

# Metadiscourse in lectures: importance marking

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What are importance markers?

Deroey & Taverniers (2012a)

# Importance markers

**Lexicogrammatical** devices that **overtly** mark the relative importance or relevance of **points** which are presented **verbally** or **visually**

(Deroey & Taverniers, 2012a, p. 222)

- ✓ **the most important thing to b bear in mind** throughout the lecture really is pest is a human definition
- ✗ **the first thing** i want to do today is to is to formally er try and explain what the connection is
- ✗ mass warfare which is obviously such **an important thing** in the nineteenth century

How were the markers retrieved?

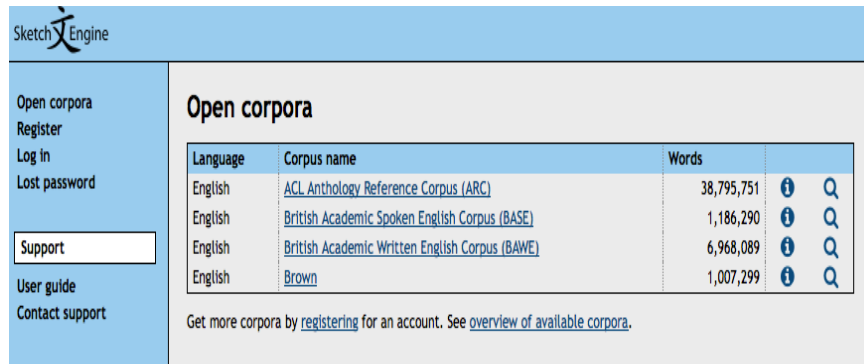
Deroey & Taverniers (2012a)

# British Academic Spoken English corpus

160 lectures

Arts & Humanities, Social Studies & Sciences,  
Physical Sciences, Life & Medical Sciences

Corpus Query tool: Sketch Engine



Sketch Engine

Open corpora  
Register  
Log in  
Lost password

Support

User guide  
Contact support

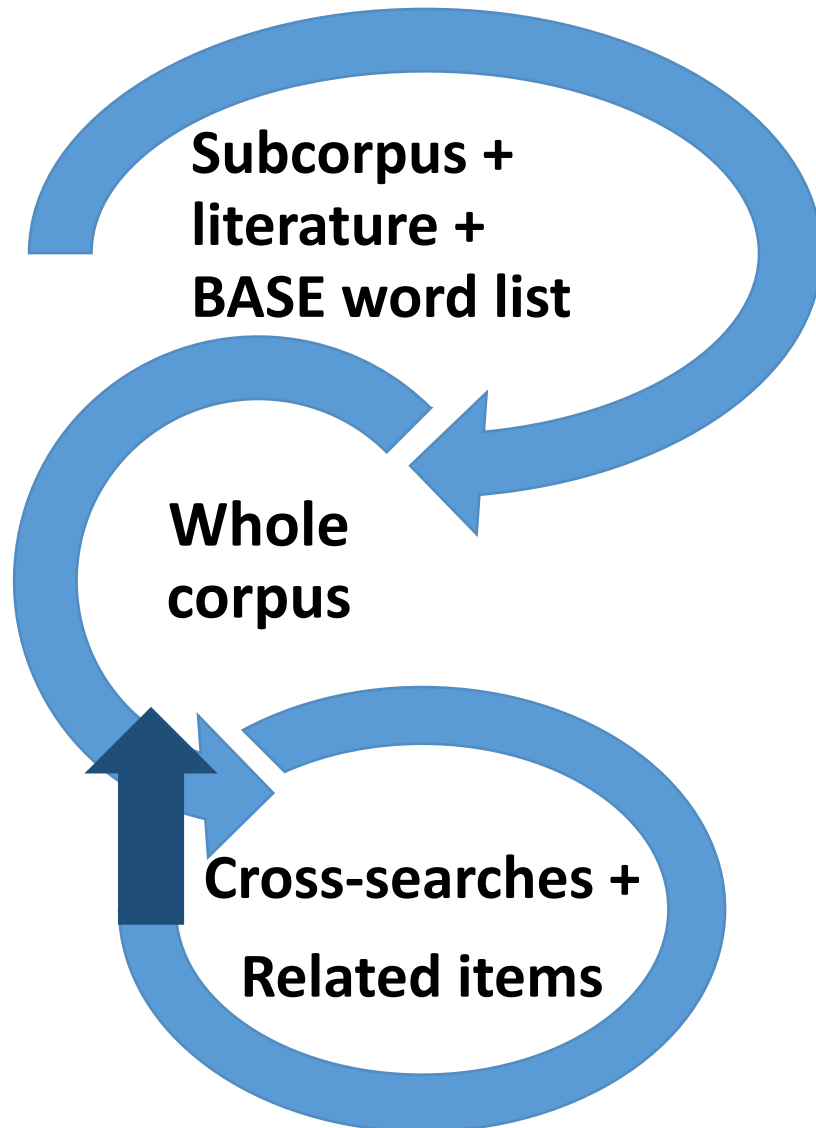
### Open corpora

Language	Corpus name	Words		
English	<a href="#">ACL Anthology Reference Corpus (ARC)</a>	38,795,751	i	Q
English	<a href="#">British Academic Spoken English Corpus (BASE)</a>	1,186,290	i	Q
English	<a href="#">British Academic Written English Corpus (BAWE)</a>	6,968,089	i	Q
English	<a href="#">Brown</a>	1,007,299	i	Q

Get more corpora by [registering](#) for an account. See [overview of available corpora](#).

# Multipronged approach

(Deroey & Taverniers 2012a)



Manual analysis 40 lectures  
Markers from other studies  
≥50 BASE

Concordance co-text  
Synonyms & derived words

# How do lecturers mark important points?

Deroey & Taverniers (2012a)

Deroey (2014)

Deroey (2015)

# Types according to key constituent

Pattern type	Example	Frequency (N=782)
Adjective patterns		
Noun patterns		
Verb patterns		
Adverb patterns		
Exam-related expressions		



# Verb and noun markers predominate

Pattern type	Example	Frequency (N=782)
Adjective patterns		
Noun patterns	this is the important <b>point</b>	284 (36.3%)
Verb patterns	i want to <b>emphasize</b> this	420 (53.8%)
Adverb patterns		
Exam-related expressions		

# Other types are rare

Pattern type	Example	Frequency (N=782)
Adjective patterns	that's quite quite <b>important</b>	55 (7%)
Noun patterns	this is the important <b>point</b>	284 (36.3%)
Verb patterns	i want to <b>emphasize</b> this	420 (53.8%)
Adverb patterns	<b>significantly</b> this is made out of virtually one block of Carrara marble	15 (1.9%)
Exam-related expressions	it's something we can sort of ask exam questions on	8 (1%)

## Formulaic, multifunctional markers predominate

Pattern type	Example	Frequency (N=782)
Adjective patterns	that's quite quite <b>important</b>	55 (7%)
Noun patterns: MN v-link	the <b>point</b> is that people can't do that	c. 21%
Verb patterns: V n/clause	<b>remember</b> slavery had already been legally abolished	c. 34%
Adverb patterns	<b>significantly</b> this is made out of virtually one block of Carrara marble	15 (1.9%)
Exam-related expressions	it's something we can sort of ask exam questions on	8 (1%)

Stereotypical & explicit markers are less common

deic v-link ADJ: **this is absolutely crucial**

*it* v-link ADJ clause: **it's important to note** this is further subdivided

adj MN v-link: **the key point is** they do not give up those natural rights

1s pers pron V n/clause: **i want to stress this point**

2 pers pron V n/clause: **you should also note** that significance depends on the sample size

How do lecturers mark less important points?

Deroey & Taverniers (2012b)

Deroey (2014)

Spot the marker(s) of lesser importance

my cat is a demon i don't know why i put dow that  
down as a metaphor you only got to look at me to  
see that that's true but never mind



## Key findings

Very few markers with inherent meaning of irrelevance / lesser relevance

Most express lesser relevance implicitly / cumulatively: 'muted signals' (Swales & Burke, 2003, p. 17)

Potential to function as markers of lesser relevance:

- co-text

- non-verbal, visual, prosodic cues

- lecture genre

# Markers of lesser importance

Message status

Topic treatment

Lecturer  
knowledge

Attention- & note-  
taking directives

Assessment



# Message status

Assign negative importance to part of message

that's a little bit of a sideways **sideline**

i'm **joking**

Signal transitions between more and less important  
discourse

that does have certain consequences for for change but  
**anyway** i'm not i won't be going on on to those

# Topic treatment

Indicate limited discourse / time is devoted to topic

what i'd like to do now is to say **a little bit** about water

then you do a few more operations which i **will not drag you through** right now and why this is so **et cetera et cetera**

# Lecturer knowledge

Suggests imprecise / partial knowledge

**i can't remember** it's in the textbook but ignore that 'cause it's totally irrelevant for the actual what i'm going to tell you

it's never called that in film study **i don't know** why but it isn't

# Attention- and note-taking directives

Direct students not to pay attention / take notes

you **don't** need to **copy** them all down

**ignore** that 'cause it's totally irrelevant

# Assessment

Indicate what information will not be examined

it **won't** come up on an **exam** paper

you **don't** have to **know** the details of Keynes' economic theories

Some implications for metadiscourse study

Corpus linguistic research revealing, but:

Manual analysis and interrater reliability necessary

Triangulation, multimodality, prosody, non-verbal communication affect analytical accuracy

Quantification: reliability and feasibility?

‘Judgments of plausibility rather than certainty’

(Mann & Thompson, 1988, p. 245)

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## References

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