Confronting corpora with coursebooks: the case of lecture listening

Katrien Deroey

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Is there a problem?

(Deroey, under review; Deroey, 2017)
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. (Thompson, 2003, p. 6)

Listening material in an ELT classroom is rarely similar to academic lectures. (Alexander, Argent & Spencer, 2008, p. 224)

[...] most 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. (Rodgers & Webb, 2016, p. 171)

Exposing students only to simplified lecture texts certainly does students a disservice. (Salehzadeh, 2013, p. xix)
Corpora, questions, analysis
Corpora & analysis

160 lectures: British Academic Spoken English corpus Manual and automated analysis of importance markers

25 coursebooks (mainly UK)
Student’s & teacher’s books; audiovisuals
Questions

Representativeness of language

Lecture authenticity

Research-informedness
Language: Importance markers
# Importance markers in BASE lectures (N=782)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>N</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Remember/notice/note</td>
<td>264</td>
<td>33.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>just remember this</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>notice this is again a matter of express consent</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The point/question is</td>
<td>162</td>
<td>20.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the point is by chance these two structures are similar</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I want to emphasize/stress;</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>8.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(as) I (have) pointed out</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The important/key point/thing is</td>
<td>64</td>
<td>8.2</td>
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<td>You have to remember</td>
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Which are importance markers?

1. **the point is** that people can't do that
2. **the point is** for you to develop your own scholarship
3. **the thing** you have to remember **is** there’s no such thing as the heritability

4. if you forget everything else i say just **remember** that kidney failure causes high blood pressure
5. there is a class switch **remember**
6. **remember** slavery had already been legally abolished
# Importance marking in coursebooks (N=52)

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<tbody>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>I want to stress</td>
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<td>13.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remember that</td>
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<td>11.5</td>
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- ➔ No or few markers
- ➔ Common (implicit) markers underrepresented
The language presented to students in textbooks is a poor representation of the real thing. (Gilmore, 2007, p. 98)

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. (Gilmore, 2015, p. 517)

Corpus linguists now often point out how radically intuition and use may converge. (Stubbs, 2001, p. 151)
Authenticity
The use of authentic lectures is rare

Authentic lectures
Aish & Tomlinson *Lectures: Learn listening and note-taking skills*
*Cambridge Academic English*
Kelly, Nesi, & Revell *EASE Volume one: Listening to lectures.*
Salehzadeh *Academic listening strategies*

No or vague descriptions of lectures
Excerpts; unusually short lectures
Clearly structured, slow delivery
Little progression from lower to higher levels
Research-informedness
Research-informedness

Research-informed

*Academic listening strategies*
*Cambridge Academic English*
*EASE: Listening to lectures*
*Campbell & Smith *English for academic study: Listening*
*Lynch *Study listening*

Research-informed coursebooks incorporate research in a minor, non-systematic, unclear way

Most: no/vague statements about research-informedness
Textbooks continue to depend on the writer’s experience and intuition rather than systematic research. (Hyland, 2006, p. 5)

Textbook writers fail to consult either appropriate corpora or appropriate applied linguistics literature when designing materials. (Flowerdew, 1992, p. 204)

Although 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). (Harwood, 2005, p. 150)
Implications & recommendations for EAP
Things to remember when using coursebooks

We may be training students with unrepresentative language.

We may be failing to prepare students for the challenges of their lectures.
Applied linguistics researchers often energetically pursue their own narrow fields of interest with minimal concern for the accessibility [...] to other stakeholders [...] ; 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 [...], and publishers appear to show more concern for their bottom dollar than the provision of innovative textbooks, in tune with contemporary theory [...].

Gilmore (2015, p. 521)
What does it mean for EAP teachers?

Do your research: coursebooks & lectures

Adapt & supplement

‘Simplified texts that gradually approximate authentic ones’ (Widdowson, as cited in Gilmore, 2007, p. 108)

Strategies

Invited lectures

Discipline & institution specific lectures

You matter!
Lecture listening materials


Reading: Garnet.


Importance marking


References


References


Acknowledgement

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.