

## Abstract

In this chapter, we will examine the relationship between presenter and audience by considering the use of stance and engagement, as well as noting the pivotal role that the use of narrative plays in conference presentations.

## 9.1 The Notions of Stance, Persuasion, and Engagement

Both RPs and CPs require that the writer/speaker negotiate a type of agreement with their readers or listeners. In order to do so, the writer/speaker first needs to establish rapport with the discipline's audience. Hyland (2005) sees this as involving the use of three interpersonal categories: stance, persuasion, and engagement.

Stance primarily involves the use of evidentiality—specifically the application of (1) hedges (particularly involving the use of epistemic modals such as, '*It seems*' '*It appears that*') and boosters ('*extremely*' '*unbelievably*'), (2) affect—realized in attitudinal markers, and (3) presence—particularly in terms of self-mention. These three attributes create persuasion by bringing the reader/viewer into the text.

These can be augmented for the purpose of engagement by the use of second-person pronouns (particularly the inclusive '*we*' over the exclusive '*you*'), rhetorical questions, explicit inclusion of shared knowledge between researcher and audience, the use of directives (such as obligations or instructions), and the insertion of personal asides such as arguments or anecdotes. All these aid in establishing what Hyland refers to as 'intersubjective positioning' wherein a CP speaker has to tread a fine balance between self-assertion and self-effacement.

As we noted earlier, Hyland claims while the use of explicit stance and engagement markers are apparently dropping in the humanities (perhaps in an attempt to establish more appeal as being objective and 'scientific'), they are increasing or holding steady in scientific written research.

Hyland notes that epistemic marking and self-mention too are decreasing in some humanities disciplines. For example, he states that the use of directives has changed—with the appearance of modals decreasing considerably over the past twenty years or so while imperatives have increased Hyland arguing that these changes indicate a less intrusive approach to stance. (Readers should keep in mind that the changes that have been noted are longitudinal in nature—the claim being made is *not* that stance and engagement markers are used more in the sciences than in the humanities.)

But while these may be true of written academic texts, we must keep in mind once again that the discourse of CPs and other conference speech events is multimodal. The RP is not simply read aloud (as in the antiquated notion of a presentation equaling ‘reading one’s paper’). Rather, it must be adapted into slides, and these slides once again must be interpreted or adapted into speech by the presenter faced with a real-time audience of viewers, as opposed to readers. The CP is thus more explicitly dialogic than the written RP, even as written research has moved to adopting a more inclusive or interactive voice.

The upshot of this is that academic conference participants, particularly those performing CPs, displaying posters, or involved in symposia, need to use stance and interactive, engagement markers in order to persuade their audiences. Such considerations are no longer the province of the salesman or the debater alone. Nor do their usage detract from the gravity or objectivity of the research methods and findings being disseminated.

Engagement features include what is called self-positioning’ in academic discourse. Great importance should be placed upon explicit self-positioning in the discourse community in both written RPs and CPs. Self-positioning to an audience in both written and spoken modes has most notably been modeled through ‘Appraisal Theory’, which focuses upon evaluative language, particularly through three categories distinguished therein: a) *attitude*: affect, appreciation, judgment b) *graduation*: force, focus, and, c) *engagement*: mitigation, amplification, and emphasis (see White, 2002, and Martin & White, 2005).

This has also been described as ‘sensory language’ and applies not only to formal, written RPs, in which the writer needs to engage the readership in order to interject an element of persuasion above and beyond the presentation of research data, but also in real-time speech, wherein the need to make such an appeal is strengthened due to the immediacy of researcher with his or her audience.

### Questions for Section 9.1

1. What are the three main examples of evidentiality in a CP, according to Hyland?
2. Explain the relationship between stance, persuasion, and engagement. Provide CP discourse examples indicating each of these.
3. Why is ‘self-positioning’ important when giving a CP?

## 9.2 Presenter-Audience Dynamics

Since CPs are performed in real time, research presenters have to adapt highly dense subject matter in a manner that will best create a positive impact upon the audience. The dynamic relationship resulting from the real-time management of a combination of both visual and aural text, as well as the ongoing interaction between presenter and audience, are representative of the fundamental differences in approach between the academic research writer and the academic presenter.

Carter-Thomas and Rowley-Jolivet (2005) describe academic conference presentations as necessitating an interpersonal dimension beyond mere textual discourse. They argue that the blending of textual and visual content calls for a different epistemological structure from that found in written research. For example, they note that in CPs, the use of the first person, as opposed to the typical detached and impersonal third-person voice of written academic research, predominates, drawing the audience into the identity or persona of the speaker, establishing a rapport with the audience, augmented by the considered use of spoken frame markers and tense shifters.

Neither are CPs mono-directional speech events. The relationship between an expectant, attentive academic audience and the manner in which the spoken content is orientated by the CP speaker has been expressed as a mutually constructed narrative, or what Morita (2000) refers to as a 'collaborative epistemic construction'. Rendle-Short (2006) views CPs as involving a recognition/response relation with the professional discourse community (the presumed audience) in producing a cohesive whole, noting that, 'It is only by taking an interactive approach to the speakers' talk and actions that it is possible to see the structure of the talk emerging,' (p. 9).

This co-constructed relationship between the audience and the CP speaker demands that presentation openings and closings, internal rhetorical moves or thematic shifts, and related discourse markers should be managed in a manner distinct from those found in written research papers. A failure to do so may easily result in the dry approach of literally 'reading ones' paper,' a scenario in which both the spoken text and slides simply verbalize an existing publication. Ineffective presentations are often the result of written text being misapplied wholesale into the realm of real-time speech (Weissberg, 1993).

Further, since the difference between academic written texts and CPs is based upon the interactive relationship between a live audience and the speaker, appropriate discourse markers become an essential part of the constructed dialogue (Webber, 2002), with the relationship between extralingual features and the written slide contents duly impacting the structure of the speech (Ventola, 2002), thus marking the CP as a distinct communicative event.

RPs, on the other hand, are typically detached from the speech events and episodes in which the development of the academic text is immersed. Therefore, increased coherence and cohesion between texts is necessary in order to build common ground between the two modes. However, it should be noted that plenary

speeches tend to be based upon already published work—and thus serve more as post hoc celebratory overviews rather than forums for introducing cutting-edge work. This further distinguishes them from parallel session/free paper CPs.

### Question for Section 9.2

1. Explain how a CP is considered a dialogic and co-constructed discourse between presenter and audience.

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## 9.3 The Conference Presentation as Narrative

Spoken academic English as carried out in conference settings is a socially constructed rhetorical artifact of overlapping communicative goals serving to transmit new disciplinary knowledge and to persuade an audience. Thus, evaluative, interpersonal, and interactive features, or what we might refer to as ‘dialogic’ features, of discourse, increase (Mauranen, Perez-Llantada, & Swales, 2010). This process has been described by Swales (1990) as involving the steps of (1) Introduction: listener orientation/content orientation, (2) Body: background situating, event, commentary, and (3) Termination: content orientation/listener orientation.

As a member (or aspiring member) of a given academic discourse community, one central CP goal will be to persuade the audience of the status, relevance, and value of the research (Hunston, 1993) as well as the validation the speaker him/herself. Doing so will involve what Tannen (1989) refers to as ‘involvement strategies’. One means of doing this involves the use of narrative, which offers a resource for assessing and confirming affiliations with others, thereby drawing in the reader/listener (Eggins & Slade, 1997).

Speech narrative involves a balance of textual and interpersonal functions of discourse, which are particularly marked in CPs while they are generally absent in RPs (Webber, 2005), and are most prominently used in multimodal settings (Rowley-Jolivet, 2012). CP narrative forms that serve to ‘tell the story’ of the research tend to add a further interpersonal dimension (Thompson, 2002), with successful CPs being products of situationally appropriate complex pragmatic choices, (Shalom, 2002), yet another quality that distinguishes them from written RPs.

Dubois (1980) noted that biomedical presentations regularly contained narrative features, although her findings are somewhat distinct from Myers’ (1990) description of the ‘narrative of science’ in which the author is absent. It is true that non-narrative types of CP do exist—so why opt for one style over the other? After all, the vast majority of RPs are non-narrative in both the hard sciences and the humanities.

In research CPs, speakers typically present a chronicle of what happened in the laboratory rather than the more delicately edited version meant for publication. These are more strongly narrative, and thus more personalized, in focus (Dubois,

1980). These personalizing features involve considerable style shifting from the more formalized openings/closings utilized in written texts to more informal commentary on slides, with occasional highly colloquial supporting anecdotes. Of particular note in Dubois' (1987) research was her finding that in spoken narratives, numerical imprecision was more common in CPs than in publications, with approximators being regularly employed in speech.

In short, the novice research presenter cannot just rely on using reapplying the RP formula as a CP model; they must utilize specific dialogic practices, organizational patterns, and linguistic repertoires, which will generally be tempered by discipline-related factors considered appropriate by specific academic discourse communities (Thompson, 2002). Taking a semiotic macro-focus based on the experiences of the researcher(s) prior to the CP event, presenters must also choose that which is considered 'relevant knowledge,' before this becomes linked into text (Charles & Ventola, 2002). Finally, the CP narrative style/content must be tailored to fit the pragmatic demands of the genre by involving audience in the CP.

The argument being made here is that a chronological narrative in particular tells the research story, going far beyond the rhetorical parameters of the IMRD style endemic to the written mode. This includes a mixing both narrative and non-narrative styles. What features does this involve? Among the factors that have been noted are

- a. When switching between modes, presenters will change to the expository mode, for example, by using present tense when explaining graphic features (Thompson, 2002).
- b. Rather than using only temporal shifts ('*then*' '*next*'), matching relations ("So what did we do? We did X.") will be more frequently employed, along with an increased usage of conjunctives such as '*but*' and '*so*' (Thompson, 2002 also see, Hoey, 1983).
- c. Greater frequency of the active voice, interactive pronouns ('*you*'), asking Q's to the audience (which, of course, is explicitly dialogic), and the use of the non-exclusive '*we*,' which thereby treats the audience as participants in a process. Informal lexis, such as '*Ok*' and '*oops*' are also used more frequently (Thompson, 2002).
- d. The reporting of results is more often carried out in the present tense, emphasizing 'general truth' or established fact, indicating a strong commitment on the part of the speaker/writer. This strategy is also used in the interpretation of findings section(s) (Thompson, 2002).
- e. Failures and problems of research are openly addressed in CP narratives. This is often achieved by using direct speech, colloquialisms, and idiomatic expressions. Failures tend to be spoken of in the past tense; successes in the present (Thompson, 2002).
- f. Anecdotes including humor and irony are rare—and thus are not to be considered a key generic feature. However, they are used on occasion (Plum, 1988) and can serve as yet another means of realizing the interpersonal dimension of the CP.
- g. The presenter prioritizes interaction/involvement with audience over the minutiae of research methods/results (Carter-Thomas & Rowley-Jolivet, 2005).

- h. Science presenters told more stories of the research processes, including failures, than did humanities' presenters. Science presenters also used more audience-inclusive pronoun choices, thereby involving the audience in hypotheticals and/or in the research process (Thompson, 2002). Scientific research presenters also take stances much closer to actual process of research than is done in RPs (Schiffrin, 1994).
- i. Humanities presenters used more questions, dialogic phrases, and interruptions to involve the audience in the presentation itself (Carter-Thomas & Rowley-Jolivet, 2005).
- j. If the presentation precedes the publication, the inherently interactive quality of CPs allows the researcher to address potentially problematic areas in advance (Myers, 1994). This is often performed in narrative form so that viewers are fully familiarized with the process of the research.

### Questions and Exercises for Section 9.3

1. Why are interpersonal features a necessity in CPs whereas they tend to absent from written academic papers?
2. Beyond the basic expression of the research question, methods, results, and discussion, what features of narrative tend to appear in CPs? List three.
3. Give three examples of how discourse choices might change if a CP is hoped to be presented with a strong narrative element.

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