

In the Name of God

A Comparative Study of Interactive and Textual Orientation to Mark Importance in Academic Lectures in English and Persian

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**1. Introduction**

**1.1. Preliminaries**

This comparative study will aim to deal with marking importance in academic lectures presented in English and Persian. It will compare markers of important lecture points in terms of their interactive and textual orientation and frequency in academic lectures. A fundamental characteristic of effective lecture delivery and comprehension is the realization of important parts of the lecture. That is why lecturers are supposed to organize and evaluate their discourse using importance markers (Brown & Bakhtaran, 1988; Kiewra, 2002; Tyler, 1992). Put differently, marking important helps them perceive the picture when processing the complicated lecture message (Deory, 2013).

In linguistics, discourse markers have been divided into two types: macro- and micro-markers. Macro-markers signal major transitions, include topic shifts, and conclude remarks. On the other hand, micro-markers are discourse signaling cues that function at the micro-level to demonstrate inter-sentential relations (Chaurdon & Richards, 1986). According to Deorey (2013), importance markers are lexicogrammatical devices that overtly highlight the important, relevant, or significant points in a discourse. These kinds of metadicursive devices have been named 'importance cues' (Kiewra, 2002), 'relevance markers' (Hunston, 1994), 'emphasis markers' (Yung, 2005), ' emphasizers' (Siepmann, 2005) ' focusers' (Simpson, 2004). They have further been called 'macro-markers' in Chaurdron and Richards's study (1986).

This study builds on a previous investigation of Deorey (2013) in which the importance markers were classified in terms of their interactive and textual orientation. Interactive orientation is related to the discourse elements which deal with the participants or the content of the discourse (Doery, 2013). In the case of the participants' pertinence, there are markers with speaker orientation, listener orientation, and joint orientation. Speaker's oriented markers usually have a first person singular subject pronoun and the main verb highlights a verbally presented point (e.g. *I ought to Stress that I'm talking about …*). The markers with listener orientation include speakers' direction of the listener for performing a cognitive act (e.g. *bear in mind*, or, *it's significant to remember*). Markers classified as having joint orientation are not frequent (e.g. *I ask you to notice*).

Textual orientation is concerned with the position of the marker in the text. It embodies prospective, retrospective, or combined orientation. Prospective markers precede the highlighted points. It is also said that the highlighted discourse, which follows the evaluative frame, is generally part of the same sentence (e.g. but it is important to remember……). On the other hand, retrospectively oriented markers follow the point (e.g. this method is largely influenced by the criticism and that is important to know). They usually contain a deictic (that), which encapsulates prior discourse and makes it available for evaluation (Gray 2010). Combined orientation combines retrospective marking with renewed presentation of the point (e.g. as I pointed out earlier Garzas always kept his ideology). This explicit connection between prior and new data is said to boost effectiveness of the lectures (Bjorkman 2011).

The present study aims to compare marking importance in academic lectures in terms of interactive and textual orientation markers between native English and Persian data to find out the differences between English and Persian discourse (lecture genre) in order to inform EFL and EAP learners to improve their ability of lecture delivery, comprehension, and note-taking.

**1.2. The Literature Review**

Several studies have discussed the effects of the presence of impotence discourse markers in different types of the texts. A number of researches have also been conducted to see how the presence or absence of discourse markers can affect understanding and recall of lectures. The first attempt to investigate the effects of discourse signaling cues on L2 listening comprehension was the study by cauldron and Richards (1986). They found that macro-markers (e.g. importance markers) help more than micro-markers in second language learners' comprehension and recall of lectures.

Jung (2003) conducted a study to determine whether the positive effects of signaling cues in L1 listening could also be applied to L2 listening. She examined the effects of discourse signaling cues on L2 learners listening comprehension of high- and low-level information in academic lectures. The study involved 80 Korean learners of English as a Foreign Language. 40 of the learners listened to the lectures with signaling cues, and the other 40 listened to the lectures without such cues. Results of her study revealed that students who listened to lectures in the target language that contain emphasis markers recalled significantly more information.

In their study, Kiewra and Titsworth (2003) have shown that providing organizational lecture cues improve note taking and achievement. Participants listened to a lecture that contained or did not contain organizational lecture cues. The results confirmed that lecture cues and note taking work to raise achievement, and educators are encouraged to use spoken organizational cues while presenting lectures.

In another study, Marina Bondi (2008) combined a corpus and a discourse perspective, and showed that emphatics (importance markers) are significant parts of discourse. Her study focuses on the use of emphatics in journal articles and on their evaluative orientations/parameters. The research also discusses that how their frequencies, meaning and uses vary across two soft disciplines: history and economics. Finally she concluded that the emphatics can assist the listener or the reader to comprehend the text more effectively.

Similar results emerged in an investigation by Eslami Rasekh (2009). For her study, 72 EAP students majoring in teaching English as a foreign language were selected. They were divided into two groups, listened to two different versions of a lecture. The two versions were different according to quantity and type of discourse markers. Listening comprehension was tested. The findings demonstrate that the participants comprehended the lecture better when discourse markers were included than when they were omitted.

Rahimi and Vahid Dastjerdi (2012) investigated the effects of discourse markers in lectures on students’ compositions. The participants were 20 male advanced English learners. They were divided into two groups. Two texts for giving lectures were chosen related to ‘science and technology’. In order to compare the comprehension of participants from the text, discourse markers were used in the lecture of group 1 and in the other lecture for group 2 no discourse marker was used. The results indicate that group 1 used more cohesive devices in their writing and therefore produced more coherent text.

**1.3. Statement of the Problem**

Despite the fact that lectures are the central instructional activities in academic contexts, and giving a lecture, is one of the most frequent ways of transferring information, it seems that not enough attention has been paid to how discourse markers can effectively shape genre of the lectures for better comprehension. It is extremely essential for all EFL learners to be aware of effective lecture delivery through appropriate use of importance markers as the speaker, and identifying the significant points in a lecture as the listener.

Although some studies have been made to confirm the positive role of discourse markers in comprehending different kinds of texts (see above), it seems that few have been conducted to investigate interactive and textual orientation of importance markers and the relevance of these lexicogrammatical markers in academic lectures. Furthermore, no study has been oriented to compare lectures by English and Persian speakers in terms of marking importance. We can see that there is a relative lack of investigation on this topic, especially in Iran.

**1.4. Purpose and Significance of the Study**

In order to fill the gap in research on the mentioned topic, this cross-linguistic study attempts to find out how marking importance and interactive and textual orientation of importance markers in the lectures differ or resemble in English and Persian. This will be executed by analyzing an adequate number of lectures in each language. This study will be based on the premise that the information derived from this investigation will provide insights to assist Iranian students, teachers, and all the lecturers who are keen to be more native-like English users.

Obviously, giving a good lecture is an art, which potentially involves some skills that stem from lecturers personality. However, at the same time, some other skills can undoubtedly be practiced and learnt (Rahimi & Vahid Dastgerdi, 2012). This can lead us to the importance that the present study has in fostering our knowledge of presenting an organized lecture, which includes a sufficient number of importance markers with the proper interactive (and textual) orientation. Comparing native data with the non-native one can also draw our attention to how different languages can vary in their discourse genres.

**1.5. Research Questions**

This study intends to investigate the following questions:

1. Does marking importance in academic lectures of English and Persian differ significantly?
2. What types of markers are used more frequently in each language?

**2. Methodology**

**2.1. Corpus**

This study will rely on 40 lectures. Twenty of them will be selected from the British Academic Spoken English (BASE) corpus, all delivered by native speakers of English, and distributed across academic subjects. The other 20 will also be the academic lectures delivered by native Persian speakers in academic contexts in reputable universities of Iran, such as Amirkabir and Sharif Universities of Technology. The lectures are available on the university websites. It seems that this number of lectures will be manageable to handle and is also enough to allow reliable generalization. However, if necessary, more lectures will be collected until the data become saturated.

The importance markers presented in these 40 lectures will be collected and marked according their interactive and textual orientation. Further, native English data will be compared to Persian one to see to what extent the genre of lecture is different in these two languages in terms of marking important, relevant, or significant points.

**2.2 Framework**

The present study will employ the multi-pronged approach by Deroey and Taverniers (2012), for obtaining a comprehensive picture of lexicogrammatical importance markers. It represents the interactive and textual classification of importance markers which are categorized as adjective, noun, verb, or adverb patterns depending on their chief constituent. Interactive orientation pertains to the inclusion of elements referring to discourse participants (speaker, listener, or joint orientation) or the absence thereof (content orientation). A distinction is made between primary and secondary interactive orientation. The classification of a marker’s primary interactive orientation depends on its main constituents, namely Subject or Object pronouns, full verbs, metalinguistic nouns, importance adjectives, and adverbs, while its secondary interactive orientation depends on possessive determiners, pre- and postmodifiers (adjectives, pronouns, verb type), and accompanying discourse markers. For example, the Subject pronoun you in (3) and the imperative bear in mind in (4) means these markers are viewed as primarily listener-oriented. By contrast, (5) exemplifies primary content orientation since the main part of marker contains no pronouns or verbs referring to the participants or their actions; however, the cognitive directive in the postmodifying subclause is considered to introduce secondary listener orientation. (3) now you also need to just bear in mind that there are things like Welfare to Work programmes (4) and bear in mind Marx was quite quiet about the work of art (5) now the most important thing to b bear in mind throughout the lecture really is pest is a human definition.

Textual orientation pertains to the position of the marker relative to the highlighted discourse and can be prospective, retrospective, or combined. The prospective orientation of a marker was generally apparent because the noun phrase or clausal complement presenting the highlighted point followed (e.g. that there are things like Welfare to Work programmes in (3). Alternatively, textual orientation was determined by establishing whether the referent of the discourse encapsulating deictic (mainly that and this) occurred before or after the marker, as in (6) What is spatial frequency that’s very important.

***Table 1:***

*Primary Interactive Orientation of Importance Markers*

Primary orientation Example

Content orientation The point is these books are totally different

Participant orientation

Listener orientation Don’t forget to make it as simple as possible

Speaker orientation I insist that it is possible

Joint orientation I want you to notice that this boy is another case

Table 2: Secondary participant orientation of importance markers

Secondary orientation Example

Listener orientation This is the point that you should remember

Speaker orientation The difficulty of the case is not so noticeable I declare

Joint orientation The problem we stress on is how is the mixture shaped

Table 4: Importance markers patterns

Primary content orientation Primary participant orientation

Adjective patterns Listener orientation

deic v-link ADJ V n/clause

mn v-link ADJ 2 pers pron V n/clause

it v-link ADJ clause

what v-link ADJ Speaker orientation

v-link n/clause 1s pers pron V n/clause

1p pers pron V n/clause

Noun patterns TO-INF n/clause

deic v-link MN

deic v-link adj MN Joint orientation

MN v-link 1p pers pron V n/clause

adj MN v-link 1s pers pron v + 2 pers pron

there v-link MN TO-INF n/clause

there v-link adj MN

Adverb patterns

Assessment-related expressions

**2.3. Procedure**

The study begins with the collection of English and Persian lectures, all from reliable academic sources. The first step after data collection will be identifying the importance markers generated in whole corpus. Next the markers will be classified in terms of their interactive and textual orientation. Further, the frequency of each type will be studied in the lectures. Finally, we will discuss whether the differences in two languages are significant. To keep the study manageable, only the transcripts will be examined. The analysis is, therefore, not informed by visual, non-verbal, and prosodic cues or information from the discourse participants.

It should be pointed out that before the main analysis of the collected data begins, ten percent of them will be subjected to a pilot study. To do so, this part of the data will be scrutinized by the researcher and her supervisor in order to reach agreement over the method of analysis and the feasibility of the study. After preliminary analysis, its inter-rater reliability will be ensured through Phi correlation.

**3. Data Analysis**

All the markers will be classified in terms of interactive and textual orientation, also their frequency in the text will be calculated. After that the chi-square will be conducted to show whether or not the differences in marking the important parts of academic lectures between English and Persian are significant.