ABSTRACT

It is commonly assumed that, in university lectures, it is the subject matter that is important, and the relationships between the participants are only secondary (Rounds 1987). Even though this may be true for most lectures, it does not mean that these relationships do not exist or that the subject matter is presented from a purely objective point of view. Previous research with this genre as a corpus (Fortanet 2002a, 2002b, 2003) show that teachers use a number of resources to enhance their relationship with the audience or, on the contrary, to create a distance: choice of personal pronouns, introduction of questions, insertion of asides, use of reporting and quotation, etc. The relationship between the participants, especially that established between the lecturer and the students is closely linked to the relationship between the speaker and the subject matter. University lecturers very often express an attitude towards the topic explained or discussed, and also ask students to give their opinion on it. In the research carried out in relation to the use of the personal pronoun ‘I’ it was found that the choice of this pronoun was very often linked to the expression of the speaker’s attitude.

Attitude, or stance, has not received the attention that would be expected for a general characteristic of human language that is present in almost any type of genre, especially in speech. However, stance has frequently been associated to particular aspects of the language. For example, some researchers have related stance and intonation (among others O’Connor and Arnold 1973; Crystal 1975; Coulthard 1992), since this is a feature that is very commonly used in English speech with the aim of showing the speaker’s attitude.

Another feature of the language commonly associated with stance is modality. It was defined by McCarthy and Carter (1994:102) as “the speaker/ writer’s stance towards the message communicated” and this association can be found in many grammars of the English language (Quirk et al. 1985; Collins Cobuild Student’s Grammar 1991; Hewings 1999).

Sometimes stance is also associated with certain verbal tenses or aspects. Quirk at al. (1985: 188) point out two special stance functions of the past tense: the attitudinal past, which “reflects the tentative attitude of the speaker” and the hypothetical past to express “what is contrary to the belief or expectation of the speaker”.

Some relation can also be found between the expression of stance and another feature widely analysed, particularly in written academic English, hedging. Hedging is defined by Hyland (1998:3) as an indicator of the “unwillingness to make an explicit and complete commitment to the truth of propositions”. Hence, it should be considered as a way to express a certain attitude.

However, the most complete research about stance is that carried out by Biber and Finegan (1988, 1989) which leads to the chapter “The grammatical marking of stance” in Biber et al. (1999: 965-986). They point out a number of devices that are used in English to convey stance: adverbials, adjectives, modals, prepositional groups,…

As said before, the use of the pronoun ‘I’ has already been identified as a marker of stance in university lectures. However, I think the attitude of the speaker is usually not only expressed by one marker. The purpose of the present research is to establish the linguistic features of the verbs accompanying these instances of ‘I’, in order to consider if they also contribute to the marking of stance. The features analysed refer to lexical and to grammatical stance:

LEXICAL STANCE
I + copular verb + affective or evaluative adjective or noun
The frequency of these features in the corpus will show if the predominant stance type is related to affect (positive or negative) or evidentiality (showing certainty or doubt).

To carry out this research I make a thorough analysis of five lectures from the MICASE (Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English) (Simpson et al. 1999). The MICASE is a corpus consisting of speech events occurring at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor from 1998 to now, since it is subject to continuous updating. It has over 1.7 million words, and can be found in the Internet.

Additionally, the frequency of some of the verb forms accompanied by ‘I’ will be searched in the whole MICASE corpus, and specifically in the subcorpus of lectures.

The results of this research will contribute to the description of stance marking in university lectures. They will also be useful for students who wish to study in American universities, and for lecturers who aim to teach in international settings. Moreover, it is also expected that results of this type make writers of EFL textbooks aware of the importance of including the expressions of stance in their textbooks.

**Bibliographical references**


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