TEXTUAL, GENRE AND SOCIAL FEATURES OF SPOKEN GRAMMAR: A CORPUS-BASED APPROACH

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This paper describes a corpus-based approach to teaching and learning spoken grammar for English for Academic Purposes with reference to Bhatia's (2002) multi-perspective model for discourse analysis: a textual perspective, a genre perspective and a social perspective. From a textual perspective, corpus-informed instruction helps students identify grammar items through statistical frequencies, collocational patterns, context-sensitive meanings and discoursal uses of words. From a genre perspective, corpus observation provides students with exposure to recurrent lexico-grammatical patterns across different academic text types (genres). From a social perspective, corpus models can be used to raise learners' awareness of how speakers' different discourse roles, discourse privileges and power statuses are enacted in their grammar choices. The paper describes corpus-based instructional procedures, gives samples of learners' linguistic output, and provides comments on the students' response to this method of instruction. Data resulting from the assessment process and student production suggest that corpus-informed instruction grounded in Bhatia's multi-perspective model can constitute a pedagogical approach in order to i) obtain positive student responses from input and authentic samples of grammar use, ii) help students identify and understand the textual, genre and social aspects of grammar in real contexts of use, and therefore iii) help develop students' ability to use grammar accurately and appropriately.

INTRODUCTION

As in any other communicative situation, in English for Academic Purposes (EAP) contexts learners need to know *what* to say and *how* to say things with words – to echo Austin's (1962) well-known postulates. For these learners, knowledge of English grammar is necessary in order to communicate accurately, meaningfully and appropriately, taking into consideration the specific purposes, participants and situations involved in the communication. As Johns (1994) argues, one effective way of developing accurate and appropriate uses of a language is through learners' exposure to authentic corpus-based materials. With the advance of the new technologies, corpora and concordances have become a valuable source for retrieving genuine examples of language use for both research and pedagogy.

Corpora have made a significant impact on language description and research. Structural and functional aspects of academic written and spoken discourse have been described in Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, and Finegan's (1999) exhaustive description of English grammar, based on corpus evidence and contrasting usage across registers. Theoretically-oriented research also suggests that linguistic analysis benefits from evidence of language used in real contexts. Using multidimensional analysis, Biber (2003, 2006) describes systematic differences in the co-occurrence of linguistic patterns in university speech and writing in order to provide accurate descriptions of EAP-specific phraseology. The development of specialized genre-based corpora has enabled significant EAP research to be carried out involving analyses of discoursal, pragmatic, rhetorical and genre features of both academic writing (Breivega, Dahl, & Fløttum, 2002; Hewings, 2001; Hyland, 1998; Reppen, Fitzmaurice, & Biber, 2002) and academic speech (Ädel, 2006; Pérez-Llantada & Ferguson, 2006; Poos & Simpson, 2002; Simpson & Swales, 2001). These studies have implicitly or explicitly indicated that the structure and functions of grammar patterns in specialized discourses should represent a "fundamentally important part of writers' and speakers' communicative repertoire" (Biber, Conrad. & Cortes, 2004, p. 400), and hence require pedagogical attention in EAP courses.

Corpora have been reported as being particularly helpful to materials and textbook writers as they allow easy access to authentic contextualized examples of language (Johns, 1994; Stevens, 1991). In fact, corpus researchers have been prolific in developing pedagogical materials and guidelines for EAP courses (Simpson & Leicher, 2006; see also *Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English* website's section of pedagogical materials). Corpora have also been heavily exploited in the study of non-native learner language acquisition (Charles, 2007; Cortes, 2004; Granger, 1998; Granger & Petch-Tyson, 2003; Hadley, 2004; Neff, Ballesteros, Dafouz, Martínez, & Rica, 2004, 2007) as well as for the implementation of data-driven learning (DDL) in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) and EAP courses. Although DDL literature has reported positive responses to corpus-based tasks involving students' direct use of concordance lines, a number of limitations have been acknowledged, including the need for training students in the use of corpora, the absence of information on discoursal and pragmatic features of grammar usage in the KWIC method[1], and other learning problems ranging from loss of motivation for the method to learners' tendency to overgeneralize about grammar usage (Hadley, 2004; Charles, 2007).

In an attempt to contribute to the study of corpora and concordances in EAP pedagogy, this paper reports on the combination of corpus-informed grammar instruction and corpus-based materials used in an academic spoken English course at university level. In this approach, the teacher, who is expected to have a high degree of familiarity with both the corpus data and discourse analysis, chooses corpus concordances and contextualized extracts to provide students with input and to focus attention on structural and functional aspects of academic spoken discourse. The approach as reported here did not involve direct handling of the corpus by students because the necessary computer facilities were unavailable.

The novelty of the approach lies in the fact that it is grounded in Bhatia's multi-perspective model for discourse analysis and seeks to facilitate the students' identification and interpretation of lexico-grammatical items from textual, genre and social perspectives. Specifically, this study addressed the following research questions:

1. Can corpus-based instruction and materials lead to enhanced understanding of the textual, genre and social aspects of grammar in real contexts of use?

2. Can corpus-informed instruction and materials help students develop the ability to put into practice their understanding of grammar in context within a range of academic situations?

Gilquin, Granger and Paquot (2007, p. 324) have pointed to the limited development of corpus-informed materials in EAP contexts. To our knowledge, no descriptive account of a corpus-based EAP course grounded in a multi-perspective analysis of discourse has been reported to date. To fill this gap, this paper describes classroom procedures using corpus-based instruction and materials and reports on the students' linguistic output and their responses to the approach.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

The pedagogical approach presented in this paper seeks to address grammar problems encountered in an upper-intermediate academic spoken English course for third year Electronic Engineering students at the University of Zaragoza, Spain. The traditional approach to teaching grammar had been identified as a source of ineffective learning processes (Pérez-Llantada, 2006). Under the traditional approach, learners were taught grammar items and patterns but were unable to use them accurately, meaningfully or appropriately in context. This learning problem, termed the "inert knowledge problem", refers to those situations in which "students are taught grammar as a set of rules, but even if they can apply the rules to exercises successfully during the lesson, they don't seem to be able to activate their knowledge of the rules when they are communicating during another part of the lesson or in another context" (Larsen-Freeman in Pérez-Llantada, 2007, p. 158).

The aim of the EAP course discussed here was to prepare students linguistically in order to participate successfully in European international student exchange programs. All the students had previously received instruction in academic written English in the first and second years of their degree courses, and in this course they were expected to learn oral communication that was both effective (e.g., able to define terms, describe objects and procedures, give reasons and express opinions) and appropriate (i.e., attending lectures, participating in seminars and discussions, giving presentations, expressing opinions in laboratory sessions, interacting with teachers and students, etc., while taking into account the specific communicative situation).

Theory sessions involved the use of corpus-informed instruction and corpus-derived materials in order to elicit inductive grammar learning and raise the students' awareness of the structural and functional roles of lexico-grammatical patterns in real contexts. These theory sessions were always followed by practical sessions, centred on tasks intended to consolidate the grammar input received in the theory sessions and elicit oral production. The practical sessions were designed in the form of mini-projects involving activities such as information search, information analysis and synthesis and information transfer, as well as role plays, case studies, problem-solving tasks and simulations (cf. Pérez-Llantada, 2006) and were followed by feedback sessions. The course was comprised of a total of 90 teaching/learning hours, 60 hours for theory instruction and a 30-hour workload of practical assignments.

The free-online *Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English* (MICASE; Simpson, Briggs, Ovens, & Swales, 1999) was selected as being representative of academic speech and therefore matching the students' specific learning needs. Some other advantages were envisaged in the use of this corpus. Its software design enabled the teacher to search the corpus for words and phrases across different academic events, returning concordance results with references to files, full utterances, and speakers[2]. In the theory sessions, students were given frequency data and concordance lines in the form of printouts in order that they should identify lexico-grammatical patterns of English in academic spoken settings. In the practical sessions, the teacher used contextualized corpus extracts to prepare consolidation exercises and language production tasks for the students.

The theoretical framework chosen as the basis for the new approach to teaching/learning grammar was Bhatia's (2002) "multi-perspective analysis of discourse". This framework distinguishes between a textual perspective (discourse is regarded as text), a genre perspective (discourse is regarded as genre) and a social perspective (discourse is regarded as social practice). Bhatia's model was specifically applied to the EAP grammar course as follows. In the analysis conducted from a textual perspective, the observation of corpus examples helped students view grammar items through statistical frequencies, collocational patterns, context-sensitive meanings and specific discoursal uses of words. This perspective of analysis sought to elicit recognition of lexico-grammatical variation across different communicative events, purposes and participants. In line with Bhatia's second perspective, the genre perspective, corpus-derived materials were used to provide students with exposure to recurring academic speech phraseology across academic genres or text types with specific purposes, participants and rules for communication. From this perspective, students were expected to develop 'genre awareness' (Johns, 1999; Paltridge 2002), that is, to become acquainted with the appropriate linguistic and rhetorical conventions for each specific speech event type (or genre type). Bhatia's third perspective of analysis was used to approach the social and institutional aspects of grammar usage in specialized communication. This perspective was targeted at raising learners' awareness of how the speakers' discourse roles, discourse privileges and power statuses are enacted through different lexico-grammatical choices.

CLASSROOM PROCEDURES AND STUDENT RESPONSE

1st Perspective of Analysis: Academic Spoken Discourse as Text

Various theories of language acquisition state that learning grammar should not be done in an isolated way, but rather through context, looking at structural patterns and specific uses of words in discourse (Larsen-Freeman, 2003). The MICASE online search facility allows the teacher to obtain frequency data across a broad range of speech events and speakers, to see concordance lines for any word or phrase used by specific speakers in all transcripts, and to view the entire utterance in which the search term appears using the "View Context". This corpus information helps the teacher obtain contextualized language models for use as the basis for the students' identification of the specific forms, meanings and functions of lexico-grammar items at a textual level.

The selection of lexico-grammatical items took into account several factors: (i) the results of the students' needs analysis according to their specific academic profile, (ii) the possible transferable knowledge of academic written grammar that the students had acquired in previous academic years and (iii) the language acquisition problems that had been detected among the students in previous years. For reasons of space, this paper only discusses a selection of grammar items of academic spoken English that the course approached from textual, genre and social perspectives.

One of the linguistic elements that had proved to be problematic for learners using a traditional grammar approach in previous years was the use of referential items in discourse. Referential nouns, also called 'phoric nouns' or 'signalling nouns', are widely used in academic speech to provide cohesion to discourse (Swales, 2001; Flowerdew, 2003). Pedagogically, these items are important to look at because, although they represent a lexical category, they need to be framed grammatically to be fully meaningful. As for language production, referential nouns are also important in order to train students in the language of reporting – informing about a given topic – a communication skill extensively used in academic spoken contexts. For these reasons, they were conceived of as suitable input for integrating grammar and lexis in the classroom, as Tucker (1998) and Hunston (2002) proposed.

During the course, the teacher first focused on corpus information relating to the items *matter(s)*, *fact(s)* and *issue(s)*. Table 1 was used to show the students the frequency distribution of these words and elicited a warm-up discussion on some formal aspects of these nouns. Students noted that *fact* and *matter* were far more recurrent in the singular than in the plural form, while the singular and plural forms of *issue* showed relatively similar frequencies in the corpus.

Table 1. Frequency Rank of *matter(s)*, *fact(s)* and *issue(s)* in MICASE

Phoric nouns	Raw counts	Frequency per 10,000 words
Fact	436	25.71
Issue	335	19.75
Issues	274	16.16
Matter	93	5.4
Facts	44	2.59
Matters	13	0.76

Relying on MICASE concordance lines, the teacher then developed a formal taxonomy of common collocations with referential nouns in order to elicit recognition of the lexico-grammatical patterns

containing these lexical items. Table 2 below was designed to encourage students' identification of some common patterns containing the word *issues* and discussion on its co-occurring phraseology.

Table 2. Some Combinations Including *issues* From MICASE Concordance Lines

Verbal combinations	Noun combinations	Adjectival combinations
to talk about several *issues* to write about these *issues* to bear on scientific *issues* to care about certain *issues* to start looking into the *issues* to bring up a lot of *issues* to focus on *issues* of to come up with the *issues* that to refer to major *issues* in to be interested in the *issues* of to sum up some of the *issues*	a response to *issues* of commitment to the broader *issues* of little concern for certain *issues* a grip on specific *issues*	different *issues* very specific *issues* one of the big *issues* one of the key *issues* those ongoing *issues* fundamental *issues* central *issues* as separate *issues* all kinds of *issues* *issues* of concern

Using the MICASE search facility, the teacher also provided exemplification of a broader range of phoric nouns (*thing(s)*, *idea(s)*, *point(s)*, *question(s)*, *concern(s)*, *aspect(s)*, *problem(s)* and *reason(s)*) with the purpose of raising students' awareness of how each communicative situation determines the speaker's formal vs. informal choices. On the basis of the MICASE speech event attributes, the teacher asked the students to practice phoric nouns in a range of academic situations such as delivering a lecture to a large class of students, participating as an expert in a panel discussion, taking part in one-on-one discussions between a student and an instructor, or interacting in student-led study groups. Students practiced adapting their speech to each situation using the appropriate contextualized utterances with considerable success: while they chose *matter(s)*, *fact(s)*, and *issue(s)* in simulations of formal speech events, the nouns *thing(s)*, *idea(s)*, *point(s)* or *question(s)* were more likely to occur in those tasks involving simulations of informal situations. For example, the following excerpts show the same student performs successfully in formal and informal contexts. Of note, excerpt 1 also includes one of the combinations from Table 2, i.e., "refer to major issues":

1. In this presentation I will refer to two major **issues** related to renewable energies. (student #34 simulating that he is delivering a paper at an international conference on renewable energies)

2. We will discuss all these **things** at the students' group meeting. (student #34 talking to his colleagues about arranging the weekly student meeting)

In the following MICASE examples decide whether the words in italics refer to forthcoming information or to previous information. Then, specify the referent (the actual meaning) of each of these words.

(1) there are concerns that it, um infringes on, um citizen rights, when um uh endangered species occur on private land, uh that's a very big *issue* (LES 175SU028)

(2) if morality is a *matter* of sentiment it is so for the whole [...] (COLL475MX082)

(3) there's still the *issue* of how does that policy change by the firm change the expectation of the workers (LES280JG138)

(4) you've been talking about the *fact* that we need the supply -side strategies (SEM 340JG072)

(5) the *fact* is that the tyrosine kinase activity is heavily phosphorilated (LE3c92)

Figure 1. Example of classroom exercise

To make students aware of the discourse functions performed by lexico-grammatical items, contextualized utterances containing *matter(s)*, *fact(s)* and *issue(s)* were retrieved by the teacher from the "View Context" column of the MICASE search interface. With these concordance lines, learners could identify the discoursal effects of phoric nouns in real language instances. They realised that phoric nouns need to be filled out or lexicalized with information so that the discourse can make sense. Doing the MICASE-based exercise (Figure 1), they also seemed to understand the anaphoric (referring to previous statements, as in sentences 1 and 2) and cataphoric functions (anticipating clarifications or qualifications of information, as in sentences 3, 4 & 5) of phoric nouns.

Such observation was the first step leading to the learners' subsequent use of these items in role-plays and simulations. By way of illustration, student #19 was able to produce utterances using both anaphoric and cataphoric referential nouns correctly.

1. Wind energy is one of the most valuable alternative energies for the **reasons** I have explained before. These are very important **reasons** that we should take into account for the future. (student #19)

2. In my opinion, the main **problem** with mini hydraulic stations is its relatively low production output. (student #19)

After the students had practiced these grammar items, the teacher used a feedback session to consolidate students' acquired knowledge of phoric nouns and to correct other inappropriate grammar uses. For instance, the student who produced extract 1 below noticed that the phoric noun *aspects* combined with chronological discourse markers (*firstly*, *secondly*, *finally*, *to summarize*) and that it performed a cataphoric function as *aspects* anticipated a list of ideas that the student used to recapitulate what he said before. The student further commented that he "filled out" –lexicalized– the word *aspects* using parallel anticipatory-*it* structures (*it is important to* […], *it is very important to* […]) when summarizing and giving his opinion.

Extract 1

The following *aspects* are important in negotiations. Firstly, it is very important to carefully prepare the negotiation by researching information, preparing sticking points, planning your negotiation strategy, etc. Secondly, it is also important to be careful with the attitude, the rapport, to be flexible and confirm and write the points agreed on during the negotiation. Finally it is important to use a simple and clear language and to use short words and sentences that you are comfortable with. To summarize, it is very important to prepare the negotiation and to use a clear language to negotiate successfully. (student #1)

Extract 2, which was also discussed in the feedback session, illustrates the beginning and end of a student's oral presentation. The student acknowledged that his selection of phoric nouns (*topic*, *reason*, *things*, *fact*, *objective*, *points*) served to provide cohesion to discourse and to indicate to the audience the organization of the speech. He also realized that the informal *things* might not be appropriate for the formal slant of his presentation. The student's observation that phoric nouns combined with chronological markers (*first*, *secondly*, *finally*) at the beginning and end of his oral presentation encouraged the teacher to anticipate the discoursal functions of textual metadiscourse phraseology in monologic speech which was one of the grammar aspects dealt with in the second level of analysis.

Extract 2

The topic of my presentation today is magnetic levitation trains. The reason that this topic is useful for you is because these trains are going to be the trains of the future. We are going to talk about three things. These are first, the fact that these trains are more economical because they don't contaminate, and secondly the performance of these trains.

> Finally we are going to look at the advantages that these trains offer compared to ordinary trains.
>
> […]
>
> In conclusion, in this presentation my objective was to know the advantages of this type of trains. I have covered three main points: first, the fact that these trains are more ecological. Secondly, the performance of these trains and finally I highlighted the advantages of these trains. (student #29)

Analysing the student's use of grammar in this feedback session was particularly useful in creating future practice. The teacher noted that, in extract 2, *firstly* and *secondly* were followed by nominal constructions, whereas *finally* was followed by a main clause, although his instruction had only provided models of the second type of construction. The teacher therefore decided to search in the future for a broader range of corpus examples – even longer extracts – in order to fine-tune classroom input and foster more accurate grammar usage perceptions.

Overall, the students' language production suggested that combining Bhatia's first perspective of discourse analysis with corpus-based instruction helped to develop students' awareness of grammar patterns in academic speech. Being able to use recurrent lexico-grammatical patterns in specific communicative contexts paved the way towards considering academic spoken discourse as genre.

2nd Perspective of Analysis: Academic Spoken Discourse as Genre

An important issue when exploring grammar patterns in academic genres is the consideration that all genres are constructed "within a frame of social action" (Bhatia, 2002). Through MICASE-informed contextualized models, corpus-based instruction and practice seemed to develop student awareness of how grammar patterns perform a transactional function (to convey information) and an interactional function (to build up and maintain social relationships).

To demonstrate recurrent grammar patterns across academic genres, the teacher initially provided some corpus samples for the analysis of monologic speech events (lectures, colloquia, and discussion sections). Special attention was paid to academic lecturing since, according to the needs analysis carried out prior to the course, this was the genre to which learners needed most exposure. Textual metadiscourse expressions, also called text-referencing expressions (Hyland, 1998; Mauranen, 2001), were one of the lexico-grammatical patterns selected for instruction. Such expressions were pedagogically important in order to prepare students to be competent listeners/speakers in foreign universities in socially acceptable terms (i.e., knowing how to interpret a speaker's relationship with an audience and how to establish comfortable interpersonal relationships with listeners).

The teacher used the MICASE search mode to search concordance lines for the desired speech event type, type of audience and academic role of the speaker (in the "Transcript Attributes" and "Speaker Attributes" columns, respectively). With this information, the teacher then prepared a theory handout with contextualized extracts from MICASE lectures. In the handout, textual metadiscourse expressions were presented to students as those expressions used by university professors in monologic speech in order to tell the audience what the text itself is going to do. Through corpus examples (see Figure 2), students were encouraged to identify recurrent grammar patterns of textual metadiscourse expressions in lecture talk. After correcting the exercise, the teacher briefly commented on the discourse functions of these different patterns.

Later, in the practical sessions, the students were given a list of MICASE metadiscourse expressions for use in their presentations. The analysis of their oral production suggested that the students became conscious of the textual and interpersonal effects of metadiscourse: alerting listeners to the information to come (*we're going to talk about*; *I'd like to look at*), and establishing a rapport with the audience (*as you*

can see; *you'll notice*). The extracts below may illustrate how the MICASE-based list of expressions became a useful source of consultation; all the expressions underlined in the extract appeared in the list.

Extract 3

In this presentation we're going to talk about four things. These are, firstly, the location of hydroelectric power stations all over the world, and secondly the location of hydroelectric power stations in Spain and Aragon. Next we're going to talk about advantages and disadvantages of hydroelectric energy. Finally we're going to look at the future and development of hydroelectric power stations and mini-hydraulic power. (student #15)

Extract 4

Here we can see a flow chart that explains the process of producing hydropower. If you look at it more closely, you'll notice that we are talking about a renewable energy because water on earth is continuously replenishing and as long as this continues we won't run out of this energy source. (student #17)

Extract 5

Here we can see a flow chart about nuclear energy, in particular, uranium's fusion and the next electricity generation. I'd like to look at this flow chart about uranium's fusion. As you can see it begins with the uranium atom, it is fissioned in a controlled chain reaction and creates heat. After, this heat in turn heats the water and produces steam. (student #11)

Identify the grammar patterns of the following textual metadiscourse expressions from MICASE. Match the two columns accordingly.

MICASE EXAMPLES	GRAMMATICAL PATTERNS
(A) *Today we're going to talk about the theory of relativity […]* (B) *Let's look at metabolism […]*	(i) *we + verb + complement /let's + verb + complement* (teacher's comments: both grammar patterns are formed by short subject-verb-complement sentences which create a very simplified, easy-to-grasp speaking style)
(C) *I'm going to summarize and give an example of how we compute the probability.*	(ii) *I + verb + and + verb + complement* (teacher's comments: paratactic structures forming parallel, simple-to-process and simple-to-produce constructions which facilitate lecture understanding)
(D) *So now we'll start so today what I'm gonna talk to you about is the middle to late Miocene environment of southern Ecuador.*	(iii) *wh-clause + is + subject predicative* (teacher's comments: grammar pattern collocating with transition markers for discourse cohesion purposes; also note that important/new information is placed at the end of the clause)
(E) *Okay, uh let's get moving, um, we are going to talk today about sentencing policy and the war on drugs*	(iv) *let's + verbal signpost + we + verb + complement* (teacher's comments: these grammar patterns co-occur with the typical features of improvised speech, i.e. transition signposts, retrace-and-repairs, pauses, hesitations and repetitions)

Figure 2. Answer-key for a matching exercise on grammar patterns of textual metadiscourse expressions

Students' observations in a feedback session confirmed their awareness of recurring phraseology in lecture talk. The student who produced extract 3 explained that he prefaced his presentation with a list of the main points to facilitate understanding (*we're going to talk about*, *we're going to look at*). Students #11 and #17 remarked that they used these expressions in order to "approach" the audience when highlighting relevant information using visuals (*here we can see*, *as you can see*, *you'll notice* in extracts 4 and 5). Their comments served to confirm to the teacher that they were able to recognize the cognitive and pragmatic effects of metadiscourse units in this particular genre and use them appropriately.

Although, in general, the students' production illustrates a good mastery of grammar patterns in terms of linguistic accuracy and appropriateness, several limitations should be pointed out. This second level of analysis mostly covered the lecture genre and, therefore, only monologic speech production was practiced. Also, an analysis of the extracts revealed some transfer from the students' knowledge of academic written grammar, probably because linguistic performance had been pre-planned at this stage. Perhaps some attention to dialogic speech events such as research group meetings, seminars, or office hours would have smoothed the transition from the second to the third level of academic spoken discourse analysis and, at the same time, prepared students for the practice of improvised or unplanned speech, which was one of the main targets of the third level of analysis. In spite of these observations, combining Bhatia's second perspective of analysis with MICASE-based models and materials raised students' awareness of the genre as well as context-sensitive aspects of spoken grammar.

3rd Perspective of Analysis: Academic Spoken Discourse as Social Practice

Bhatia's third perspective of analysis seeks to raise awareness of the social and institutional factors of academic spoken genres. The teacher first retrieved entire transcripts from MICASE by clicking on the hypertext at the end of the file information header and selected extracts of grammar usage in several dialogic speech events like research group meetings, seminars, and lab sessions. With this material, instruction focused on those lexico-grammatical realizations in discourse that entail the projection of the speaker's intellectual identity as well as differences in power status among participants.

One aspect of grammar approached from this third perspective was the use of pragmatic devices that help the speaker project an identity and manifest his/her institutional role in socially acceptable terms. Native speakers commonly use pragmatic devices such as hedging for mitigating the force of their statements when there are power status differences between participants, and boosting for showing that one is intellectually able to express an opinion. However, these devices seem to be particularly problematic for non-native students. Neumann (2006) reports that EAP Spanish students tend to underuse these pragmatic devices and, as a result, their language is unlikely to be regarded as socially acceptable by the members of a foreign institution. To overcome this sociolinguistic and strategic problem, the teacher used the MICASE search mode to develop awareness-raising exercises that provided students with exposure to different shades of commitment towards propositional content.

After the students had practiced sentence mitigation and emphasis, the teacher elicited discussion on the institutional aspects affecting grammar choices. Students recognized that in sentence 7 of the first exercise (Figure 3; *[i]t's kind of almost a philosophical question*) the professor uses the hedges *kind of* and *almost* to tone down his otherwise categorical remark when addressing a lower-ranking audience of junior undergraduates. Learners also observed that, in contrast, the professor's use of emphatic markers in sentences 6 and 7 of the second exercise (Figure 4) was institutionally acceptable because he played the role of a higher-ranking expert-speaker in a colloquium.

You can make your speech more polite by using hedges. In the following sentences from MICASE hedging expressions have been deleted. Decide where to include the words in brackets to retrieve the original hedged sentence. The first one has been done for you as an example.

1. *It's not **quite** what we wanted, but it's **a little** better than the original proposal.* (**quite, a little**)

2. *It's too close for somebody to be entirely separated from the architect.* (**just a little**)

3. *The reward from staying this extra year, doesn't repay the extreme cost.* (**probably, rather**)

4. *So typically the dilute is less than about point-oh-five to point-one.* (**quote unquote**)

5. *If all the cells in a tumor, were attached to each other, it would be impossible.* (**virtually**)

6. *[…] approaching it with this brute force and I would say naive reductionist approach that many scientists approach it with […]* (**sort of, rather**)

You can make your speech more persuasive by using intensifying words to emphasize your points. In the following sentences from MICASE intensifiers have been deleted. Decide where to include the words in brackets to retrieve the original emphasized sentence. The first one has been done for you as an example.

1. *We're working **extremely** well now. But how can we work **even** better?* (**extremely, even**)

2. *Many organisms become well specialized for a particular place and time.* (**extremely**)

3. *They've done well in urban areas.* (**actually, very**)

4. *They're badly paying service jobs.* (**pretty**)

5. *The text was terrible like written badly, it's boring and it repeats itself.* (**really**)

6. *[...] and from the viewpoint of rain forest once every hundred years is frequent.* (**of course, actually, quite**)

7. *The landscape itself is, is heterogeneous.* (**very, really, quite**)

Figures 3 and 4. Examples of classroom exercises

Once students seemed to understand the functions of hedging and boosting mechanisms, the teacher focused on the pragmatic effects of grammar choices in dialogic speech events. The following passage from MICASE (adapted from Neumann, 2006, p. 31) was used to raise awareness of how the status of the participants in a research group meeting affects the speakers' lexico-grammatical choices. Using this extract, students were asked to identify the grammar choices of the professor (i.e., the sentences underlined), compare them with those of the students, and discuss their pragmatic effects.

Learners inferred that some of the linguistic resources employed by the professor (S1) – direct questions, directives and reprimands – are "discursive privileges" (Neumann, 2006, p. 31) of a high-ranking member of the university. Learners also commented that, unlike the professor, the students (S3 and S4) only made tentative observations using probability modals (*i i, i might have to*) and attribution (*he said […] he said it's* […]) because, as lower-ranking group members, they were not expected to control the communicative situation or project their intellectual identities.

> This is an abbreviated passage from a physics research group meeting (crossed-out words signal overlaps). Discuss the use of the sentences underlined considering the role of the speakers in this academic situation.
>
> S1: [. . .] so then the question is, what are the capabilities of the new thing? so for example, how far out in the I-R can it go? how far out in the U-V can it go?
> S3: uh the, what i told 'em we wanted, um is it's gonna be three-fifty to ten-fifty nanometers, all at once.
> S1: three-fifty? is that enough for you? [. . .] he'd like ~~three-twenty-three~~
> S4: ~~w- we want~~ three-two- three-twenty [. . .]
> [. . .]
> S3: you can't, he said you can go below three fifty, but it's gonna have to be a different grating than this one [. . .]
> S1: ~~uhh mm~~ if it's only the grating, then i'm not worried at all because we can always replace the grating. [. . .] if it's the C-C-D, then we should wa- get one that really is that has broader [SU-M: sure] ~~spectral~~ coverage so find out what the spectral coverage of the C-C-D is.
> S3: i i, i might have to talk to somebody else. i asked him [. . .] what's the low end from? and he said well in this case he said it's from the grating [. . .] so, he said if you wanna go below you'd have to get a different grating.
> S1: right [. . .] but if you also have to get a different C-C-D then, [. . .] then you should just have bought that C-C-D to begin with.

Figure 5. Example of a classroom observation task

Students put into practice this corpus-based observation of the pragmatic effects of grammar through tasks in which they had to simulate dialogic speech events. In these tasks, the teacher asked the students to express their opinions while establishing a suitable social distance from their interlocutor(s). For carrying out the tasks, the teacher prepared a MICASE-based context-sensitive list of lexico-grammatical expressions of stance containing hedges and boosters. The list sought to provide students with a corpus-informed selection of high-frequency pragmatic formulas. Each example also contained context-sensitive information on the speaker's academic position/role (junior faculty, senior faculty, graduate student, undergraduate student, etc.) so that learners could recognize how particular lexico-grammatical choices relate to specific discourse roles and privileges. As shown in the extracts below, the students appeared to integrate these expressions in their speech either for mitigating or highlighting their stance following politeness rules. In a feedback session, the students who produced extracts 6 and 7 commented that the use of an epistemic lexical verb co-occurring with a first person pronoun (*I think*), evaluative lexis (*important*, *definitely*) and certainty and possibility modals (*will*, *can*) served to express an opinion or contest a point of view. The students added that these lexico-grammatical choices were appropriate – or socially acceptable – because they were acting as speakers with a higher-ranking institutional role (see contextualization of examples in parentheses). A similar degree of awareness was shown by the students who produced extracts 8 and 9. They explained that they had used lexico-grammar expressions conveying tentative commitment such as probability adverbs (*perhaps*), impersonal stance expressions (*it would be better to; it seems to me*) probability modals (*may*), hedged expressions with epistemic verbs (*I tend to think*) and conversational hedges (*a bit*) in order to express reservation or disagreement in polite terms since they were playing the roles of lower – or less powerful – ranking speakers.

Extracts 6 and 7: Strong commitment

(6) Definitely I think that the use of hydrogen cars instead of petrol ones will be an important environmentally-friendly advance. (Student #4 playing the role of an expert in a colloquium and giving his opinion about alternative energy sources)

(7) I think the best advantage of wind power is that it is a clean and renewable energy that mitigates global warming. However, it can be dangerous for the land and for wildlife. (Student #32 simulating that he is presenting and defending a poster at an engineering conference)

Extracts 8 and 9: Tentative commitment

(8) Perhaps it would be better to use one of these alternative energies that do not run out rather than making use of non renewable sources which may eventually disappear in the near future. (Student #11 addresses a group of experts and gives his opinion about the advantages of alternative energies in an international meeting)

 (9) I tend to think that the design of the electronic is a bit too complex and perhaps not very cost-effective. It seems to me that we need to decide on an alternative design. (Student #22 acting as a student in a computer design lab session and addressing the professor)

As had occurred in the previous levels of analysis, students showed no difficulties in understanding corpus-based instruction, performing corpus-based tasks and identifying socially acceptable uses of grammar in their own linguistic production. Also, the teacher was able to identify some language learning problems in the students' speech. First, consistent with Neumann (2006), students found it relatively easy to emphasize their statements, but particularly difficult to hedge the discourse for conveying tentativeness and politeness, probably because Spanish is less hedged than English. Secondly, although learners acquired the patterns, they performed less accurately and fluently than in previous tasks. This might be attributed to the fact that, at this stage, the students practiced using improvised speech, which entails greater complexity of production than pre-planned speech. Thirdly, the teacher noted that the students at times transferred their knowledge of their L1 to their oral production. If we take, for instance, the use of *definitely* in sentence-initial position in extract 6 above, this adverbial position scores just one occurrence out of 292 matches in MICASE, which indicates that it is a very unusual sentence position. Therefore, the student's use of sentence-initial position was attributed to an L1 to L2 transfer, as this is a more common position for stance adverbs in Spanish (Alarcos-Llorac, 1994). By contrasting students' production with corpus-based samples of specific linguistic items or expressions, the teacher was able to identify linguistic transfers and provide corpus-informed feedback to the students in order to solve these language acquisition problems.

Assessment process

Along with the collection of examples illustrating the students' responses and actual speech production, a systematic evaluation process was undertaken to validate the extent to which the corpus-based instruction and materials led to an enhanced understanding of grammar in real contexts of use and helped students develop the ability to apply that understanding when learning academic spoken skills. Following the guidelines of the European Convergence in Higher Education, ongoing assessment was implemented to evaluate student performance. The teacher assessed language production at the end of each practical session of the course. When reviewing the student work (names on, non-randomized), performance of the 40 students in the course was rated from 1 to 10 using an assessment scale which covered the four competences described by Canale and Swain (1980): grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence and strategic competence. Though very time-consuming, the assessment process provided the teacher with detailed information on the proficiency level of the students as well as an accurate picture of how learners progressed throughout the course. To ensure reliability of data, a formal survey of other English-related activities was carried out, and only 5% of the students reported that

they had been taking other concurrent study of English that might have significantly contributed to this improvement.

The data resulting from this assessment process give promising signs that the students might be benefiting from this type of corpus-based instruction. Quantitatively, the results indicated that they had considerably improved their linguistic proficiency by the end of the course. Figure 6 shows the group proficiency levels at the beginning, mid-term, and at the end of the course. Initially, 60% of the students had A levels, 35% were B levels and only 5% of the students scored C levels. Midterm, 62.5% of the students reached B1 and B2 levels and students with A levels decreased to 32.5%. At the end of the course, B and C proficiency levels scored highest, while A levels only accounted for 7.5% of all the students. The group scored highest in the B2 level (35% of the students) and, significantly, 30% of the students reached C1 and C2 levels.
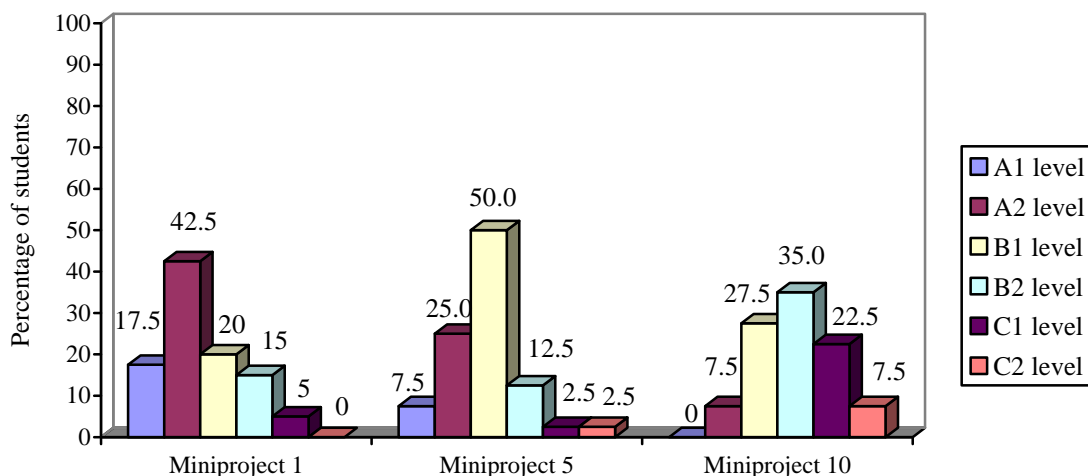
Figure 6. Progression of the group's proficiency levels according to the Common European Reference Levels[3]

Students also showed a gradual improvement in the four language competences, which scored a range of 4.9-5.1 out of 10 points at the beginning of the course, 5.8-6.3 at midterm, and 7.3-7.8 at the end of the course. Grammatical and discourse competences showed the greatest improvement, each of them scoring a total increase of 2.7 points at the end of the course. Similarly, sociolinguistic and strategic competences scored a total increase of 2.6 and 2.4 points respectively at the end of the course. This might indicate that students acquired an enhanced understanding of grammar in real contexts of use and were able to apply that understanding of grammar usage in practical communicative tasks.

Following the European Convergence protocols established for Higher Education[4], students were asked to rank a list of specific competences from 1 to 4[5], indicating whether they had achieved a significant development in each competence. The list of competences included a range of skills developed during the course: analysing, synthesising and summarising information critically; applying knowledge and understanding to address problems; communicating appropriately for a variety of purposes to a variety of audiences; developing a flexible approach to study and work; developing the skills necessary for working and learning independently; preparing, processing, interpreting and presenting data using appropriate communication techniques; using the internet critically as a source of information, etc.). According to the students' opinions, first in the rank of competences was "communicating appropriately for a variety of purposes to a variety of audiences", which scored a group mean of 3.45 out of 4.

In the light of the assessment results and of the students' perceptions of their competence development, corpus-based instruction appears to have been successful in resolving the inert knowledge problem described at the beginning of this paper. Although future work is needed to systematically evaluate the instructional approach in terms of how it improves proficiency and or linguistic competences, both learners' grammar knowledge and their ability to use that knowledge accurately and appropriately in a range of academic situations seemed to be fostered through this multi-perspective corpus-based instruction.

DISCUSSION

The main purpose of this study was to describe and report on a new corpus-based teaching/learning approach to grammar trialled in an EAP course with reference to Bhatia's multi-perspective model of discourse analysis. The initial assumption was that corpus-based instruction and materials containing examples of real language use would improve grammar proficiency. A brief discussion of findings pertaining to the research questions is provided below.

As regards the first research question, 'Can corpus-based instruction and materials lead to enhanced understanding of the textual, genre and social aspects of grammar?', the experience suggested that providing exposure to authentic examples of grammar offered students a view of how grammatical patterns work at textual, genre and social levels. Through the analysis and interpretation of corpus samples, students seemed to be able to relate the structural aspects of grammar at a textual level to its functional aspects at the genre and social levels. Corpus-informed instruction provided students with rich input (a) on context-sensitive uses and frequencies of words, (b) on the integration of grammar and lexis in discourse, (c) on the way communicative purposes determine lexico-grammatical choices in both monologic and dialogic genres, and (d) on the way grammar patterns vary among discourse participants and power status positions. As described above, students seemed to acquire knowledge of the form, meaning and function of grammar items by using their analytical skills and inductive reasoning. Observation by the teacher and feedback sessions appeared to confirm the students' awareness of how genre and social aspects help to determine the textual realizations of grammar in real language production. This learning process certainly appeared to help students interpret grammar patterns in relation to specific contextual restrictions, such as different communicative purposes, relationship between participants and communicative settings. Further, this approach may have helped the students put into practice their knowledge of grammar usage, thus contributing to overcoming the inert knowledge problem associated with the traditional approach to teaching grammar.

The second research question was 'Can corpus-informed instruction and materials help students develop the ability to put into practice their understanding of grammar in context within a range of academic situations?' MICASE-informed exercises and tasks proved to be a useful source for students to practice grammar skills in context and learn how to make appropriate lexico-grammatical choices when presenting data, providing reasons, and expressing opinions to different audiences and for different communicative purposes. The students' appropriate linguistic performances in the classroom assignments, of which illustrative examples have been presented above, suggest that they learned to recognize not only the transactional but also the interactional function of grammar within a context of use.

From the sessions it was also clear that the students did not have difficulties in comprehending the corpus examples they worked with, nor did they tend to make overgeneralizations in relation to the use of grammar in context. This suggested that the teacher's approach of controlling the corpus-based input through selection of examples to present to the students had been successful in preventing two problems commonly reported in the DDL literature (Granger, 1998; Granger & Petch-Tyson, 2003; Hadley, 2004). An added advantage commented on above was that, by examining whether the linguistic production of the students matched the input received, the teacher was able to identify other grammar problems and solve them appropriately. As corroborated by the results of the assessment process, the students showed

significant improvements in the four linguistic competences over the duration of the course. Although no control group was used and no comparison was made with similar cohorts of students completing the more traditional EAP course in the past, the fact that, for almost all the students concerned this was the only source of English study and practice in that period, suggests that the approach taken in the course can be considered a major factor in that significant proficiency improvement.

Moreover, the students showed positive attitudes towards corpus-based work and no signs of demotivation were observed. Although no formal record of students' opinions was kept in the form of a questionnaire, in informal conversations held with the teacher, the students commented that the corpus-based materials were very appealing to them because of their authenticity and contextualization within a real academic setting. They also observed that, while the analysis of isolated samples of grammar usage had been particularly problematic for them when exposed to traditional English-grammar teaching/learning approaches, the contextualization of grammatical uses based on MICASE gave them a clearer understanding of the discoursal functions of grammar in context. Students also reported that they had become aware of the practical nature of the corpus-based instruction and of the fact that the specificity of the materials matched their real language needs. They noted that both the instruction and the materials were extremely valuable for their successful participation in European international exchange programmes and that this, in turn, encouraged them to practice their grammar knowledge in the classroom assignments. For all these reasons, the approach trialled in this course might be considered as an alternative pedagogical method of solving some of the learning problems reported in DDL approaches to EFL and EAP courses.

In addition to the limitations previously explained, the following issues should be considered for improving the course. As regards the design, the approach described in this paper lends itself particularly to lexico-grammar, but its applicability to sentence grammar would need to be validated in the future. Another limitation, partly due to course time constraints, is that only a limited range of monologic and dialogic genres were targeted in the course, which somewhat restricted the students' view of academic speech with respect to the broader range of speech events in real university settings. Future experiences should assess the need for focusing on all the academic spoken genres represented in MICASE, as this might lead to greater awareness of genre-based grammar variability in university speech.

The corpus-based approach to grammar learning presented in this paper can be extended in several ways. It would be most useful to implement systematic methods (e.g., by means of a control group) to rigorously evaluate the effectiveness of the approach in improving learners' language proficiency. Since students did not have access to the corpus, future research should also assess whether learners' direct access to MICASE data outside the classroom may enhance accurate and appropriate uses of spoken grammar. A further important extension to the present study would be to investigate the way this approach to grammar learning helps diagnose students' weaknesses and track the students' improvement both qualitatively and quantitatively. In the future, the construction of a learner corpus would also be advisable in order to obtain reliable information on syntactic, semantic and pragmatic features of learner texts as well as to develop a more thorough error analysis of the students' language.

CONCLUSION

This paper has described and illustrated a particular approach to the utilization of a corpus as an aid to improving grammar proficiency in academic spoken English courses. In the case under study, Bhatia's multi-perspective model for discourse analysis provided a pedagogically appropriate framework for corpus-based grammar exploration and supported effective grammar acquisition.

Relying on the advantages of the MICASE online corpus and its browsing and searching facilities, the teacher was able to retrieve both frequency and context-sensitive data across a broad range of speech events and speaker attributes to obtain authentic models for analysis, to design corpus-based instructional

materials which matched learners' specific target needs, and to raise students' consciousness of their real needs for learning academic spoken grammar. In addition, the use of corpus-based instruction allowed contextualization of grammar usage across university speech events and seemed to foster appropriate grammar uses. From a textual perspective lexico-grammatical items were observed and later used by the students to form syntactic constructions "that extend beyond the boundaries of a word and incorporate elements of their environment" (Tognini-Bonelli, 2001. p. 131). From a genre perspective, grammar constructions were recognized by the students as being closely linked to the communicative conventions established by disciplinary communities for each university genre or speech event type. From a social perspective, grammar – both that of the corpus models and that of the students' actual linguistic production – was specifically shaped by the social dynamics of academic communication.

As evidenced by the students' accurate and appropriate grammar production within a small repertoire of genres, discursive conventions, institutional roles and communicative settings, the corpus-based approach grounded in Bhatia's framework improved learner awareness of context-sensitive features of academic speech and encouraged students to integrate these features in their own spoken skills. It helped prepare students to become linguistically competent so as to participate in university life in an English-speaking country. Although much remains to be done, it seems that receiving language instruction through corpus data might help EAP students learn to communicate effectively and understand "the full realities of the world of discourse" (Bhatia 2002. p. 15).

NOTES

1. A KWIC (Key Word In Context) concordance is a set of examples of a given word retrieved from an electronic corpus. By using these concordance lines students can see different examples of a word used in context, learn the patterns within which this particular word occurs, and learn how to use the word appropriately.

2. See search facility interface at http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/c/corpus/corpus?c=micase;page=simple. For further details on search tips see http://www.lsa.umich.edu/eli/micase/searchtips.html. In the present study, the researcher was also the teacher in charge of instructing the group of students and the one who conducted the classroom-research experience.

3. The scheme proposed in the "Common European Framework of Reference: Learning, Teaching, Assessment" starts from an initial division into three broad levels: Basic User: A1 and A2, Independent User: B1 and B2, Proficient User: C1 and C2. A more detailed Self-Assessment Grid showing major categories of language use at each of the six levels can be found at http://www.coe.int/T/DG4/Portfolio/?L=E&M=/main_pages/levels.html.

4. See http://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/2010/objectives_en.html#basic

5. 1=none, 2=slight, 3=some, 4=significant development.

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