



“We have about seven minutes for questions” I: The Q&A sessions from a specialized conference

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Why a Conference Corpus?

- the need for specialized corpora has been widely acknowledged (Flowerdew 2004), yet only few are available
- the language of conferencing has been studied quite extensively (cf. Ventola et al. 2002, Bamford 2005), but Q&A sessions have not received too much attention yet (but cf. Webber 2002)
- conferences are *en vogue*, bringing together NNS of English and thereby furthering ELF; calls for
 - descriptive documentation of language change
 - linguistic analysis providing input for TESOL (cf. Dyer 2008)



John Swales Conference Corpus Statistics

- 23 lectures and Q&As presented at a conference in honor of John M. Swales (June 2006)
- thematic focus of presentations was on discourse/genre analysis
- participants and audience members were all academics from countries all over the world
- all recorded files were transcribed according to established MICASE conventions
- (JSCC will be made freely available by late 2008 😊)



John Swales Conference Corpus Statistics

length (time):

- 20 minutes allotted for each presentation; 10 minutes for each Q&A session
- average total length (presentation & Q&A) = 29.6 minutes
- average Q&A length = 6.4 minutes

word counts:

- Q&A sessions: 23,179
- presentations: 75,319



A Pattern Approach to the Q&A in JSCC

- first explorations of JSCC: identification of frequent patterns
 - comparing the Q&A and the presentations
 - comparing the Q&A and a large reference corpus of spoken academic English (MICASE)
- ⇒ What are the patterns specifically associated with Q&A sessions?
- ⇒ What do these patterns reveal about (perceived) speaker roles?



A Pattern Approach to the Q&A in JSCC

- “Römer-approach” 😊 to pattern identification (Römer 2008): going back and forth between different pattern extraction software outputs, concordances, and the original transcripts
- n-gram extraction with Bill Fletcher’s kfNgram
 - full n-gram lists **it seems to me**
 - phrase-frames **it * to me**
- keywords analysis with WST4.0
- identification of significant collocations with Michael Barlow’s Collocate



Case Study 1: Pattern Analysis

presentations	Q&A sessions
referential noun phrases one of the, some of the, the use of, in the field	hedges I think, you know, kind/sort of
attention-directing phrases this is, you can see here	positive evaluation that's a very X
procedural phrases I tried/started/wanted to	negative evaluation it seems to me
	suggestions would be interesting, I wonder if

Initializing criticism	Reacting to criticism
I'm gonna venture a rival hypothesis ok	that's a really good point
I suggest or submit that	that would be fascinating
to me	can I just add to that
it's really much more	thanks for bringing this up
what we're looking at	thank you
I (just) wonder if	that's a very good question
I was just going to ask you	
I just wanted to say	
can I make a comment?	
it seems to me	
it would be interesting	
it occurred to me	



Initializing Criticism: **I wonder if**

1. disagreement:
I wonder if I can inject some skepticism into the idea of genre
2. suggesting change/addition:
I wonder if you try to track that at all in your respondents
3. asking for justification/opinion:
I wonder if that's also a kind of a problem that's lurking in the background



Initializing Criticism: AUX be interesting

Suggesting additions/changes:

I mean it **would be interesting** to see the lectures where they didn't laugh

it **might be interesting** to pair this with humanities texts as well

and it **might be interesting** to look at the distribution of 'I' and 'we'



Initializing Criticism: **seems to (me)**

1) disagreement:

it **seems to me** not a single genre but a um document containing several genres

2) asking for justification/opinion:

I was really interested in your finding about linguistic vagueness mm because it **seems to** be kind of the odd man out

that **seemed** astonishing **to me**



Relative Pattern Frequencies: **I think**

phrase-frames in the Q&A sessions:

- **I think, you know, I mean**

⇒ (Thompson & Mulac 1991, Wulff 2008): epistemic marker/hedging device (smoothing)

	presentations	Q&A
I think	92 (.01%)	107 (.46%)

$p_{\text{binomial}}=0^{***}$



Relative Pattern Frequencies: kind of/sort of

phrase-frames in the Q&A sessions ctd.

- **kind of, sort of**

⇒ Gries and David (2007): in direct comparison, kind of is associated with writing, sort of with spoken language

	presentations	Q&A
kind of	81	44
sort of	44	90

$\chi^2=155.22;df=1;p<.001***$



Case Study 2: Chair Utterances

Categories:

1. pre-utterance comment **<PR> questions**
2. opening comment **ok we have nine minutes for questions**
3. post-opening pause
4. mid-Q&A utterance **<P: 06> other questions**
5. pre-closing pause
6. closing comment **maybe on that note it's a good place to stop**



Case Study 2: Chair Utterances

- 1) opening comments:
 - many flagged (**so, okay, well**) to bridge speech events
 - 1st person plural is nearly always used, marking distancing from authority in their peer environment
well happily we have four minutes for questions
 - announcement of time: often very specific, signaling responsibility (and giving feedback to presenter)
thank you we have uh four and a half minutes for questions



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⇒ nearly obligatory fixed expression (no variation including, e.g., **discussion** or **comments**) – an intertextual effect?!



Case Study 2: Chair Utterances

- 2) middle comments
 - rare - occurs 4 times; hesitation to exercise power beyond the set precedent
 - intervention follow long pauses (to stipulate further discussion)
- we're gonna have time for maybe one more question.
one more**



Case Study 2: Chair Utterances

3) closing comments

- heavy hedging (minimizes commanding behavior; distancing function)

**i mean i think we're gonna have to stop there
we probably need, probably need to, wrap it up
maybe on that note it's a good place to stop
ok uh i've been told we need to stop**



Case Study 2: Chair Utterances

Chairs' assigned role vs. perceived role

- assigned authority to regulate and preside over the session
- in reality, chair plays down & minimizes power through informal and casual speech (Mauranen 2004)
- marking distancing from authoritative role
- contribution limited to:
 - announcing time limits (opening comments)
 - announcing when time is up (closing comments)
 - occasionally calling for additional questions after a lull (mid-comments)



Summary & Discussion

A pattern approach to JSCC suggests that the language of conferencing is not a unified genre:

- there are significant differences in the kinds and (relative) frequencies of patterns found in the presentations and the Q&A sessions
- these reflect the different functions of the two speech events
 - presentations: “empiricist repertoire” (Gilbert & Mulkay 1984)
 - Q&A: “contingent” repertoire



Summary & Discussion

research papers, published reports
reviewer comments and evaluations

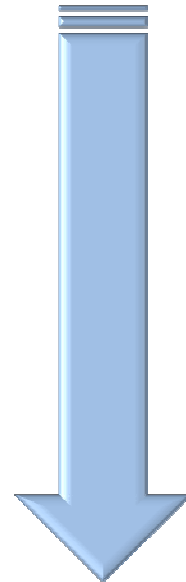
conference presentations

Q&A post-presentation discussions

personal remarks addressed to speakers
(informal setting)

personal remarks about third parties at
conferences (gossip)

empiricist



contingent



Thank you.



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