could be seen as a reason for helping students recognize and disambiguate these.

Second, most importance markers were explicit, even in materials using authentic lectures: preference was given to markers with adjectival evaluation (e.g. the key point is), clear statements of lecturer intention (e.g. what I’m stressing is) and explicit directive force (e.g. what you don’t want to forget). This suggests that those markers which are comparatively rare in authentic lectures tend to be those which students are trained to recognize in coursebooks. This illustrates Gilmore’s points that ‘the language presented to students in textbooks is a poor representation of the real thing’ (2007, p. 98) and that ‘the evidence suggests that textbook authors are not yet habitually checking their materials against relevant corpus data to ensure that the language models they provide are as naturalistic and pedagogically useful as possible’ (2015, p. 517). If we take importance markers to exemplify the representation of lecture discourse in listening materials, it would thus seem that little has changed in the 25 years since Flowerdew compared the language of definitions in coursebooks and lectures (1992). Yet, as Rost (2011, p. 166) points out, ‘[i]f the target of the learners is to understand genuine spoken language […] then the target needs to be introduced into instruction’. As we will see below (see ‘Research-informedness’), this state of affairs may be the result of publishers’ commercial preoccupations, authors’ lack of time and corpus training, and insufficient concern on the part of applied linguists regarding the accessibility or pedagogical implications of their research.

3.2. Lectures

Our main question regarding the nature of the lectures included in the coursebooks concerns their authenticity. Table 2 reveals that the materials overwhelmingly do not use authentic lectures as defined above. The exceptions are ALS, CAE, EASE, and Lectures. It is worth noting that even courses with authentic lectures tend to use excerpts or unusually short lectures which are typically clearly structured and delivered relatively slowly. Only ALS and EASE include lectures from degree programmes, taken from the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English and BASE corpus, respectively. In CAE, ‘a variety of lectures’ are said to be ‘delivered by experienced lecturers and researchers’ (p. 6) and ‘recorded at the University of Cambridge’ (p. 5). They are presumably from the Cambridge Academic English Corpus (CAEC), but the lectures appear to be public or especially invited and so cannot really be considered authentic in the way those in ALS and EASE can. Lectures states that ‘five authentic lectures provide realistic practice’ (p. 6) but uses audio recordings only. The resulting absence of some of the facilitating features and challenges of real lectures naturally makes the listening experience less representative, as Field (2011, p. 103) notes:

> It is obvious that there are large environmental and experiential differences between a learner attending to an audio recording in a classroom and a real-world lecture listener who has the benefit of visual support, both paralinguistic (in the form of gesture and facial expression) and linguistic (in the form of the written content of PowerPoint slides, for example). But the point at issue extends well beyond ecological validity: The main question demanding consideration is whether there is sufficient overlap between the cognitive processes that are elicited in the two contexts, to the extent that the first can be said to provide an adequate preparation for the second.

Two books contain authentic listening fragments that are not university lectures: LEAP contains a Nobel Prize acceptance speech and public lectures at an arts festival, while Unlock uses ‘documentary-style videos from Discovery Education’ (teacher’s book, p. 9) and scripted lectures. However, in their study on the usefulness of authenticity as a criterion for selecting EAP listening materials, MacDonald et al. (2000, p. 264) report that ‘educational TV documentaries […] turned out to resemble the target situation [lecture listening] more closely than the original notion of authenticity might suggest’. EAS

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2 Where no level is stated, the information occurs on the same page in all levels of the course.
listening segments are ‘based [my emphasis] on transcripts of authentic lectures given at the University of Reading ... as part of their [students’] normal degree programmes’; re-recording was ‘to ensure clarity’ but ‘the language and content ... have been maintained’ (p. 7). Finally, CT, FP, LR, and Oxford EAP use scripts delivered by actors, while SL uses real lectures but the texts also seem scripted. The need to critically examine materials is apparent from the absence of (clear) descriptions of the lectures or the misleading nature of these descriptions. CT, for example, is reported to use lectures with ‘engaging instructors in a variety of settings including offices, lecture halls, and classrooms, many with live student audiences’ (p. vii). However, all are delivered by actors rather than ‘instructors’, some of the ‘lectures’ are by an actor sitting behind a desk in an office with no audience; in lecture halls and classrooms there is no use of visuals, and the ‘live student audiences’ appear to be acting.

As Goh (2013, p. 68) points out, teachers need to be aware of how authentic lecture discourse differs from that of written or scripted texts. The use of scripts and actors in the analysed materials almost invariably entailed slow speech, frequent pausing and reformulation, explicit discourse structuring and careful explanations of terms. Rodgers and Webb (2016, p. 171) further note the following in this regard:

[M]ost EAP listening programs are based upon commercial textbooks. The downside of this is that these textbooks tend to present the structure and language of the lectures as simply organized and transparently coherent. Actual lectures, however, are a much less tidy form of discourse.

Flowerdew and Miller (1997, p. 30) similarly reported that the lectures in EAP listening books were ‘very coherent, explicit and self-contained’ compared to an authentic lecture, which was ‘much more “messy”’. Thompson (2003, p. 14) also found that ‘read-aloud texts are much more listener-friendly, the texts are shorter and less informationally complex, and their organisation is more carefully signalled’. While practising with simple and explicit texts may be pedagogically appropriate for less proficient students, the materials for more proficient students I examined continued to use such listening fragments.

Along with using authentic lectures, students can be helped to cope with real lectures by the inclusion of longer texts (cf. Flowerdew & Miller, 1997; Rodgers & Webb, 2016; Thompson, 2003). Table 2 shows the inclusion of full length lectures is rare, with the longest segment being c. 50 min. In fact, most listening segments are 3 min at most.3 Well over half the excerpts in EASE are under a minute, with most others being under 4 min. LR, Oxford EAP and Unlock increase the average length of excerpts across levels, yet even at higher levels very short excerpts (c. 1–2 min) are common. In CT and CAE also, no clear correlation exists between level and excerpt length. The maximum length for any one level in CT is 7 min. CAE provides one full-length lecture online per level but the longest fragment on DVD is at B1+ (c. 9 min.). EAS and Lectures excerpts are all under 10 min; FP, LEAP and SL provide longer listening practice of between c. 5 and c. 22 min. In ALS, segments are mostly between 6 and 50 min. The preference for short fragments in most materials may of course be guided by pedagogical and practical considerations such as language level, focused practice, and class time management. However, it is doubtful such listening practice adequately prepares our students for their degree lectures, which will tend to be at least 50 min.

3.3. Research-informedness

Establishing whether materials were research-informed was more difficult than expected. As a result, the classification of coursebooks in Table 2 as (not) being research-informed is rather crude. Typically, there are no or only vague author statements about any ‘research’ that was done, the way language items had been selected, and the source of lectures. Vague statements about ‘research’ were discounted as they may have referred to market research or materials trialing. Even when explicit mention was made of primary or secondary research into lecture discourse and listening, the descriptions of the research and corpus were vague and it was largely unclear how findings had been incorporated into the materials. As Burton (2012) notes in his study on corpus use in coursebooks, authors’ reporting using corpora does not necessarily mean the books are completely based on or informed by a corpus. The general sparseness of information in our coursebooks could lead one to suspect any research done was minimal or not systematic, as it stands to reason that greater detail can only serve to instill confidence in the teacher and students that the materials are fit for purpose.

As Table 2 indicates, many materials do not appear to be research-informed. CT, FP, LEAP, Lectures, Lecture Ready, Oxford EAP and Unlock contain no statements about or references to research on lecture discourse and listening. This naturally does not necessarily mean the authors have not performed such research, but if they have, they have neglected to tell us or refer to the literature. The series editor of CT, for example, is Michael Rost, the author of ‘Teaching and researching listening’ (2011), so we could expect the series to be research-informed in some way but there are no references to listening research. Interestingly, the CT lectures instantiate what Rost (2006, p. 53) calls ‘elaborated texts’, i.e. texts with added redundancy (e.g. repetition, paraphrase), greater transparency (e.g. explicit signposting), increased pausing, and more interactivity (e.g. comprehension checks). Striking features of these lectures were reformulation and repetition of key words; clear and consistent overt signposting; frequent pausing and relatively slow speech; and the use of rhetorical questions and other interactive language. However, it is beyond the scope of the current study to examine materials for the comprehension facilitating features included in the EAP lectures or for the choice of skills covered that may reflect the integration of findings from lectures and lecture listening.

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3 I considered the length of any one track. In some cases excerpts of the same lecture occur in consecutive tracks but I could not reliably judge whether the lecture continued from the same point.
ALS, CAE, EAS, EASE and SL were research-informed following the criteria used here. However, research tended not to be incorporated in a major, systematic, or obvious way. ALS provides a typically vague statement about the book ‘reflect[ing] much of the current research on academic listening’ (p. xv) but references to relevant research are indeed frequent. The CAE series aims to teach language that is ‘up-to-date and relevant’ (p. 6) and accordingly the Cambridge Academic English Corpus (CAEC) is said to have been extensively used in material preparation. However, while listening exercises indeed use language from the CAEC lectures, these lectures do not appear authentic (see above) and it is not clear whether or how systematic research into lecture discourse has happened. The authors of EAS refer to literature on listening processes, micro- and macroskills, note-taking as well as lecturing style and discourse. As regards the latter, they add that they have performed an “informal analysis” of lectures from the BASE corpus (teacher’s book, p. 7), but we are only given limited information about their research and how it is reflected in their course design. They report finding ‘substantial use of informal and idiomatic language by lecturers’ and ‘less use of (and consistency in the use of) discourse markers to organize information than we might have expected’; consequently, they have de-emphasised ‘listening for discourse markers as a means of identifying key ideas to note down’ (teacher’s book, p. 7). The EASE course takes phrases from the BASE lectures to exemplify key functional language. Nevertheless, the treatment of importance markers suggest that the corpus was not systematically examined to inform the choice of language items (see above, 3.1.2).

Finally, Lynch (SL), himself a researcher on academic listening, notes that his 2004 edition has changed from the first edition ‘reflecting the developments in the teaching of listening in recent years’ (p. 7). The addition of ‘cognitive and metacognitive macrostrategies’ are also said to be motivated by ‘recent research into foreign language listening (for example, Vandergrift, 1999, Rost 2002).’ Building on ‘recent proposals (such as those of Field 1998; White 1998) for an expansion of the post-listening phase to include analysis of spoken language and speaker delivery’, Lynch has also emphasized post-listening work more, particularly ‘the notion of ‘troubleshooting’ (Tauroza 1995), in which the teacher and students work together in analysing what has caused their comprehension problems’. Lynch’s statements about the use of research materials are about as clear as descriptions get in the coursebooks examined here, but again there is no information about the source of language items, such as importance markers.

The lack of (systematic) research or use of research findings in these coursebooks is in line with Hyland’s (2006, p. 5) observation that ‘textbooks continue to depend on the writer’s experience and intuition rather than systematic research’. Despite the availability of lecture corpora and research into lecture listening and discourse, EAP listening textbooks generally appear no more research-informed than they were twenty-five years ago, when Flowerdew (1992, p. 204) noted the ‘unsatisfactory treatment of key academic language’ and cited studies concluding that ‘textbook writers fail to consult either appropriate corpora or appropriate applied linguistics literature when designing materials’. Indeed, comparing the 2017 edition of Contemorary Topics with the one of 2013, I found no changes in the features I report on in this paper. While we may wish to see more research-informed coursebooks to improve the representativeness of lecture discourse and listening practice, Gilmore (2015, p. 521) offers the following explanation for this unsatisfactory state of affairs:

To date, remarkably little effort has been made to improve cross-disciplinary communication amongst the various interested parties: applied linguistics researchers often energetically pursue their own narrow fields of interest with minimal concern for the accessibility or intelligibility of their work to other stakeholders, or its pedagogic implications (Tomlinson, 2012); language teachers are rarely encouraged (or able) to keep up to date with theoretical advances [...]; materials writers seem to rely more on replication of previous successful models, [...] and their own creative muses than theory-driven, principled design criteria (Sheldon 1987; Hidalgo, Hall & Jacobs 1995; Prowse 2011; Tomlinson, 2012), and publishers appear to show more concern for their bottom dollar than the provision of innovative textbooks, in tune with contemporary theory (Littlejohn 1992).

4. Conclusion

This study set out to review how representative lecture listening coursebooks are of the lectures our students need to understand. Examining their representation of language, the authenticity of lectures and research-informedness, the following could be concluded.

First, a comparison of one key discourse signpost, importance markers, suggests a mismatch between the language presented for listening training and the language students are likely to encounter in their lectures. Importantly, the ones that were commonly included were explicit and not representative of the predominantly implicit importance markers in the corpus. Hence, the danger is that we could be training our students to recognize markers which are comparatively easy to recognize but uncommon, while neglecting very common markers that are harder for students to identify. Second, the EAP lectures were not generally authentic. They were typically short, scripted and acted, or they were not academic. They generally also varied little in length or delivery style across levels. Third, many materials were not informed by either research on listening skills or lecture discourse and those that were typically did not integrate findings in a systematic or obvious way. This lack of research-informedness goes some way towards explaining why the language and lectures in the materials were not generally representative of real lectures. While empirical research into the effects of authenticity on learning largely remains to be done (cf. Tomlinson, 2012), it stands to reason that the limited representativeness of materials affects the effectiveness of listening training. It is therefore to be hoped that writers will start to incorporate authentic lectures and use findings from applied linguistics. To quote McCarthy (1991, p. 12), ‘[w]ith a more accurate picture of natural discourse, we are
in a better position to evaluate the descriptions upon which we base our teaching, the teaching materials, what goes on in the classroom, and the end products of our teaching’.

4.1. Pedagogical recommendations

What then can EAP practitioners do to make informed decisions about selecting and developing lecture listening materials? First, we should critically examine materials to assess how confident we are that they prepare our students for their lectures: what— if anything— do authors say about the lectures and language included and any research informing materials design; are the lectures and language authentic and if not, how do they appear different and to what extent could this be problematical for our purposes? We can also become more aware of any discrepancies between real lectures and coursebook representations by keeping abreast of lecture listening and discourse research and analysing freely available lectures.

Second, we may want to supplement our teaching with authentic and more extended lecture listening (cf. Rodgers & Webb, 2016). At least we should use ‘simplified texts that gradually approximate authentic ones’ (Widdowson, 1998; as cited in Gilmore, 2007, p. 108). This will help ‘develop strategies to deal with the “messiness” of real lectures’ (Flowerdew & Miller, 1997, p. 44), providing a better preparation for their more implicit signposting, faster speech rate and dysfluency. Less proficient students can be helped to work with authentic texts by previewing vocabulary and content (Rost, 2006), providing advance notes with the main points and structure, using shorter excerpts, having transcripts, or simplifying tasks (see Alexander et al., 2008; Gilmore, 2007; Rost, 2011). This form of ‘sheltered instruction’ (Rost, 2011, p. 194) helps ensure they are not overwhelmed and discouraged, while also motivating them by working with realistic lecture models. The training of top-down metacognitive listening strategies to plan for, monitor and evaluate listening comprehension (Vandergrift, 1999; Lynch 2004) can further help to scaffold the listening process and focus attention so that, for instance, the learner is not fixated on or can more easily cope with low-level issues such as word recognition and unfamiliar vocabulary (Goh, 2000; Rost, 2006). As regards additional listening resources, TED talks appear popular, probably because they are short and cover a range of topics that appeal to a wide student audience. However, they are not lectures, so while ‘some TED talks are suitably similar to lecture discourse to be used as semi-authentic academic listening materials’, ‘on average they are not’ (Wingrove, 2017, p. 93). We may therefore want to explore using freely available online lectures from resources such as HS Talks (https://hstalks.com), Open Yale courses (http://videolectures.net/yale_oyc/) (see Wingrove, 2017) and Coursera (https://coursera.org). However, drawbacks of such lectures include the lack of opportunity for interaction and their potentially limited representativeness of lectures at your institution. In this regard, invited lectures can be useful in providing an experience that is contextually richer and potentially more interactive. Nevertheless, we should remember these lecturers may display more sensitivity to the needs of the audience than would be the case in regular lectures (cf. Salehzadeh, 2013). Since lecture features vary across disciplines, institutions and lecturers, working with degree and institution specific lectures where possible seems desirable with disciplinary homogeneous groups (MacDonald et al., 2000). For instance, to support students on a BSc in Computer Sciences, the University of Luxembourg Language Centre is developing materials using lectures delivered on this BSc along with lecture preparation, comprehension and note-taking tasks based on input from the content lecturers (e.g. their summary of the key points; lecture outline: pre-lecture reading). This approach should provide more realistic practice by familiarizing students with various accents and delivery styles; by providing a listening experience that is authentic and relevant to their background knowledge; and by checking their performance against the lecturers’ expectations. This also allows for autonomous (cf. Rost, 2011), student-centered, individualized work, as the lectures will be available on Moodle (the University’s learning platform) for them to work on at their own pace and depending on their needs.

Finally, we should bear in mind that as EAP practitioners it is we that drive coursebook innovation. Burton’s (2012) survey of ELT publishers and writers found that publishers’ commercial interests mean that they tend to be conservative in innovating materials and that writers work to tight deadlines and often lack corpus training. While books keep being sold this way, there is little incentive for either publishers or writers to invest in the training and research that would be needed to make coursebooks more representative of real lectures.

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