

## English as a GloCalization Phenomenon. Observations from a Linguistic Microcosm

**Carmen Pérez-Llantada & Gibson R. Ferguson (eds).**

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Since its appearance on the Internet in 1999, the MICASE (Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English) has meant a revolution in the study of spoken academic discourse. Up to that moment research had focused on written language due to its easier accessibility. However, the growing demand of courses to learn the spoken English language used at the university, together with the possibility of free access to a corpus of that language, have made MICASE an invaluable tool for the researcher, and the EAP teacher. There is a great variety of studies related to the MICASE. In the last 4 years about 30 articles have been published by researchers from all over the world based on this corpus (University of Michigan, 2007). The MICASE has become the representative discourse of the American university, and as such it is compared in many of the above mentioned studies with the discourse used in other universities and countries. Thanks to it, more and more is known about how lecturers speak and this is contributing to learn about similarities and differences not only in terms of language but also in terms of pedagogical resources and methodologies, usually closely linked to the university discourse.

*English as a GloCalization Phenomenon. Observations from a Linguistic Microcosm* has to be added to the above mentioned list. The first thing that draws the attention of the reader of this book is its title, which can hardly be understood by those who are not familiar with Swales' work (2002). MICASE is a corpus entirely compiled at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor. It can thus be considered as the use of academic discourse in a specific setting, that is, a local phenomenon. However, only by means of the study of the real use of language in specific settings can we make generalizations for the global use of English as an academic language –thus, leading to the “glocalization” concept.

John Swales has written the Preface, in which he contextualises this book in the realm of publications about MICASE. As he says, this is the first time

that a whole edited volume is devoted to studies on the corpus, and, surprisingly, it has been produced at the University of Zaragoza, in Spain. Furthermore, he explains the relationship some scholars from this University have had with the English Language Institute of the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor, and the relevant research that is today being produced by these and other researchers. In fact, much of the interest on ESP, and especially EAP research that is blooming at the moment in Spain, is due to the extreme generosity of John Swales and his group, who not only compiled an excellent corpus, but uploaded it on the Internet, and made it available free for everyone.

Before starting with the articles, the editors of the book provide an Introduction where they justify the importance of academic English in Europe nowadays as a *lingua franca*, and of the study of world Englishes as local adaptations of the English language. The book is organised into three parts: the first part deals with *The social dimension of a linguistic microcosm*, the second part is entitled *The scope of pragmatics within a linguistic microcosm*, and the third part, *Pedagogical insights of a "glocalization" phenomenon*.

Within the first part, the article by Claus-Peter Neumann, "The complex dynamics of faculty-students relations in dialogic academic speech events: the research group meeting" examines how status differences affect the language of research group meetings. Following previous theories he analyses the four research group meetings in the MICASE, looking for discourse representative of high-ranking speakers: sharing the floor, on-record orders, controlling over the agenda, speaking for the group, discrepancy, reprimands, and the assessment of the speakers (Conefrey, 1997). His results prove that student-teacher interaction is a matter of negotiation, that is, status is a local affair achievable by any member. As Neumann points out, it would be very interesting to make students aware of the different ways to contribute in class debates in the proper way, and to highlight the essentially democratic nature of debates in North American universities. However, I would suggest that further research should also analyse cultural differences and ways of speaking in other countries.

The second article in this part is "The gender of power relations in academic speech: a cross disciplinary approach". M<sup>a</sup> Teresa Escudero Alías analyzes the use of the expressions "I mean" and "you know" in relation to the gender of the speakers, and comparing disciplines. According to Escudero Alías, these expressions help the speaker to establish and maintain a position in speech which has power implications when used by males (they use "I

mean” more often), and a willingness to establish a closer and more informal relationship in the case of women (they mainly prefer to use “you know”). From my point of view, it is rather risky to generalise this interpretation of the use of the expressions “I mean” and “you know” as there can be other factors affecting the choice, such as extended use in the social context of the speaker.

Still in the first group “Signalling speaker’s intentions: towards a phraseology of textual metadiscourse in academic lecturing” by Carmen Pérez-Llantada Auría deals with the presence of interpersonal elements in relation to textual metadiscourse. The results of the study prove that North American lecturers use textual metadiscourse expressions when holding the floor, though they also try to establish a more informal participating atmosphere at some points. As for the pedagogical implications, students can be exposed to textual metadiscourse and to expressions used for interpersonal relations, which will help them to understand not only the language of lecturers, but also how social roles work in relation to the discourse. One of the most interesting aspects of this article is the interpretation of results from the point of view of pragmatics and cognitive theory.

The second part of the book takes the scope of pragmatics in the observation of the spoken academic discourse found in the MICASE. Rosa Lorés Sanz, in her article “Academic literacy vs academic talk: signalling nouns as devices of intratranslation” compares research articles with university lectures. Her aim is to explore the abstract nouns used to signpost information and manage information flow and the development of an argument. Her results prove that the seven most frequent signalling nouns seem to be used in a reversed way in written and oral academic discourse, that is, those that appear to be more commonly used in lectures are the least common in research articles, and the other way round. Regarding the pedagogical implications, students should have a good knowledge of signalling nouns in order to enhance their listening comprehension skills.

In the second article in this group, “Developing the message: retake phenomena in scientific lectures”, Silvia Murillo Ornat focuses on some reformulation markers which can convey identification and specification, explanation, definition and denomination, correction, conclusion, and summary. Further research would be interesting to compare the use of reformulation in different disciplines. It would also be useful to find some pedagogical applications for this research.

Ignacio Vázquez Orta presents “A corpus-based approach to nominalization in academic lectures”. He carries out a quantitative analysis of the occurrence of nominalization by means of derivation in the lectures in MICASE. Vázquez Orta compares his results with those obtained by Biber (1988) for academic prose and colloquial speech. There seems to be a much lower frequency of nominalizations in lectures than in written academic prose but it is higher than in colloquial spoken English, especially in the Humanities and Art disciplines. Nominalization seems to be an important characteristic of academic monologue, which situates it in a position between informal speech and academic prose. It would have been interesting to find also in this article some pedagogical implications, since this feature of spoken academic discourse appears to be of great relevance for students.

The last article in this group is “The use of ideational grammatical metaphor in academic spoken English” by Ignacio Guillén Galve. This piece of research deals with the use of metaphoric nominalizations in interactional/dialogue speech events. The findings show that grammatical metaphors are less often used in North American academic speech than in the academic prose in this discipline.

The third part of this book deals with the pedagogical insights of a “GloCalization Phenomenon”. The first article in the group studies ways to quantify exact numbers in the academic spoken discourse of the MICASE. Ramón Plo Alastrué in his article “Vagueness and imprecise numbers in the hard disciplines of the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English” makes a search of the use of suffixes, approximating adverbs, and some coordination tags to indicate vagueness. “About” seems to be the most common followed by “or something” and “or so”. Plo Alastrué claims that “approximators have proved to be dramatically less frequent in American English” (page 204) than in British English, and tries to explain this fact in terms of the directness of the North American speech. However, the grounds for this statement do not seem to be justified, since no information is given about similar studies involving a corpus of British English. Applying the results to teaching practices, Plo Alastrué suggests lecturers should make students aware of the difference between purposeful vagueness and the undesired ambiguity to be avoided according to the Gricean maxims (Grice, 1975).

“‘I think I know what you are saying’. Epistemic lexical verbs as stance markers in American academic speech” by Maria Rosario Artiga León examines the use of lexical epistemic verbs in the MICASE and compares

her results with those obtained by Hyland (1998) for a corpus of research articles. There appear to be far more occurrences of epistemic verbs in written than in spoken academic discourse, “think” appears to be the most common epistemic verb and its main function is that of discourse management, followed by conveying purposive vagueness, avoiding intrusion or showing politeness. Regarding pedagogical implications, Artiga León estimates that lecturers should include epistemic verbs in their English language syllabi, as they are “essential interpersonal features of discourse” (page 232).

Irene Aixalá Gil in her article “‘What we mean is actually how we mean’. A contribution to the analysis of sociopragmatic aspects of MICASE discussion sections” provides a preliminary description of the use of “actually” in spoken academic discourse in English, and its implications for interaction. This adverb is mainly used in discussion sections to show control over the contributions, and over the participants, to signal agreement or disagreement and to emphasize something. The author of this paper suggests some examples of exercises for students.

The last article in the book also within the section devoted to pedagogical insights is entitled “How to *arrange* MICASE-based pedagogical materials for the teaching/learning of EAP vocabulary”. Its author, Luz Gabás Ariño, offers an approach to vocabulary teaching using the MICASE as a source of information. After an analysis of the uses of the verb “to arrange”, she searches the word and its synonyms in the MICASE. The results are used as corpus evidence for the design of pedagogical activities. This research is justified as an example of methodology to be followed by teachers of English, as well as a contribution to bridge the gap between research and pedagogical activities.

All in all we can say that *English as a GloCalization Phenomenon. Observations from a Linguistic Microcosm* is a book that is worthwhile reading from beginning to end. There are several aspects the reader notices when reading this book and which should be highlighted for their relevance. Firstly, the homogeneity: all chapters of the book deal with a different aspect of the language in MICASE, but keeping the same structure and the same solid arguments, which are consistently applied to the corpus, and developed into pedagogical implications. Secondly, the theoretical endeavours the articles are based on come from a variety of approaches that go from genre theory to pragmatics, through systemic linguistics, corpus linguistics, discourse analysis or sociolinguistics. Thirdly, a great effort is perceived to bridge the gap between

research and pedagogy. During many years, the tendency in discourse analysis has been to study the language *per se* without paying much attention to the application of results. The approach taken by this book makes it a valuable tool not only for researchers but also for EAP practitioners. They will find in this book enlightening ideas for reflection and further application to their work.

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