Introduction

Abstract

This introductory section will explain the scope of this book, its purpose, its intended readership, how it should be approached by readers, the background to its development, which aspects of conference English it intends to cover, and will also introduce some of the key concepts recurring throughout the book.

1.1 What's Included in This Book? Scope and Purpose

This book is geared toward three types of readers. One type of reader is the teacher of English for Specific Purposes (ESP) or English for Academic Purposes (EAP), those who teach oral presentation and/or other professional English skills to young researchers and academics, particularly those teaching non-native English speakers.

The second readers targeted are novice researchers and young academics who plan to present and/or otherwise participate productively at international academic conferences in the future and therefore would like to know a little more about the phenomenon of managing conferencing discourse, particularly those who lack experience participating in academic conferences.

The third target reader is the language researcher, especially those interested in specialist spoken discourses, particularly the use of English in the various sub-genres and speech events that are typically included in academic conferences.

Thus, this is not a book designed solely to offer oral presentation tips, and certainly does not intend to convey techniques regarding the effective design and productions of posters or PowerPoint (or other presentation software) slides. Rather, our focus within will be largely upon the (English) discourse of conferencing itself, as well as those prosodic/paralinguistic (intonation, pronunciation, various forms of 'body language') and environmental (physical, social, cultural) features that

accompany or influence the interactions and discourse that emerge at academic conferences.

Thus, this book has a dual purpose. The intention is not only to add to the understanding of this specific genre of spoken English, but also to enable both novice and non-native English speaking (hereafter referred to as *NNES*) academics and researchers to perform more effectively at international academic conferences. While the many available 'how-to' commercial presentation guidebooks tend to focus largely upon the prescriptive dimension of oral conference presentations (hereafter *CP*s), in other words what effective performers/presenters *should* do, most academic research into interactive spoken English, such as the fields of genre analysis and discourse analysis, has tended to describe only how interlocutors carry out various types of spoken texts, the actual use of situated speech.

This book aims to cover both perspectives. While it aims to provide a comprehensive outline as what academics actually say at conferences, how they organize, manage, and produce discourse for specific conference speech events, it will also discuss which forms and approaches appear to make for the most effective performance in CPs, poster sessions, or other conference events, formal and informal, static and dynamic.

As a result, it is not my intention to simply supply readers with a list of useful set phrases, nor to repeat the type of stock 'public speaking tips' that could easily found through a Google search. Instead, I intend to expand the scope of inquiry by discussing some of the affective social, environmental, and cultural factors that concern many novice and NNES conference participants, and thereby make practical suggestions based upon a clear understanding of academic conference speech, both as an event and as a language genre, by considering many of the problems that lead to performance anxiety and other difficulties that both novice and NNES conference attendees may experience.

This book is divided into five parts, each further sub-divided into chapters, and, in some cases, even further into narrower sub-sections. Part I of the book deals with the general scope and form of academic conferences, particularly points of convergence and divergence between conference English and the language employed in the broader context of public speaking, particularly the TED phenomenon. Here, we will also introduce the hot potatoes of ESP/EAP discourse, the role and status of the NES versus the NNES, and the emerging field of English as a Lingua Franca (ELF), as well as a brief discussion of the distinct notion of 'World Englishes.' Part II introduces a more academic focus, focusing upon discussions of genre analysis, mode, the role of the discourse community, and the structure of spoken narratives. This section should appeal to those with a more academic interest in the management of specialized discourse.

Part III introduces an analysis of oral conference academic presentations based primarily on the author's own research and observations. The linguistic analysis of various 'moves' made within the presentations is derived from the academic analyses that have been described in Part II. Part IV provides an analysis of the linguistic choices made by proficient conference presenters, from openings to managing Q&A sessions. This section contains suggestions and recommendations

Table 1.1 General overview of the book's focus and intended audience by section

Part	Focus	Audience
Part I	Introductory/Outline Linguistics/Sociolinguistics	General Academics/researchers
Part II	Linguistics/Sociolinguistics	Academics/researchers
Part III	Applied linguistics	Academics/researchers
Part IV	Linguistics/Practical/Advisory	Teachers/practitioners
Parts V and VI	Practical/Advisory	Teachers/practitioners

based upon various authentic examples of commonly used formulaic academic phrases, strategies, and modes of text management and should be of particular interest to prospective conference presenters.

Part V extends the scope of observation and analysis to so-called agnate conference roles and speech events, such as chairing, managing poster sessions, and leading workshops, with the intended goal of practical application by both readers and trainers/teachers. The appendix provides several practice materials and related advice pertaining to both classroom practice and last-minute tips for effective CP performance. It is thus hoped that the appeal of this book extends from the practical to the academic, from the student/presenter to the teacher/trainer. A general overview of the book's structure is displayed in Table 1.1:

1.2   Background

Working in the English department in the Faculty of Medicine at a university in Japan for over twenty years, I had frequently heard local medical professionals claim that their English CP skills had not measured up to their own wishes or expectations (or, perhaps more importantly, those of their superiors). Many healthcare professionals reported feeling ineffective or alienated not only as speakers, but also as participants at such conferences—not because they lacked field expertise or English skills per se but because they were unaware of the norms and patterns of English discourse associated with the genre.

My initial underlying research question was thus to determine exactly in what way or ways such conference participants and speakers were falling short of expectations, followed by the question as to why. This book attempts to answer these initial research questions as well as offer some advice on how to address these problems.

I was awarded consecutive Scientific-in-Aid research grants for the period 2012–2016 from the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, and Technology in order to analyze and provide possible solutions to the problem of alleged ineffective performances by Japanese medical professionals at international conferences. My earlier conference discourse research was therefore based upon analyzing the weak

points, their causes, and providing solutions for this problem. I've since surveyed and interviewed numerous Japanese doctors on the topic, and the results from these (Guest, 2013; 2014) inform some of what you'll read in this book.

As an educator myself, with an academic background and an ongoing interest in applied linguistics, over the past twenty years I have attended over two hundred academic/professional conferences related to teaching, curriculum planning, education methodologies, and theoretical linguistic forums in various corners of the globe—in almost every case as a presenter myself. These CPs have run the gamut from shotgun-styled 10-null parallel sessions to elaborate invited plenary speeches. I have been through the novice conference attendee/presenter stage myself and have presented in a foreign tongue (Japanese), both of which have provided me with a perspective from which I can empathize with both novices and NNES speakers.

Initially, in order to gain a more holistic perspective of academic conference English, I took a somewhat 'clinical' approach to the challenges faced by novice presenters and attendees. This was done by first eliciting the 'symptoms' and 'chief complaints' in order to learn more about the 'pathology' of the difficulties encountered. This was carried out through conducting surveys, 'diagnostic' interviews, observing systematic in vivo CP performance, and noting common affective and provoking factors. Thereafter by developing several hypotheses (or 'provisional diagnoses') regarding likely causes of success and failure, I eventually felt sufficiently informed to offer some prescriptive 'treatments.'

Thus, the practical suggestions made in this book, both for those young researchers and NNESs who plan to enter the world of academic conferencing and for those who teach these skills to others, are based upon research and first-hand observations, as well as the subsequent utilization of analytical models widely accepted within the fields of ESP and EAP discourse. While some of these findings, representative of particular academic conference discourses, might be considered prosaic, others should serve to illuminate the bigger picture as to how academics manage spoken discourse at conferences.

This investigative process involved applying the experience of observing and analysis of 170 medical CPs performed in English by medical professionals (so-called 'hard' sciences) and 121 more CPs from the field of applied linguistics/language education ('soft' sciences). Noting and analyzing the most effective methods and approaches, as well as the problematic areas, common to novice and NNES, as both presenters and participants, at these conferences provide the basis for the suggestions and advice I offer in this book. In other words, any advice found in this book is not based simply upon ideal or abstract notions of what 'seems intuitively right' or that which has emerged solely out of my own experience, but also takes into consideration the actual conference interactions and performances of a variety of academic researchers and in-service professionals.

Using established models of linguistic genre analysis and discourse analysis (the academic underpinning of these types of analyses are discussed in detail in Part III of this book), I analyzed those features and patterns of interactive spoken discourse

that were prominent in conference settings, and subsequently uncovered not only which types of speech events, speech genres, and sub-genres were most frequent but also how spoken discourse in these events was typically managed (with the most significant results and observations explained in detail in Parts IV and V).

1.3   What Aspects of Conference English Will This Book Cover (or not Cover)?

There exists one more unique quality to this book. Most readers will be aware that one's English 'performance' at an international academic conference does not begin at the first presentation slide nor does it end when you click the final 'Thank you' (in fact, many CPs represent in-process research, a part of a longer-term investigation). But within the CP speech event itself, the often-dreaded Q&A session (more accurately described as the discussion session or, hereafter, 'DS') invariably follows. Attendees and presenters also usually have to make post-presentation small talk, many have to manage poster sessions, or otherwise participate in extemporaneous discussions connected to their research areas. Some will wish to take part in symposia or colloquia; some might lead or attend workshops. Some may be required to chair CPs or other sessions. This book addresses all of these areas of more 'dynamic' English usage as well, not just the relatively static CP event itself. Therefore, although CPs may constitute the core event of academic conferences, the scope of spoken conference interactions reaches much further. Academic conference speech sub-genres typically include the following:

a. *Conference presentations (CPs)*

This core conference event includes the categories of plenaries, keynote, and other featured and/or invited speeches, plus symposium presentations—as well as free paper/parallel/concurrent sessions. These various categories of presentations must be distinguished for analysis as they all vary considerably in length, physical environment, audience, tenor, and even expected contents. However, as keynote and plenary speakers are generally accomplished presenters and veterans of performing conferencing presentations, this book will focus more upon what are known as the parallel/concurrent sessions or free papers ('free papers' is the preferred title at scientific conferences, whereas these are usually referred to at humanities conferences as 'parallel' or 'concurrent' sessions. Henceforth, the abbreviation *FP/PS* will be used to refer to these events).

It is also important to distinguish between the somewhat formalized, more static, monologic character of the CP per se and the more dynamic, open-ended, dialogic follow-up discussion/Q&A session that typically follows. Readers should note that I will not addressed commercial or business presentations, which are both generally non-academic in register and tend to be given by trained and seasoned field professionals, in this book.

b. *Poster sessions*

Although poster sessions may be unmanned, especially given the recent rise in popularity and number of e-poster submissions, it is assumed at some point that the poster presenter will be involved in discussions with visitors. This serves not only as an essential part of the dissemination of their research findings, but also as a vital means of establishing or maintaining academic networks (manning the poster at a set time is standard practice in the humanities, less so in the hard sciences). A recent trend at scientific conferences has also been poster–presentation combinations, in which a poster 'host' is required to give a very short presentation-based overview of their poster.

c. *Workshops*

Far more common at humanities conferences—particularly in language education circles—than at scientific conferences, both workshop management/leadership and participation roles are discursively distinct from standard CPs. Characteristics of both leading and participating in this highly interactive genre deserve some discussion. For the sake of this book, I have not distinguished a workshop from a seminar, as the difference is functionally negligible with both management and discourse patterns appearing to overlap.

d. *Symposia, colloquia, and other formalized discussions*

Whereas humanities conferences tend to include more workshops, a similar 'teaching' function at scientific conferences is carried out in special symposia, colloquia, or similar discussion forums. These too tend to display specific genre-based characteristics. Although the etymology of the term 'symposia' would seem to indicate that this event has traditionally tended be less academic and more free-discussion oriented than colloquia, the distinction between the two terms has effectively been lost in the current era of widespread academic conferences and thus are, for the most part, conflated in this book.

e. *Active participation (as audience member, attendee, participant)*

For the novice conference-goer, particularly a NNES, such innocuous activities such as registering and collecting passes, getting relevant and accurate conference information, and even finding the location of specific events can be anxiety-inducing. However, because these activities are somewhat idiosyncratic, they do not readily lend themselves to academic discourse analysis and are not dealt with in this book. More central to the role of effective and rewarding conference participation though is active involvement as participants in Q&A/discussion sessions, workshops, and symposia. Since this is an often overlooked feature of conference discourse, this book will contain a few short sections addressing the issue of being a 'good participant.'

f. *Chairing*

Although chairing roles are usually awarded to established, veteran members of the academic community, novice hosts will occasionally find themselves appointed to managing FP/PSs, both including the introduction (and related management) of presenters and as acting as moderators during Q&A/DSs. Therefore, the role, functions, discourse patterns, and potential pitfalls of the being the chair in CPs and symposia will be briefly discussed.

g. *Meetings (topical, organizational, academic)*

Special interest groups regularly use conferences as venues for meetings among board members, group members, and often to recruit those interested in the field. These range from formalized discussions of organization and management (typical of 'congresses') to focused discussions on pertinent topical issues currently circulating in the field. As this type of discourse pertains mostly to field experts, conference veterans, and ranking committee members, this book will not address this area in any detail.

h. *Social events (formal, planned)*

Planned social activities form an essential part of the conference domain, but their idiosyncratic and unpredictable nature (as these could include everything from city tours to set gala dinners to welcome parties) means that they fall largely outside the scope of this book. Effective participation in such endeavors will likely depend more upon the attendees' personality, the vagaries of chance interactions, one's existing social and interactive skills and habits, and related levels of engagement and/or interest more than the aforementioned conference sub-genres.

i. *Social gatherings (unscripted and spontaneous)*

Although extended activities with other participants, both as guests and hosts, is an essential element in conference networking, they fall largely outside the scope of this book for the same reasons as social events above. Unplanned social gatherings, including the kind of spontaneous chitchat that emerges during breaks and just before/after sessions, defy simple analysis, and are thus addressed only briefly.

j. *Management (as host)*

Active organization of a conference will generally be managed by expert host members, with particular conference management duties delegated to others already considered competent in their duties, under which a series of volunteers or venue staff will carry out various other duties. Much of this takes place within pre-conference settings and has more to do with organizational, human resource, and workplace interactive skills than the management of academic discourse. As such, this aspect of conference discourse will not be addressed in this book.

1.4 How Should I Read This Book?

This book aims to appeal to the reader in three ways. First, the research which underlines much of the book is presented in a manner that should meet the basic standards of the academic reader. Discussions regarding specialized discourse fields will be carried out, with the most pertinent research cited and terminology deployed. Thus, at many points, the tenor of the writing will be academic in nature.

But, as mentioned earlier, this book does not intend to serve as an extended research paper. It is also designed to offer practical applications for the findings of conference discourse such that English for Specific Purposes (ESP) and English for Academic Purposes (EAP) teachers and novice academic conference attendees/participants may also benefit from an understanding as to how these spoken genres are typically managed. Thus, the reader can also expect to occasionally encounter a third, more personal, voice, one marked by anecdotes, interviews, and editorial commentary of a more casual nature.

Readers should once again note that the author's research included representative fields from both the hard sciences (primarily medicine) and the humanities/soft sciences (primarily language education/applied linguistics). When generic distinctions between these two domains are significant, it will be noted. A more detailed outline of some of the fundamental differences between the two academic domains can be found in Chaps. 8 and 9, and is also occasionally raised in other sections.

However, a caveat is needed here. While one can say with a certain degree of authority which linguistic features of academic conference English are most common and that we can, to some degree, assign synopses or formulaic patterns to particular genres or speech events, the question as to whether one linguistic approach or form is better than another can be highly subjective. Whatever pretensions one may have about establishing objective, data-driven, or evidence-based foundations for preferred language choices, there will always be an ephemeral element involved that reflects the observer's or participant's personal orientation. To some extent, then it will be up to the reader as to whether, and to what degree, they might apply the suggestions or preferences expressed in this book to their own interactions and performances.

I have been asked on several occasions to conduct workshops and seminars to help brush up participants' academic CP English skills. Had I responded to such requests by saying that I cannot say whether A is better than B, or that anyone else's judgment is as good as mine, it would have no doubt have been seen as a dereliction of my professional duty, both as a teacher and language researcher. In this book, however, I have tried to consider evaluative factors beyond my own immediate performance likes and dislikes by grounding prescriptive content in descriptive analyses. After all, if a certain interactional or discourse pattern becomes part of the accepted generic canon, there is usually a valid reason for it.

I've already utilized many of the insights I've gained from these surveys, observations, analyses, and related research experience to better instruct my in-house medical students and medical professionals in their English presentation

skills, as well as in conducting English research presentation workshops to medical professionals throughout various parts of Asia. Therefore, I hope that this book may serve as a 'printed workshop' of sorts for its readers.

1.5   What Are the Central Linguistic Notions or Concepts Covered in This Book?

a. *Discourse:*

Discourse refers to the use of language within social contexts, particularly in terms of meaning-making (the larger field of semiotics) between speakers/listeners and/or writers/readers. The manner in which discourse is organized and managed varies according to a number of factors. Discourse that emerges in spoken academic settings, within the generic confines of giving CPs or engaging in academic workshops or symposia, carries certain repeated and recognizable forms. This is the central academic focus of this book.

b. *Speech events:*

A self-contained speech unit that has specific goals and purposes and thus has a loosely codified or conventionalized structure is a speech event. Explaining a conference poster to interested viewers is a speech event, so is chitchat over refreshments during breaks, although the latter is far more loosely codified. There is some blurring between the categories of sub-genres and speech events, although the latter tend to focus more upon the purpose of the spoken discourse itself, whereas the former is more concerned with the interactive conventions that surround and constrain it.

c. *Register:*

Register refers to stylistic variation in language, notably the degree of formality employed. However, register should not be equated solely with levels of formality/informality (which is more closely aligned with the sub-category of *tenor*, explained below).

   Halliday and Hasan (1976) define register so as to include the set of meanings and semantic patterns that we use under specified conditions. This includes our choice of words and structures that realize that which we wish to convey. In practice then, register may be said the manner in which we mark our professionalism—or our membership within a field or profession. Understandably, discourse at academic conferences generally displays an academic register, although the register will vary according to the formality of the speech event. Speakers will adjust register according to interlocutors and circumstance—the 'accepted' register

at academic conferences will be marked differently than those of, say, a sporting venue, even if the interlocutors are the same. Register acts an umbrella term for the categories of mode, tenor, and field (all introduced below). Couture (1986) makes the crucial point that register imposes constraints at the levels of vocabulary and syntax whereas genre constraints operate at the level of discourse structure.

This book actually serves as willful example of shifting register. The introduction and first part contain personal and anecdotal contents, maintaining a more familiar voice in an attempt to be accessible to a wide variety of readers. The second and third parts adopt a more academic register as befits the inclusion of more scholarly data, rhetorical structure, and lexis. The fourth and fifth parts utilize a mixture of the academic and personal voices, a blended register more conducive to the practical considerations and advice dispensed in these sections.

d. *Genre:*

Genre refers to a class of communicative events with a shared set of communicative purposes (Mauranen, Perez-Llantada, & Swales, 2010). In particular, genre is concerned with the rhetorical organization of texts, and for Swales (1990), the rhetorical moves made within a text. Genres tend to have a recognizable synoptic structure that is tacitly accepted by a given discourse community. The underlying rationale of a given genre establishes constraints on allowable contributions. Participants are expected to adhere to the expectations of the particular discourse community. As a result, instances of genre can vary in proto-typicality. Macro-genres such as academic conferences can typically be divided into sub-genres, such as poster session discourse and workshop management. Nonetheless, genre codes are inherently flexible and are adapted according to the discursive needs of the discourse community.

Genre differs from register in that it operates in completed texts. Genres would include business reports, research papers (hereafter abbreviated to RPs, although they are also referred to as RAs—research *articles*—by some), and CPs, whereas register focuses upon, for example, the language of newspapers, the language of bureaucrats. The use of generic nomenclature in particular is often considered a source of insight regarding the rhetorical organization of both written and spoken texts.

e. *Mode:*

Mode is the means by which language is conveyed, generally written or spoken. Conferences are particularly nuanced in terms of mode, not only because they are inherently multimodal events, but also because the two modes often emerge within the same speech event, especially in CPs and poster discussions. When the conventions and manners of the two or more modes converge (in short, when they become 'multimodal'), one of the most distinctive features of conference discourse is realized.

f. *Field:*

Field refers to the topical area that is being covered by the discourse. Choice of field often informs both the organization and the tenor of the discourse. At academic conferences, field not only necessitates the use of specialist terminology but also confers an explicit educated or specialist tenor among the participants. This term conflates to some degree with the term *domain*.

g. *Tenor:*

Tenor refers to the relationship between participants and the manner in which this relationship is manifested in discourse. This includes such qualities as the level of language used on scales of formality vs. informality and distance/detachment vs. active engagement. It also refers to the nature of the speaker's 'voice.' Voice is often referred to as an 'identity option,' the manner in which we choose to present ourselves to other members of a community (or even to those considered to be outside the community). This will typically mean that an academic tenor will be used in formalized events involving specific academic discourse communities, such as conferences. Using a situationally appropriate tenor goes a long way toward being persuasive and influential within a specific discourse community. Gender, age, and power status are other factors that can affect or help to determine appropriate tenor.

Questions and Exercises for Chapter 1
Most chapters and sections of this book will end with questions, exercises, tasks, or reflection/discussion points for teachers/readers to address. As the vast majority of these questions and exercises call for the reader or student to reread, interpret, expand upon, and consider the application of the material presented in this book for their own theoretical or practical situations, no answer key is provided.

1. Give one example each of a discourse (1) field, (2) mode, (3) tenor, (4) register, (5) genre, and (6) speech event.
2. Name four types of formalized speech events that are typically held at academic conferences.
3. Name three different categories of CP and think of two ways in which each of them would likely differ in form and structure from the others.

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