Kajian Malaysia, Vol. 32, Supp. 1, 2014, 111–129

"…so it is very important...": EVALUATIVE ADJECTIVES IN ENGINEERING LECTURES

Noor Mala Ibrahim[1] and Ummul Khair Ahmad[2*]

[1,2]Language Academy, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, 81310 UTM Johor Bahru, Johor, Malaysia
[*]Corresponding author: m-ummul@utm.my

Evaluation has been shown to have a prominent role in academic discourse and has been investigated in both written (Hyland, 1999) and spoken discourse (Swales and Burke, 2003; Crawford-Camiciottoli, 2004). In spoken discourse, particularly in academic lectures, evaluation is often used by lecturers to express their assessment of the content, and to orient listeners towards the preferred interpretation. This paper reports how lecturers from two different institutions (in Malaysia and in the UK) use adjectives of evaluation. Five engineering lectures with corresponding topic from each institution were analysed using Wordsmith Tools 5.0 (Scott, 2008), and extracted concordance lines containing adjectives of evaluation were manually examined to verify their evaluative function. Findings have revealed that lecturers from both institutions showed great awareness on the needs of their students in processing the lecture content, suggesting the fulfillment of their pedagogical role. However, the Malaysian lecturers used a limited variety of evaluative adjectives, with important being the most frequent. In contrast, their British counterparts employed a wider range of linguistic items to evaluate their discourse and at the same time, help students consider how to interpret the content of the lecture.

Keywords: evaluative adjectives, engineering lecture corpus, Malaysian academic lectures

INTRODUCTION

Many studies have examined various aspects of academic lectures in search for increased understanding of the discourse which include aspects of lecture introduction (Thompson, 1994; Lee, 2009) and lecture closing (Cheng, 2012), organisational patterns of lectures (Young, 1994; Thompson, 2003) and specific linguistic features such as pragmatic force modifiers (Lin, 2010), signaling devices (Zarina, 2008; 2010; Swales and Malczewski, 2001; Deroey, 2011), textual metadiscourse (Perez-Llantada, 2006) and pronouns (Fortanet, 2004). Most of these studies tend to focus on native speaker settings, perhaps due to the availability of corpora such as Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English [MICASE] (Simpson and Swales, 2001) and British Academic Spoken English

[BASE] (Nesi, 2010). Investigations involving non-native English speaking participants, however, have taken place in some parts of Asia (Flowerdew, 1994; Flowerdew and Miller, 1997; Tauroza and Allison, 1994; Sa, 2008; Jung, 2006; Khuwaileh, 1999) and Europe (Crawford-Camiciottoli, 2004; 2007) looking at several interactive features (Morell, 2004) and reflexive language (Mauranen, 2010), which have contributed to the knowledge on facilitating lecture comprehension among non-native learners.

In Malaysian higher education, even though lectures continue to remain to be the central instructional mode (Singh, Narasuman and Thambusamy, 2012), and English has since become the medium of instruction mostly due to the internationalisation policy of the tertiary education embraced by the country (Mohini, 2008), work on the linguistic features of Malaysian academic lectures has been very limited. Most studies involving higher education in Malaysia have focused on lecture delivery in general (Singh, Narasuman and Thambusamy, 2012) as well as innovations in lectures such as problem-based learning (PBL) (Rohani and Sahar, 2012) and students' language ability (Ezihaslinda et al., 2011) or students' learning styles (Ruslin and Zalizan, 2010). Investigations on the spoken language features of Malaysian lectures may have been scarce due to and hampered by the difficulties associated with collecting spoken data (Leech, 1991), and this perhaps may be the reason for the scarcity of studies documenting on the linguistic descriptions of Malaysian academic lectures, as compared to studies coming out of from different settings, native or non-native, globally.

The study described in this paper involved a corpus of academic lectures at undergraduate level recorded at Universiti Teknologi Malaysia (henceforth, UTM) in Johor Bahru, Malaysia and Coventry University (henceforth, CU) United Kingdom[1] allowing us to look at various comparisons on aspects of spoken academic discourse in general. Since both institutions are best known for their engineering and technical degree programs, the corpus consists only of academic lectures in the Engineering fields. This paper focuses on the ways of how Malaysian lecturers and their British counterparts highlight important and crucial points in their lectures, with a specific focus on the use of adjectives of evaluation as a means to guide listeners that could lead to effective comprehension of the lecture content. This investigation serves two obvious benefits: while the investigation on the use of evaluative elements in academic lectures offers insights into the language use in spoken academic discourse in general, the comparison between the same speech events across two different institutions may reveal interesting observations about the variants used in two varieties of spoken academic English across cultures and institutions.

EVALUATION AND EVALUATIVE ADJECTIVES IN LECTURES

Evaluation is a slippery and complex notion (Thompson and Hunston, 2000) that in general expresses "attitudes held towards information given in the text and towards the communicative value of the discourse itself" (Hunston, 1994: 191). For Crawford-Camiciottoli (2007), evaluation refers to how writers or speakers project themselves in their propositions to express their attitudes and opinions, and commitment to texts. In didactic discourse such as lectures, Samson (2006) postulates that speakers employ evaluation to project their various roles (the pedagogical, the professional and the self-promotional), thus evaluation functions to exhibit authoritativeness as an important persuasive strategy for knowledge presented to be accepted. More importantly, evaluation is used to provide listeners a clear signal of the preferred interpretation and comprehension of the knowledge presented, which perhaps plays a critical role in academic listening. As Crawford-Camiciottoli (2007) argues, when lecturers indicate which parts of their lecture should be interpreted as important, they actually organise their discourse while evaluating it. Briefly, borrowing from Thompson and Hunston (2000), there are three functions that evaluations perform, namely expressing the speaker's opinion, constructing and maintaining writer-reader and speaker-hearer relations, and organising discourse.

A very wide range of devices from lexico-grammatical elements (for example adjective, adverbs, nouns, verbs and modals) to non-linguistic items such as intonation as well as visual aids can be interpreted as expressing evaluative meaning and one of the most important and frequent means of evaluating is through the use of evaluative adjectives (Marza, 2011). In semantic sense, evaluative adjectives express a speaker's attitude, viewpoint or feelings on the entities or proposition that he or she is talking about (Thompson and Hunston, 2000). Additionally, taking into account the communicative purpose of the statement within which the evaluative adjectives are present, the evaluation expressed shows the text organising role, which highlights the interpersonal relations between the speaker and the text and the audience. This in turn is important in the interpretation of the text (Soler, 2002; Samson, 2006). It is this role of evaluative adjectives that becomes the focus of investigation in this paper.

Investigations on evaluative adjectives have not been very extensive, yet there have been investigations on the use of evaluation in lecture discourse in general (see for example Swales and Burke, 2003; Deroey and Taverniers, 2012) and in specific fields such as economics (Samson, 2006) and also in non-academic areas such as promotional hotel websites (Marza, 2011). In academic lecture discourse, Swales and Burke (2003) examine what they termed as "polarised" and "centralised" evaluative adjectives using MICASE and a corpus of research articles to indicate affinity of academic speech with everyday conversation. Deroey and Taverniers (2012) include adjectives in their comprehensive overview of relevance markers in lectures and reveal that

important predominates as a realisation of relevance in academic prose. They also demonstrate that various formal constructions reflecting relevance are restricted around the adjective *important*. Samson (2006) identifies *different* as the most prominent adjective in her corpus of ten written economics lectures and claims that *different* is used by economists primarily to discuss, compare, and express an opinion on different theories, models or processes in their texts as a means of positioning themselves as experts of the field, and at the same time guide their readers through the texts. Comparing her findings and those of Swales and Burke's (2003), Samson concludes that evaluative adjectives are strongly constrained by domain. Samson's (2006) study implies significant implications on lectures of different knowledge domains. This paper could add to that of Samson's study by indicating whether the engineering domain has its variation of evaluative adjectives used in lectures and in so doing, maps the adjectives used in the Malaysian lectures against those used in the British lectures. The investigation into the manner evaluative adjectives guide listeners towards effective comprehension of the lecture content is also the highlight of the paper particularly for the Malaysian higher educational setting which has had few studies documented.

METHODS

This section describes the corpus used for this study in detail and the analytical procedure followed for analysing data.

Corpus

Data used for this study consist of two small specialised sub-corpora of about 45,000 words, each made up of five undergraduate Civil Engineering lectures, video-recorded and transcribed at UTM and CU. The lectures were collected from 2008–2010 and were compiled as part of a larger corpus under the collaborative research project between the two universities. Prior to recording, similar topics covered in Civil Engineering were identified and matched as closely as possible. Getting the perfectly-matched topics was, however, challenging since a number of lecturers approached declined to have their class video-recorded. Lecture topics chosen for this study revolve around *Equilibrium of Two Particles, Aggregate and Admixture, Analysis of Columns, Resultants, Forces and Moments,* and *Serviceability and Durability,* presumably all common topics covered in Civil Engineering undergraduate curriculum. It should be noted, however, that most lectures have overlapping topics of a varying degree. For example, a lecture from UTM may be about *Equilibrium of Two Particles* and *Moments* but a corresponding lecture in CU may focus on *Forces and Moments*. All lectures from the two sub-corpora were transcribed following the same

transcription protocols (see http://www.coventry.ac.uk/researchnet/elc/Pages/Markup.aspx).

Analytical Procedures

Thompson and Hunston (2000) claim that the act of evaluating could be done along different parameters and they put forward four parameters (good-bad, certainty-uncertainty, expectedness-unexpectedness and important-unimportant) that could be used as bases for analysis. They further claim that in certain types of genres it is evident that different parameters could be more significant in terms of presence and roles played. Evaluations of goodness and certainty express the author's or speaker's view of the status or value of the propositions or entities i.e., the *real-world* functions and evaluations of expectedness and importance have *text-oriented* function where they serve as guide to readers and listeners in processing what they are reading or hearing (Thompson and Hunston, 2000). Since this study intends to look at the manner evaluative adjectives guide listeners towards effective comprehension of the lecture content, evaluation along the parameter that has text-oriented function would be the primary focus of the investigation.

To identify the most frequent adjectives used in the lectures, the analysis of the corpus began with a wordlist and frequency list using Wordsmith Tools 5.0 (Scott, 2008). Only adjectives that occurred in five or more transcripts were included in the analysis in order to draw attention on the selected *types* of adjectives that are used in engineering lectures. The adjectives were then searched using Wordsmith Tools to extract concordance lines with the adjectives, before the output was manually edited to remove irrelevant evaluative adjectives. Following Crawford-Camiciottoli (2007) and in line with the Thompson and Hunston's (2000) parameter decided earlier, the first consideration for inclusion and exclusion is to decide whether the evaluative adjectives actually refer to the lecturers' evaluation of relevance of the phenomenon outside of the discourse, i.e., the real-world entity, or inside of the discourse, i.e., the discourse-entity. Adjectives that evaluate the world-entity were then discarded. However, the task has not been without any difficulty, particularly in the Malaysian sub-corpora where ambiguities are pervasive as in examples below:

1. *you see how careful we are in defining ahh moisture because it's very important* [MCiv_003]
2. *this difference is very important for you to understand in order to come up with the workability as well as the durability of your mix yah* [MCiv_003]
3. *so you need to add water when every time you mix the concrete you need to add water to it because we have cement without water cement will not react cement will not become glue so how much water that you add is*

> *depend on the on moisture content of the if this the surface dry saturated dry so the mixing water is totally for the hydration purposes or hydration process hydration also very important so last week we discuss on the setting and hardening* [MCiv_003]

In example (1), *it* in *it's* is ambiguous as whether it refers to *the act of defining moisture* or *the moisture itself,* and therefore the entity evaluated remains uncertain, thus excluded from the analysis. Example (2) is tricky because it is difficult to judge whether *the difference* functions discursively, i.e., it represents a *point* (c.f. Swales, 2001) or non-discursively i.e., a *piece of content*. Similarly in (3), *hydration* seems very clearly to refer to content, yet, as the expression occurs at the end of the discourse stretch discussing hydration, it seemed to suggest a concluding function which made it ambiguous on whether the evaluated entity functions discursively or non-discursively. When such ambiguities arise, the video recording is referred to and using the co-texts, the decision is made whether the instance should be included or excluded.

Another complicating factor that needs to be considered in this study is to decide whether an adjective actually signifies some relevance for the listeners, who are novices of the field. While it may seem convenient to just look at evaluative adjectives that *clearly* fall along the parameter of important-unimportant such as *important, critical,* and *key,* in academic discourse such as lectures, there are also other evaluative adjectives that signify relevance because they also assist students to orient their thoughts through the unfolding discourse. One example is adjectives that denote levels of complexity of contents such as *complicated, simple and easy,* which incidentally are relatively high in the sub-corpora examined. By highlighting the difficulty level of a piece of information, lecturers are able to signal the relevance of the contents in terms of the corresponding actions/reactions or attention to which their listeners should give in order to better comprehend the lecture, and therefore should be a concern as well.

The final consideration is that any evaluation of relevance coming from listeners' utterances is ignored because the aim of the study is to look at lecturers' discourse. In these sub-corpora, nonetheless, students' contribution is very minimal.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As established earlier, this paper investigates only selected evaluative adjectives that occur in five or more lectures so that we could examine the significant types of evaluative adjectives used in engineering lectures. Table 1 illustrates the most frequently used adjectives in both sub-corpora based on the wordlist output, normalised to 100,000 words.

Table 1: Frequency of frequently used adjectives in both sub-corpora

Adjectives	Frequency	Frequency per 100,000 words	Occurring in *n* number of lectures
Same	138	166	9
Different	98	118	9
Important	39	47	9
Simple	36	43	8
Easy	20	24	8
Difficult	18	22	7
Straightforward	12	14	7
Main	14	17	6
Clear	11	13	6
Key	22	26	5
Complicated	10	12	5

From Table 1, it is apparent that *same* and *different* occupy the first and the second spot respectively as the most frequently used adjectives by almost all lecturers in the two sub-corpora. While Samson (2006) has proven that *different* dominates in the economics lecture corpus, the adjective *same,* to the best of our knowledge has not been mentioned in any study as a frequently-used adjective. As expected, *important* occupies the third spot and are employed by nine out of ten speakers, suggesting the ubiquitous occurrences of our lecturers' discourse for highlighting salient information that their students need to know and grasp—perhaps a common characteristic of academic speech. Other adjectives that provide similar function as important are *main* and *key*, of which the latter is only found in the British lectures.

The data in Table 1 also show the occurrence of adjectives that fall in the *easy-difficult* parameter and the variations that are employed by the speakers (*simple*, *easy* and *straightforward,* and in certain instances, *clear* versus *difficult* and *complicated*). There are about 68 adjectives that reflect straightforwardness as opposed to 28 instances that highlight complexity of content, all taken together, suggest the speakers' great awareness of which contents that would and/or would not pose difficulty for the novices. The explicit labeling of content's difficulty status perhaps could reduce some information processing overload faced by listeners when distinguishing different *types* and/or *levels* of contents and thus could be regarded as an attempt taken by the lecturers to make it easier for their students to understand or remember the knowledge and skills (Kember and Kwan, 2000).

Evaluative Adjectives in Malaysian and British Engineering Lectures

When adjectives identified in the wordlist were further analysed to include only adjectives that *evaluate* the information and guide listeners in interpreting the content, the results are as shown in Table 2, which compares the distributions of evaluative adjectives in each of the sub-corpora.

In general, as can been seen in the table, the occurrences of evaluation are more frequent in the British lectures than in the Malaysian lectures; there are a total of about 27 evaluative adjectives for every 10,000 words in the British lectures as compared to only 15 for every 10,000 words in the Malaysian lectures. Approximately, it could be said that there is an instance of evaluation in every 670 words in the Malaysian sub-corpora but one in every 370 words in the British counterparts, suggesting a greater awareness among the British lecturers for their audience needs for guidance in comprehending the content. This also means that the British lecturers marked the relevance of information at a more frequent interval in their speech which suggests their preference to reveal attitudes towards the information presented as a means of showing authorial presence and thus achieving persuasive goals. Relatively, there is also some degree of variation in the evaluative adjectives employed by the British lecturers; for example, the use of adjectives *important* and *key* to highlight importance, which the latter has zero occurrence in the Malaysian sub-corpora.

Table 2: A comparison of evaluative adjectives in the two sub-corpora

Evaluative adjectives	Malaysian lectures	Normalised to 10,000 words	Evaluative adjectives	British lectures	Normalised to 10,000 words	Log likelihood
Different	9	2.2	Different	32	7.3	–12.57
Key	0	0	Key	22	5.0	–29.42
Same	9	2.2	Same	16	3.7	–1.65
Simple	7	1.7	Simple	12	2.8	–1.10
Easy	5	1.2	Easy	8	1.8	–0.56
Important	17	4.1	Important	8	1.8	+3.78
Straightforward	5	1.2	Straightforward	7	1.6	–0.24
Complicated	1	0.3	Complicated	6	1.4	–3.72
Difficult	3	0.7	Difficult	5	1.2	–0.41
Clear	5	1.2	Clear	1	0.2	+3.11
Main	1	0.3	Main	0	0	+1.44
Total	62	15.1		117	26.8	

Both groups of lecturers, however, reveal some commonality in that showing the importance of or emphasising on a particular piece of information is

desirable when delivering lectures; in Malaysian lectures, *important* charts the highest position while in the British lectures, *key* and *important* are just slightly lower than *different*.

To see the significant relative frequency difference of evaluative adjectives in the two sub-corpora (in this case the Malaysian sub-corpus in relation to the British sub-corpus), log likelihood calculations were conducted using the log likelihood statistic mediated by a web-based log likelihood calculator (http://ucrel.lancs.ac.uk/llwizard.html). The signs positive (+) or negative (–) function to indicate an overuse or underuse, respectively, of an adjective in the Malaysian sub-corpus relative to the British sub-corpus. The use of the signs helps to show which adjectives are most indicative of one sub-corpus (Rayson and Garside, 2000). As can be seen, there is an obvious trend of underuse of evaluative adjectives in the Malaysian sub-corpus relative to the British sub-corpus especially for *key, different* and *complicated*. In contrast the adjectives *important, clear* and *main* indicate an overuse in the Malaysian lectures.

Nonetheless, when adjectives with obvious relation (such as *simple, easy*, *straightforward, clear* and their antonyms, *difficult* and *complicated*) are lumped together and calculated, the readings clearly show indications that there is an underuse of all the three parameters of evaluative adjectives in the Malaysian sub-corpus relative to the British sub-corpus. The most significant frequency difference is shown in the different—same parameter (–12.70) followed by important—unimportant parameter (–2.47) and easy-difficult (–2.01). What the values generally imply is that comparatively the British lecturers evaluate similarities/differences, importance/unimportance and easiness/difficulty of their lecture contents much more frequently than the Malaysian lecturers do. These values however could not be used as a judgment that lectures from one institutional setting is more superior to the other, but simply as indicators showing statistically how evaluative adjectives behave in lectures, in which the aim is didactic.

To have a better insight on how evaluative adjectives behave in both sub-corpora, it is necessary to examine in detail each type. Based on each individual type illustrated in Table 2, they are categorised in three broad parameters and discussed in the order as indicated by the lump log likelihood calculation results.

Different versus same

Samson (2006) claims that in economics, *different* functions to give a subjective judgment when discussing and comparing models or theories, which in engineering the function seldom occurs, perhaps due to the nature of undergraduate engineering lectures that are concerned with transmission of factual and technical information in a precise way (Brown and Bakhtar, 1983). Hence *different* in engineering lectures in both settings is observed to orient

listeners so that they become aware of issues or matters associated with the field, such as varying codes of practices as in example (1) and methods and procedures of solving problems as shown in examples (2) to (4). For the speakers, this adjective helps them to project themselves as primary experts of the field (Samson, 2006) and thus at the same time present a more credible points of view to the audience.

1. *everything else remains exactly the same erm eurocode-two erm if you use these parameters you get the same set of tables but you see here that the numbers are somewhat different to what we have in UK practice and you'll see here for example erm that's point-four-five reduce it to point-three-two in the UK* [CCiv_017]
2. *it's like the reactions of a structure we get access to all three rules of equilibrium <0.03> so now we can use moments this again this is different in the method of sections* [CCiv_005]
3. *okay so if you look at the photostat copy of the book here okay it use different approach than the one that i'm going to teach you okay* [MCiv_004]
4. *and if you can do these then you can find member forces in pin jointed frameworks and trusses which is where it really applies and needs to be known for <0.5> so what I do slightly different to the book* [CCiv_001]

Different is also apparent to perform metadiscursive function that aids listeners to interpret the unfolding text through the explicit flagging of different approaches that the speaker would be discussing further along in the discourse, as in examples (3) and (4) above and the explicit difference enclosed in problems presented to students as highlighted in example (5).

5. *so to calculate the second moment of area for the major axis we take B B cube over twelve plus A bar square okay that is the general formula to calculate the second moment of area for a rectangular section and then multiply by two because it's on both side <0.04> okay and then R max okay a little bit different from the example eight* [MCiv_006]

Similarly, *same* seems to function in a uniform manner in both contexts. Speakers regularly refer to materials that are taught previously to highlight the similarity they have with the present materials as depicted in examples (6) to (9).

6. *so this the same thing like what we have done* [MCiv_004]
7. *now this is exactly the same principle we've used when we looked last week at method of joints we cut through the members around a joint and looked at the equilibrium of just that joint with all the forces acting on it we're doing the same thing here we're isolating part of the structure and*

looking at the equilibrium of pa- of that part just like when we want to find reactions we look at the equilibrium of the whole structure [CCiv_005]

8. *actually it's not really that tedious to classify the section once you know how to classify the section then only you apply the whatever the classification of the section to the design of the beam because wha- because if you want to design the beam and the column you need to classify the section the same thing goes to the design of the truss okay same thing go to the design of the truss* [MCiv_002]
9. *when the neutral axis is within the section <pause> that is very much the same as when you're dealing with a reinforced concrete beam section* [CCiv_017]

In all the examples above, (Det) *same* (+ Noun) phrase is used to remind the listeners of previous points made clear earlier in the discourse. This reminding "strategy" represents another didactic character of lecture discourse which orients listeners towards intended interpretation of content by signaling cohesive links between ideas.

Important and unimportant

Several previous studies on relevance markers in lectures have shown that *important* predominates (for example, Swales and Burke, 2003; Deroey and Taverniers, 2012) as realisation of evaluation. In the two sub-corpora investigated here, similar condition persists. In the Malaysian lectures, speakers orient their students towards the important points mostly during explanation of contents as in example (10), for assessment purposes or for comprehension of subsequent topics as in examples (11) and (12), and when concluding the presentation of a particular topic section as in example (13).

10. *so this very important you must multiply or to get the moment of a force about any point you have equation is very simple force times the moment arm D so that moment arm must be perpendicular* [MCiv_001]
11. *okay so if you have er positive two it will remains as positive two even when you analyze at the- the other side i mean the other joint okay because the positive and negative depends on whether the force in tension or in compression you can lose one third of your total mark for making er such mistake okay so it is very important* [MCiv_004]
12. *this very important topic hydration is very important ahh if you don't understand what is hydration because i think ahh we will definitely ask you a question during test one as well as final exam what is hydration of cement yah so if you cannot understand hydration there are so many things that you will not understand later on* [MCiv_003]

13. *so this is the some of the important elements that we need to determine and design in the base plate connection* [MCiv_006]

In contrast, in the British lectures, *important* occurs only during presentation of contents as in examples (14) and (15) and is shown to be less preferred than *key,* which displays a similar function to *important* when contents are presented and regularly used when concluding a particular discussion as shown by example (16).

14. *mass and weight mass is just a scale of quantity the amount of material in a body but weight is actually the force acting on that body towards the centre of the earth so it gives me a direction and it's important that you appreciate that in order to fully define a vector quantity like a force* [CCiv_001]
15. *this is where the lines of action of forces become oh so important it's not the point of application of the force it's the line of action of them now i'm looking for where those lines of actions cross* [CCiv_005]
16. *that's the key thing that's what makes method of sections i think difficult* [CCiv_005]

There is also not a single instance in the British lectures where lecturers made links between lecture content to assessment (tests, examinations etc.) as what have been found in the Malaysian classrooms. This difference, however, comes as no surprise since Deroey and Taverniers (2012) have also reported a very minimal reference to assessment in their 160 lectures of the British Academic Spoken English (BASE) corpus.

Easy versus difficult

Another group of adjectives that is apparent in these sub-corpora are those that are grouped within the easy-difficult continuum as a reflection of the speakers' intention on helping listeners to discriminate the content which may require more or less attention during lectures for note-making purposes and also to aid comprehension processing. Reflecting similar pattern for occurrences in both settings, taken together, *simple, straightforward, easy* and *clear* are more frequent than *difficult* and *complicated,* suggesting the shared perceptions of lecturers from both institutions on motivating students to learn (Sutherland and Badger, 2004). From the examples illustrated in (17) to (20), speakers seems to emphasise the straightforwardness of the content, perhaps to give the perception for reduced information processing load among listeners, or to explicitly comment on meaning of terminology such as "water reducing admixture" in example (20).

17. *so this is um <0.1> fully straightforward stuff really um <0.1> and again it's something you should check and it's something for your design exercise* [CCiv_018]
18. *...so this three hundre- three hundred ninety kilonewton we compare with the applied shear force ninety kilonewton so it's more than enough so which means that either the bolt connections and the welding connection is sufficient to withstand the applied shear force of ninety kilonewton <0.05>okay okay very straightforward very simple* [MCiv_006]
19. *so when dealing with slabs it's dead easy um you just stick to these rules and if you stick to those rules then it's probably okay* [CCiv_018]
20. *first is the water reducing admixture so from the term it is so clear it's water reducing admixture* [MCiv_003]

Occurrences such as in examples (17) to (19) are also most likely to take place when the speakers are making conclusion, suggesting the concern of the speakers on the processing load of the students, hence the reassurance that the content is manageable. In the case of *difficult*, the adjective tends to occur more frequently at the beginning of a topic or a new sub-topic, perhaps too implying that the speakers are forewarning their audience of the cognitive demand of the content, and that students should particularly pay greater attention to the topic. One obvious caution given is as illustrated in example (21), where the speaker clearly highlights the difficulty that would be faced by a person who cannot imagine the topic. *Difficult* is also apparently used more when speakers are making comparison on the difficulty levels between topics/concepts such as between restrained beam and unrestrained beam as in example (23) or when solving problems by using charts or equations as in (24) rather than making a pure statement that a topic/or concept is difficult. Perhaps this could mean an alternative way of showing continuity and links between contents, thus making the lecture more comprehensible and effective.

One striking observation involving the use of evaluative adjectives grouped within the easy-difficult continuum is the tendency of speakers from both groups to intensify the straightforwardness of the content, illustrated by the co-occurrence of the evaluative adjectives with *very* (as in "very straightforward"), *dead* ("dead easy"), *fully* ("fully straightforward") and *so* ("so clear") or minimising the complexity of the content as can be seen from the examples below with the adjective *difficult* co-occurs with down-toners such as "*quite* a very difficult…" (21), "*a little more* difficult" (22) "*it's not that* difficult" (23) or "*a bit* complicated" (24). Generally the use of intensifiers and down-toners in association with evaluation in academic discourse is not uncommon (see for example Diani, 2008; Hyland, 2005; Lindemann and Mauranen, 2001) and they are employed to achieve particular discourse goals. The use of down-toners with the adjective *difficult* seems to fit with the common finding that there is a need to hedge when dealing with negation. In lectures, speakers make prediction

on the manner listeners react to the content, and softening the impact of difficult content may reduce the anxiety that students could have. At the same time, putting emphasis on the easy contents may signify certainty and expectedness of the students' ability and therefore result in better engagement with the audience. In other words, the rhetorical force that these lecturers attach to when they use intensifiers or down-toners is persuasive, which serves as a means of guiding students to interpret the meaning of texts in a particular preferred manner.

21. *this is quite a very difficult concept for a person which cannot imagine [MCiv_004]*
22. *we are going to move on is look at a more powerful technique called the method of sections which is just a continuation really of what we've done last week erm but it's a little conceptually a little more difficult to understand [CCiv_005]*
23. *it's not the same okay for braced for restrained beam you you just have to ahh calculate the value of moment is equal to P Y S X something like that which very simple it's not that difficult for unrestrained beam you have to calculate the lateral torsional buckling which is quite lengthy [MCiv_002]*
24. *so it's not difficult to do you know if you've got these charts in front of you it's not difficult to do um <0.2> if you go back to the code the equations of the code are <0.1> a bit tortuous a bit complicated [CCiv_018]*

CONCLUSION

The present study looks at evaluative adjective used in undergraduate engineering lectures in two different educational settings. The study is a corpus-informed analysis of some linguistic descriptions of academic lectures occurring at tertiary levels in Malaysia. In general, both sub-corpora show a high degree of similarities in terms of evaluative adjectives used and their functions even though the British sub-corpus shows a greater variety of evaluative adjectives such as *key* to signify importance. The similarities and differences generated from the analysis—overflowing or otherwise—could undoubtedly be valuable input for subject lecturer training programmes and educational research especially in the Malaysian context.

Also importantly, what has emerged from the study is that evaluative adjectives play a prominent role in guiding novice listeners to follow academic speech such as lectures, and perhaps guide them to undertake other lecture-comprehension tasks, such as note-taking in a more effective manner. The three groups of evaluative adjectives that have been identified fall into *importance, comparison and complexity* dimensions (c.f. Tutin, 2010), underscoring the

didactic element of lectures and highlighting the high degree of awareness of the speakers about their audience's processing needs. Given the findings of the study and the significant role adjectives play in guiding students' comprehension in lectures, it is crucial for English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses to include in their syllabus a wide range of adjectives that could mark relevance.

The evaluative adjectives found in these sub-corpora also resonate with Samson's (2006) observations that the disciplinary area seems to influence the choice of preferred adjectives and their functions. In the undergraduate engineering lectures which commonly have the objectives of solving engineering problems mathematically, evaluative adjectives that highlight differences and similarities or level of complexities of formulae, equations or methods of solving problems would be beneficial for the students, particularly novices in the field. As with highlighting the importance or saliency of contents in lectures, the occurrences of evaluative adjectives that depict *importance* are indisputably prominent, as the main function of lectures is to impart important and relevant content information for learning.

Nevertheless, this investigation carried out in this paper has been limited in some ways. First, the small-size of the sub-corpora used has allowed only for a small-scale analysis which might not be representative of engineering undergraduate lectures. Despite this, it does offer an insight into the kinds of evaluative adjectives commonly employed in engineering academic lectures. We are also aware that a study that surveys only the adjectives that occur in five or more lecture such as this one inevitably disregards other adjectives that may have occurred but in smaller number of lectures which could present an equally interesting if not more revealing functions. This study, nonetheless, has indeed paved ways for us to probe deeper into evaluative language in academic speech and perhaps one that involves similar academic speech events across disciplines and institutions, particularly those of emerging non-native English-speaking settings that use the language as the medium of instruction.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The funding for this project was assisted by the British Council (Grant number RC 90) April 2008–August 2010 under the directorship of Hilary Nesi (Coventry University) and Ummul K. Ahmad (Universiti Teknologi Malaysia).

NOTES

1. The recordings and transcriptions of the British lectures used in this study come from the Engineering Lecture Corpus (ELC), which was developed at Coventry University under the directorship of Hilary Nesi.

REFERENCES

Brown, G. and M. Bakhtar. 1983. Styles of lecturing: A research report. In *Styles of lecturing: Research and faculties perspectives*, eds. G. Brown and M. Bakhtar. Leicestershire, UK: An ASTD Publication, Loughborough University of Technology.

Cheng, S. W. 2012. That's it for today: Academic lecture closings and the impact of class size. *English for Specific Purposes* 31: 234–248.

Crawford-Camiciottoli, B. 2007. *The language of business studies lectures. A corpus-assisted analysis*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

_____. 2004. Audience-oriented relevance markers in business studies lectures. In *Academic discourse. New insights into evaluation*, eds. G. D. L. Camiciotti and E. T. Bonelli, 81− 98. Bern: Peter Lang.

Deroey, K. L. B. 2011. What they highlight is…: The discourse functions of basic wh-clefts in lectures. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 11(2): 112–124.

Deroey, K. L. B. and M. Taverniers. 2012. Just remember this: Lexicogrammatical relevance markers in lectures. *English for Specific Purposes* 31(4): 221–233.

Diani, G. 2008. Emphasizers in spoken and written academic discourse. *International Journal of Corpus Linguistics* 133(3): 296–321.

Ezihaslinda Ngah, Noor Raha Mohd Radzuan, Wan Jumani Fauzi and Noor Azlinda Zainal Abidin. 2011. The need for competent work ready English language learners. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 29: 1490–1499.

Flowerdew, J., ed. 1994. *Academic listening: Research perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Flowerdew, J. and L. Miller. 1997. The teaching of academic listening comprehension and the question of authenticity. *English for Specific Purposes* 16(1): 27–46.

Fortanet, I. 2004. The use of "we" in university lectures: Reference and function. *English for Specific Purposes* 23(1): 45–66.

Hyland, K. 2005. Stance and engagement: A model of interaction in academic discourse. *Discourse Studies* 7(2): 173–192.

_____. 1999. Disciplinary discourses: Writer stance in research articles. In *Writing: Texts, processes and practices*, eds. C. Candlin and K. Hyland, 99–121. London: Longman.

Hunston, S. 1994. Evaluation and organization in a sample of written academic discourse. In *Advances in written text analysis*, ed. M. Coulthard, 191–218. London: Routledge.

Jung, E. H. 2006. Misunderstanding of academic monologues by nonnative speakers of English. *Journal of Pragmatics* 38(11): 1928─1942.

Kember, D. and K. P. Kwan. 2000. Lecturers approaches to teaching and their relationship to conceptions of good teaching. *Instructional Science* 28: 469–490.

Khuwaileh, A. A. 1999. The role of chunks, phrases and body language in understanding co-ordinated academic lectures. *System* 27(2): 249–260.

Lee, J. J. 2009. Size matters: An exploratory comparison of small- and large-class university lecture introductions. *English for Specific Purposes* 28(1): 42–57.

Leech, G. 1991. The state of the art in corpus linguistics. In *English corpus linguistics: Studies in honour of Jan Svartvik*, eds. K. Aijmer and B. Altenberg, 8–29. London: Longman.

Lin, C. Y. 2010. "…that's *actually sort of you know* trying to get consultants in…": Functions and multifunctionality of modifiers in academic lectures. *Journal of Pragmatics* 42(5): 1173–1183.

Lindemann, S. and A. Mauranen. 2001. It's just really messy: The occurrence and function of *just* in a corpus of academic speech. *English for Specific Purposes* 20(supp.1): 459–475.

Marza, N. E. 2011. A comprehensive corpus-based study of the use of evaluative adjectives in promotional hotel websites. *Odisea: Revista de estudios Ingleses* 12: 97–124.

Mauranen, A. 2010. Discourse reflexivity – A discourse universal? The case of ELF. *Nordic Journal of English Studies* 9(2): 13–40.

Mohini Mohamed. 2008. Globalization and its impact on the medium of instruction in higher education in Malaysia. *International Education Studies* 1(1): 89–94.

Morell, T. 2004. Interactive lecture discourse for university EFL students. *English for Specific Purposes* 23(3): 325–338.

Nesi, H. 2010. Laughter in university lectures. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 11(2): 79–89.

Perez-Llantada, C. 2006. Signaling speaker's intention in university lectures. Towards a phraseology of textual metadiscourse in academic speech. In *English as glocalization phenomenon. Observation from a linguistics microcosm*, eds. C. Perez-Llantada and G. R. Ferguson, 59− 88. Valencia: PUV Publications.

Rayson, P. and R. Garside. 2000. Comparing corpora using frequency profiling. Paper presented at proceedings of the workshop on Comparing Corpora held in conjunction with the 38th annual meeting of the Association for Computational Linguistics ACL2000, Hong Kong. 1–8 October.

Rohani Ahmad Tarmizi and Sahar Bayat. 2012. Collaborative problem-based learning in mathematics: A cognitive load perspective. *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 32: 344–350.

Ruslin Amira and Zalizan Mohd Jelas. 2010. Teaching and learning styles in higher education institutions: Do they match? *Procedia Social and Behavioral Sciences* 7C: 680–684.

Sa, W. 2008. An empirical study of the role of metadiscourse in listening comprehension. *CELEA Journal* 31(1): 179–196.

Samson, C. 2006. *…Is different from…:* A corpus-based study of evaluative adjectives in economics discourse. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication* 49(3): 236–245.

Scott, M. 2008. *Wordsmith tools version 5.* Liverpool: Lexical Analysis Software.

Simpson, R. and J. M. Swales. 2001. Introduction: North America perspectives on corpus linguistics at the millenium. In *Corpus linguistics in North America: Selections from the 1999 symposium*, eds. R. Simpson and J. M. Swales, 1–15. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Singh, P., S. Narasuman and R. X. Thambusamy. 2012. Refining teaching and assessment methods in fulfilling the needs of employment: A Malaysian perspective. *Future* 44(2): 136–147.

Soler, V. 2002. Analysing adjectives in scientific discourse: An exploratory study with educational applications for Spanish speakers at advanced university level. *English for Specific Purposes* 21(2): 145–165.

Sutherland, P. and R. Badger. 2004. Lecturers' perceptions of lectures. *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 28(3): 277–289.

Swales, J. M. 2001. Metatalk in American academic talk: The cases of *point* and *thing*. *Journal of English Linguistics* 29(1): 34–54.

Swales, J. M. and A. Burke. 2003. "It's really fascinating work": Differences in evaluative adjectives across academic registers. In *Corpus analysis: Language structure and language use*, eds. P. Leistyna and C. F. Meyer, 1–18. Amsterdam: Rodopi.

Swales, J. M. and Malczewski, B. 2001. Discourse management and new episode flags in MICASE. In *Corpus linguistics in North America: Selections from the 1999 symposium*, eds. R. Simpson and J. M. Swales, 145–164. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Tauroza, S. and D. Allison. 1994. Expectation-driven understanding in information systems lecture comprehension. In *Academic listening: Research perspectives*, ed. J. Flowerdew, 35–54. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Thompson, S. E. 2003. Text-structuring metadiscourse, intonation and the signaling of organization in academic lectures. *Journal of English for Academic Purposes* 2(1): 5–20.

Thompson, S. 1994. Frameworks and contexts: A genre-based approach to analyzing lecture introductions. *English for Specific Purposes* 13(2): 171–186.

Thompson, G. and S. Hunston. 2000. Evaluation: An introduction. In *Evaluation in text: Authorial stance and the construction of discourse*, eds. S. Hunston and G. Thompson, 1–27. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Tutin, A. 2010. Evaluative adjectives in academic writing in the humanities and social sciences. In *Constructing interpersonality: Multiple perspectives on written academic genres*, eds. R. Lores-Sanz, P. Mur-Duenas and E. Lafuente-Millan, 219–242. Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.

Young, L. 1994. University lectures: Macro-structure and micro-features. In *Academic listening: Research perspectives*, ed. J. Flowerdew, 159–176. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Zarina Othman. 2010. The use of *okay*, *right* and *yeah* in academic lectures by native speaker lecturers: Their "anticipated" and "real" meanings. *Discourse Studies* 12(5): 665–681.

_____. 2008. The academic lectures of native English speakers: Its complexities. *MALIM: Jurnal Pengajian Umum Asia Tenggara* 9: 125–138.