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"THIS IS FOR SURE A QUESTION AT YOUR EXAMS": ASSESSMENT REFERENCES IN EMI AND L1 ENGINEERING LECTURES

Abstract

This paper focuses on assessment-related expressions used to mark out important content in lecture discourse. Relevant to Higher Education (HE) contexts generally, such markers are even more necessary in English Mediated Instruction (EMI) contexts where students are mostly non-native English speakers. So far, little research has compared usage of those expressions by native and non-native English-speaking lecturers. A specialised corpus of engineering lectures delivered by native and non-native speakers of English was compiled. Selected query markers were used to extract references to assessment made by the lecturer. The frequency of individual markers such as the words 'question' and 'exam' and the wider discourse moves which encompass them were analyzed in terms of their positioning with respect to the lecture content, the degree of probability involved, and typical phraseology. Those frequencies were then compared between native and non-native lecturers. Content of particular importance to students should be well marked. We might therefore expect assessment references to be particularly frequent and clearly marked especially when lecturers and students are non-native English speakers. However, findings suggest that a clear distinction between native and non-native speakers of English is not always easy to make and thus have relevance for pedagogical practices and for the professional development of teachers.

Key words

assessment references, importance markers and moves, engineering lecture discourse, EMI.

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1. INTRODUCTION

This study looks at explicit references to assessment and the importance markers that co-occur with them in lecturer discourse. In an extract from a lecture by an Italian native speaker – "*this is for sure a question at your exams ok? so it's really important to remember this*" – assessment references appear in the form of individual words such as '*question*', '*exams*', forming the phrase "*this is for sure a question at your exams*". The move is completed by the importance-marking phrase "*so it's really important to remember this*".

A major part of a student's academic career revolves around assessment. Assimilation of course contents is the main goal of university lectures and students' progress requires evaluation. Assessment differs according to discipline. For the hard sciences, students are often required to memorise and apply course material (Braxton, 1995), with students' performance on engineering degrees ideally being measured through formative rather than summative assessment (Dochy & McDowell, 1997), with every lecture contributing material for this process. However, students "tend to adjust their learning behaviour to what they expect will be assessed" (Dochy et al., 2007: 90), so that assessment expectations can be even more influential than the teaching (Bloxham & Boyd, 2007: 3), and teachers all over the world are familiar with the phrase "do we have to know this for the exam?". Assessment "directs attention to what is important. It acts as an incentive for study. And it has a powerful effect on what students do and how they do it" (Boud & Falchikov, 2007: 3). As such, though the pitfalls of 'teaching to the test' are well known, we might expect explicit reference to assessment during the lecture itself. While it might seem counterproductive to tell the students what questions will be set for assessment (Deroey, 2014: 275), test expectancy might influence the notes students make (Carrier & Titus, 1981) and strategic note-taking has proved to be a factor in academic success (Flowerdew, 1994). Assessment is important whether in a native English-speaking environment, where international students may not be native English speakers, as well as in an English Mediated Instruction (EMI) context, where English is used "to teach academic subjects in countries or jurisdictions where the first language (L1) of the majority of the population is not English" (Dearden, 2014: 4). In such a context, neither lecturer nor students may be native English speakers, and English language competence is highly variable.

Form and content of assessment are powerful tools for influencing students' study habits (Palmer, 2004: 200). Therefore, inadequate teacher training in assessment practices may negatively affect students' course content learning (Serin, 2015; Subheesh & Sethy, 2020). Effective lecturer discourse, including reference to assessment practices, may be shaped by teacher training. However, teacher training experience is not always required for university lecturers (Bhattacharya, 2004), nor is training for teaching in English compulsory in many contexts (Costa, 2015: 134), so that lecturers obliged to teach in a language other than their first are at a particular disadvantage.

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Since the Bologna Process (1999)[1] took effect, the number of universities in non-Anglophone countries offering degree courses in English has multiplied, with international students coming from widely different cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Students' understanding of information, contributing to successful learning, may also be influenced by language issues as well as local and academic culture (Flowerdew & Miller, 1995). This has repercussions on the lecturer's behaviour and language in class, since "with the massification of higher education in many countries worldwide, and the increasing mobility of students, the higher education teacher cannot assume that their diverse student cohort has previous knowledge of any form of assessment, or any clear understanding of the academic standards on a course unit" (McConlogue, 2020: 41), which might be at odds with practices in the student's home environment.

Another determining factor in successful learning is how students are conditioned by different personal learning strategies and styles (Felder & Silverman, 1988; Wierstra et al., 2003), sometimes broadly divided into deep or surface approaches (Marton, 1988), and which may differ according to the learning task (Ramsden, 2003: 45). The approach may influence both note-taking and content revision in general. How students take notes during lectures might be affected by lecture cues with explicit reference to assessment, which are particularly useful for the "cue-conscious" student (Miller & Parlett, 1974) in that students are explicitly alerted to information which will be useful to them (Kiewra, 2002). With possibly dozens of students in the classroom, the lecturer must cater for all types of learning strategies, being aware of the distinction between student characteristics and the nature of different approaches to learning (Ramsden, 2003: 45), and adjusting their language appropriately, since "audience awareness is a central skill needed for effective communication" (Ädel, 2012: 122). Indeed, "instruction should routinely address all categories of a selected learning style model rather than heavily favouring one category over its opposite" (Felder, 2020: 7).

One way to address different learning styles is to use discourse to make explicit reference to important information, since the "ability to distinguish between what is relevant to the main purpose and what is less relevant […] is paramount in lectures" (Flowerdew, 1994: 11). By important information we mean content which is presented orally (thus suiting auditory learning styles) as well as visually, such as through graphs and diagrams (suiting students with visual learning styles). Importance or relevance markers in previous studies (Ädel, 2010, 2012; Crawford Camiciottoli, 2004; Deroey, 2014, 2015; Deroey & Taverniers, 2012) have included metalinguistic phrases (e.g., '*the point is*'), relevance adjectives (e.g., '*important*'), *it* + clauses (e.g., '*it is crucial*'), and *what* (e.g., '*what is important is*'). Assessment references also function as a type of importance marker in that the lecturer expresses their stance (Hyland, 2005) towards the information, evaluating it as

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[1] The Bologna Process aimed to create a single European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in an attempt to standardise higher education particularly as regards greater focus on student-centred learning, assessment practices and internationalisation.

particularly important because it is likely to be assessed. In this way the lecturer advises students in order to inform best learning practice (Bouziri, 2021: 11). The use of importance markers in lecture discourse is particularly relevant for non-native English-speaking students who often struggle with identifying the main points and logical arguments (Olsen & Huckin, 1990; Tauroza & Allison, 1994). Moreover, students may be unfamiliar with discourse practices related to assessment at the tertiary level and thus require more explicit signalling from the lecturer regarding which content is likely to be assessed.

While the form of assessment – e.g., written or oral examination, individual essays or projects – is generally made explicit in written mode in the university course programme, the content to be assessed is often not so clearly highlighted during the lecture itself. It is important for the lecturer to communicate effectively about key concepts which the students will be required to know for assessment. This is even more relevant where students and lecturers do not share the same language. Yet, little research has so far compared what native and non-native English-speaking lecturers actually say in the classroom when they refer to course assessment matters.

In the following section, I will provide a brief review of research relevant to lecture discourse in both native and non-native English contexts regarding assessment, corpus studies, and importance markers.

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2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1. Assessment

Assessment in this paper refers to evaluation of the students' understanding and recalling of learning objects/course material for the purpose of assigning a grade which will evaluate students' performance. While university course programmes are obliged to describe what constitutes fulfilment of course objectives, there is often little detail given beyond mention of the format (e.g., depending on the discipline these might include an oral exam, a final written paper, mid-term essay or quiz). Assessment-related expressions are those words and phrases with which the lecturer makes explicit reference during the lecture to the content of the examination/assessment practices required to fulfil the course objectives.

As regards assessment practices in EMI courses in Italy, Mair (2021) finds that university lecturers are mainly unfamiliar with assessment practices outside their own national context. She concludes that "Italian lecturers in ETPs [English-taught programmes] and internationalised programmes may need support in rethinking and designing appropriate assessment tools and *developing clear and transparent communication around them*" [my italics] (Mair, 2021: 112). Assessment practices in engineering education are described in detail by Subheesh and Sethy (2020),

though the communication of content that is likely to be assessed in lectures is not mentioned. Leask (2008: 127) found that students valued lecturers who were able to clearly communicate expectations about assessment requirements, though again there was no reference to the way lecturers refer to assessment content. Indeed, existing research lacks recommendations or studies about communication in the form of spoken references to assessment during lectures.

2.2. Corpus studies

While I am unaware of any corpus studies expressly focussing on assessment-related expressions, corpus linguistics tools certainly provide a way of investigating and comparing large amounts of data relatively easily and objectively. In the field of academic English, the British Academic corpus of Spoken English (BASE)[2] as well as smaller, purpose-built specialised corpora have proved useful for research into lecture discourse. These are often discipline-specific, since discourse may be affected more by the discipline than the country of study (Airey, 2015). An example is the Engineering Lecture Corpus (ELC)[3] of lectures by native and non-native speakers of English. Another corpus featuring non-native speakers of English in an academic context is the EmiBO corpus of Physical Sciences and Economics lectures at the University of Bologna (Johnson & Picciuolo, 2020, 2022a, 2022b; Picciuolo & Johnson, 2020). Specialised corpora are often used to analyse the lexicogrammatical features of specific genres such as the lecture genre. For example, the use of lexical bundles (Biber et al., 2004), sequences of words which statistically tend to co-occur, facilitates comprehension in lectures (De Carrico & Nattinger, 1988) and contributes to creating greater fluency. Lexical bundles thus have an important place in both native and non-native English lecturers' discourse. Molino (2019), for instance, found that EMI lecturers in Physical Sciences disciplines used lexical bundles less often than native English-speaking lecturers. The former tended to rely on a restricted set of bundles which were sometimes characterised by recurrent idiosyncratic expressions. She also found that certain metadiscursive functions encoded in the bundles, such as hedging, were absent from or underused in EMI lecture discourse. Like importance markers, these elements are fundamental for smooth lecture organisation and for guiding students, particularly where these are non-native speakers (Nesi & Basturkmen, 2006). Björkman (2011) compares the use of pragmatic devices including strategies for signalling importance in lecturer and student group speech in an English as a Lingua Franca (ELF) context. While she

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does not refer to assessment procedures specifically, she concludes that speakers in ELF settings should take every opportunity to deploy relevant pragmatic strategies in order to maximise communication.

2.3. Importance or relevance markers

Importance or relevance markers are used to express a speaker's evaluation of or stance towards the information (Hyland, 2005), marking it as being important for some reason. Comparing audience-oriented relevance markers in native and non-native English business lecture discourse, Crawford Camiciottoli (2004) found high variation in the syntactic patterning and a wide range of adjectives denoting relevance or importance, as well as idiosyncratic preferences, and individual lecturing styles which often characterise this genre (Bouziri, 2020). Lexicogrammatical highlighting or importance markers were investigated in native English lecture discourse by Deroey (2012, 2014, 2015) and Deroey and Taverniers (2011, 2012), who found that the most frequent importance marker patterns were not the most intuitive or those most readily included in EAP teaching materials. In their list of importance markers, Deroey and Taverniers (2012) included assessment references containing the query words '*exam*' or '*examine*', and noted the surprisingly rare presence of these by native English speakers in the specialised corpus they investigated (BASE). A further dimension was added by Deroey and Johnson (2021), who compared lecture discourse by native and non-native English-speaking lecturers with regard to the use of different types of importance markers including assessment references. Initial results showed that it was difficult to make clear distinctions between native and non-native English speakers since idiolect and variation between subcorpora also play a part. Ädel (2010, 2012) in her functional taxonomy of metadiscourse markers classifies importance markers as references to the audience, with the function of 'Managing the message'. She describes these as "typically used to emphasise the core message in what is being conveyed; as such [they tend] to provide the big picture, or at least state what the addresser wishes the audience to remember or experience based on the discourse" (Ädel, 2010: 89). She adds that they also refer "to cases in which the addresser explicitly comments on the desired uptake" (Ädel, 2010: 89). Bouziri (2020) includes importance markers within the classification 'Evaluating lecture content', where the lecturer weighs "the points s/he makes in terms of importance or relevance" (Bouziri, 2020: 120). Assessment references fulfil the same function, in that the lecturer comments on the importance of some content because it will be assessed.

Research in this area has tended to focus on the word or phrase as a unit of meaning, such as the single query words '*exam*' or '*examine*' investigated by Deroey and Taverniers (2012) as potential 'markers'. However, the co-occurrence of a single marker with others to constitute a 'move' is an important extension of this focus (Ädel, 2023; Bouziri, 2019, 2020). In this way, predominance is given to the

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overriding rhetorical aim (Liu & Hu, 2021) in a more extensive stretch of text at discourse rather than word level, involving a more contextualised analysis of the discourse functions used by speakers (Ädel, 2023: 6). In the present study, I look both at single markers referring to assessment (e.g., '*question*', '*exam*'), and the moves they are encompassed in. For example, the move "*this is for sure a question at your exams ok? so it's really important to remember this*" features an importance marker – "*it's really important to remember this*" – preceded by single markers referring to assessment ('*question*', '*exams*')*.*

This study draws on a specialised corpus of engineering lectures by native and non-native speakers of English to investigate the use of assessment references as a specific type of importance marker, using selected query markers to extract spoken references to assessment by the lecturer. My focus is on differences and similarities across the subcorpora of native and non-native speakers of English in terms of the frequency of markers and moves, as well as the positioning with respect to the content, the degree of probability involved, and typical phraseology. Signposting is fundamental for conveying importance and my hypothesis is that references to assessment will be particularly frequent, explicit and clear where neither lecturer nor students are native English speakers.

3. METHODOLOGY

This section describes corpus compilation and corpus analysis. After outlining the various components of the corpus, the data extraction procedure and concordance analysis are described.

3.1. Corpus compilation

The IMP (IMPortance marker) specialised corpus of approximately 530,000 words used for this study was compiled as part of an earlier research project into lexicogrammatical importance markers (Deroey & Johnson, 2021). For this specialised corpus, the manually transcribed recordings of engineering lectures given at four different universities by native and non-native English-speaking lecturers were selected from two much larger lecture corpora: EmiBO (Johnson & Picciuolo, 2022a), and the Engineering Lecture Corpus (ELC). The ELC consists of Engineering lectures delivered in the UK, New Zealand and Malaysia. While the EmiBO corpus consists of lectures in English in different subjects to both international and local native Italian-speaking students, course lectures from the Engineering section alone were extracted for this study.

The choice of lecture origin is to a certain extent dictated by availability in existing specialised corpora (the ELC and EmiBO), but while differences between UK and New Zealand varieties of English may be minimal, the presence of non-native

English-speaking lecturers from two quite different contexts where English has a different status may affect results. While English is learnt in Italy as a foreign language, English acts as a common lingua franca for interaction across ethnolinguistic group boundaries in Malaysia (Wardaugh & Fuller, 2021: 277).

The native English subcorpus consisted of thirty-seven lectures from the United Kingdom (UK) and New Zealand (NZ) given by native English-speaking lecturers. The non-native English subcorpus consisted of thirty lectures given at an Italian university (IT) by native Italian speakers, and at a Malaysian university (MS) by speakers of English as an additional language.[4] The number of lectures in each subcorpus and the number of transcribed words are given in Table 1.

English	Subcorpus	No. lectures	No. words
Native	UK	18	159,613
	NZ	19	107,695
	Sub-total	*37*	*267,308*
non-native	MS	14	102,626
	IT	16	163,723
	Sub-total	*30*	*266,349*
Total		**67**	**533,657**

Table 1. Specialised corpus of Engineering lectures by native and non-native English speakers

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The subcorpora contain several lectures by the same lecturer, as shown in Figure 1, where the lecture numbers for each subcorpus correspond to a letter identifying the individual lecturer.

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
IT	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	G	G	G	G	J	K	L			
MS	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	S	T	R	U	T	T	T					
NZ	*a*	*a*	*a*	*b*	*c*	*a*	*d*	*e*	*f*	*a*	*a*	*g*	*h*	*i*	*j*	*k*	*g*	*h*	*h*
UK	*l*	*l*	*m*	*n*	*m*	*o*	*o*	*n*	*p*	*l*	*l*	*m*	*m*	*m*	*n*	*l*	*l*	*l*	

Figure 1. Lecturer identity and lecture number

For example, Figure 1 shows that IT Lecturer "G" contributed five out of the sixteen Italian lectures (lectures 7, 10, 11, 12 and 13); MS lecturers "R", "S" and "T" between them contributed eight out of the fourteen MS lectures; NZ lecturers "*a*", "*g*", and "*h*" each contributed more than one NZ lecture; and UK Lecturers "*l*", "*m*", "*n*", and "*o*" also each contributed more than one UK lecture, while Lecturer "*p*" only contributed one.

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[4] Unfortunately no information about the Malaysian lecturers' native language was available.

Two other existing corpora are used as benchmarks for this study in order to crosscheck the appearance of utterances in standard spoken English and/or academic English. For this purpose the British National Corpus (BNC) and the British Academic corpus of Spoken English (BASE) will be used.

3.2. Corpus analysis

3.2.1. Data extraction

Both semi-automatic and manual procedures were used to extract concordances.Following Deroey (2012, 2015) and Deroey and Taverniers (2012), Deroey and Johnson (2021) identified importance markers of different types in the same corpus by means of careful manual reading, dividing them into specific lexicogrammatical patterns around the 'core' constituent. The patterns we identified included adjectives, verbs and nouns highlighting and evaluating information as important or relevant, idiomatic expressions appearing to serve the same function, and references to assessment. The assessment references initially identified in this way formed the starting point for the present study. However, this present study extends the analysis of assessment references to include those without an explicit element denoting importance, which instead were not considered in Deroey and Johnson (2021). This was done as follows. Using SketchEngine[5] (Kilgarriff et al., 2004), a pre-selection was done by searching the corpus for potential assessment markers. These were wordforms of *question**, *exam**, *ask**, *test**, *assign**, *evaluat** and *assess**.[6] Using pre-defined markers is not ideal, since other potential markers may be overlooked. Further careful reading was therefore done to include all possible markers which had not hitherto been identified. However, no other markers emerged. Annotation was done where the lecturer referred to some lecture content – either verbally or visually presented – which would be assessed or examined. Ambiguous instances were resolved by reading the extended co-text and in consideration of the genre and discipline. Criteria for inclusion included references to assessment content and specific lecture points, as in example (1):

> (1) so therefore in fact the steam power plant is a very good example of a heat engine yeah so this is a favourite exam exam as well er characteristics of a heat engine so you should be able to describe these four (MS)

but not general questions relating to individual work, such as student portfolios, assessment procedure or form (example 2):

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[5] http://www.sketchengine.eu/
[6] The * indicates all wordforms of the base, such that *exam** would yield *examine, examined, examines, examining, examination, exam.*

(2) if you look on the page of the course there is a description of the exam and the description is unchanged the only difference is that it's not a physical presence but it's a remote exam (IT)

Assessment references often occur with others to form a single move. This study quantifies both the number of individual query markers and the number of discourse moves they form. After extraction of relevant concordances of single query words, longer stretches of discourse containing more than one reference to assessment references were combined to make a single move. The beginning and end of each move was noted through careful reading to identify where the lecturer interrupted their presentation of content to mention its inclusion in assessment, and subsequently moved on to a different topic or resumed their description of course content. Example (3) contains just one assessment-related marker – '*asked*':

(3) You might be *asked* this. (MS)

There are no other assessment references in the close context. This single marker thus corresponds to a single move. Instead, example (4) has four assessment references relating retrospectively to the assessment content ("flow duration curve"): *question — ask — exam — ask*, as well as the importance marker "*keep in mind*":

(4) [keep in mind that the flow duration curve is a classical *question* that I *ask* at the *exam* and usually I *ask* the student to tell me about the two methods for estimation what are advantages and disadvantages of each one] (IT)

Together the four markers make up a single move, marked within square brackets, presenting the important information ('*keep in mind*') and then marking it out for assessment (*question — ask — exam — ask*). The multiple query markers in the single move in example (4) make it more likely for students to take note of the information than in example (3) where one marker corresponds to one move.

3.2.2. Analysis of concordances

Besides comparing the frequency of individual assessment references across lecturer discourse, the study focuses on their co-occurrence with similar markers constituting a single 'move', expressions of modality, position in relation to the content referenced, as well as typical phraseology. More specifically, the following were noted for each concordance:

- **Frequency**: Relative numbers of assessment references as well as numbers of moves;
- **Positioning**: Retrospective or prospective positioning of the assessment-related moves in relation to the content;

- **Modality**: The presence of modulation (necessity, obligation) or modalisation (probability) governing the assessment-related moves. Quantification was made of modal operators expressing necessity or obligation, such as *should*, *must*, *have to*, *it is essential to*, as well as adverbs of frequency denoting probability such as *generally*, *usually*, and *always*, as well as nominal groups (e.g., *normal question*). Expressions of modality were further distinguished into expressions of high probability (zero modality, modal verbs, adverbial phrases and nominal groups such as *will*, *definitely*, *for sure*, *typical/normal question*) and medium probability (e.g., *usually*, *may*, *could*, as well as the *if-* conditional);
- **Phraseology**: SketchEngine's WordSketch tool was used to extract recurring patterns, and idiomatic phrases. Such patterns were then examined to highlight non-standard usage in concordances containing the individual query words by comparing verbs and adjectives typically occurring with the individual query words with those in the BNC and BASE. Examples of idiolect and idiomatic expressions which might impede proper communication (Seidlhofer, 2011) are also noted and quantified.

To illustrate these in context, two examples (5) and (6) are commented below, with the initial query word/s in italics:

> (5) so we're now looking at question nine which is sort of most of *an exam question* in fact has it been recycled as *an exam question* no that one has never actually been recycled as *an exam question* oh yeah it has question sixteen (UK)

> (6) So you see you have *three questions three important questions to answer* so *I ask you* to select a specific type of landslide among the ones that are represented in this map (IT)

In terms of positioning, the query words in example (5) refer retrospectively to the 'content matter' of the exam question which is '*question nine*', while the query words in example (6) refer prospectively to the content '*select a specific type of landslide*'. A prospective reference is a more useful cue for note-taking than a retrospective one.

The conflicting modality '*sort of most of*' in example (5) does not clarify whether this is content for assessment. Such doubt is not dispelled by the lecturer's self-addressed question '*has it been recycled*?' – self-answered '*no*' – then self-correction '*yes, it has*'. In contrast, the zero modality in the present tense '*you have*' and '*I ask*' in example (6) confirms inclusion of the content for assessment.

As regards phraseology, while example (6) contains the standard '*I ask you*' and '*you have three important questions to answer*', the verb co-occurring with '*exam question*' in example (5) is '*recycled*'. '*Recycle*' never co-occurs with '*exam question*' in either the BNC or BASE and thus might easily lead to misunderstanding, particularly on the part of non-native English-speaking students who are less familiar with non-standard language.

4. RESULTS

Of the 1,708 potential query markers containing wordforms of *question**, *exam**, *ask**, *test**, *assign**, *evaluat** and *assess**, 163 were found to be relevant to assessment and are distributed as shown in Table 2. The query markers *assign**, *evaluat** and *assess** never marked reference to content assessment and were discarded.

English	Subcorpus	Relevant query markers	In how many lectures/total?
Native	NZ	50	10/19
	UK	31	7/18
	Sub-total	81	17/37
non-native	IT	48	5/16
	MS	34	10/14
	Sub-total	82	15/30
Total		**163**	**32/67**

Table 2. Numbers of relevant individual assessment references per subcorpus

4.1. Descriptive results

The frequencies of query markers identifying assessment-related expressions are shown as lemmas in Figure 2 according to origin.
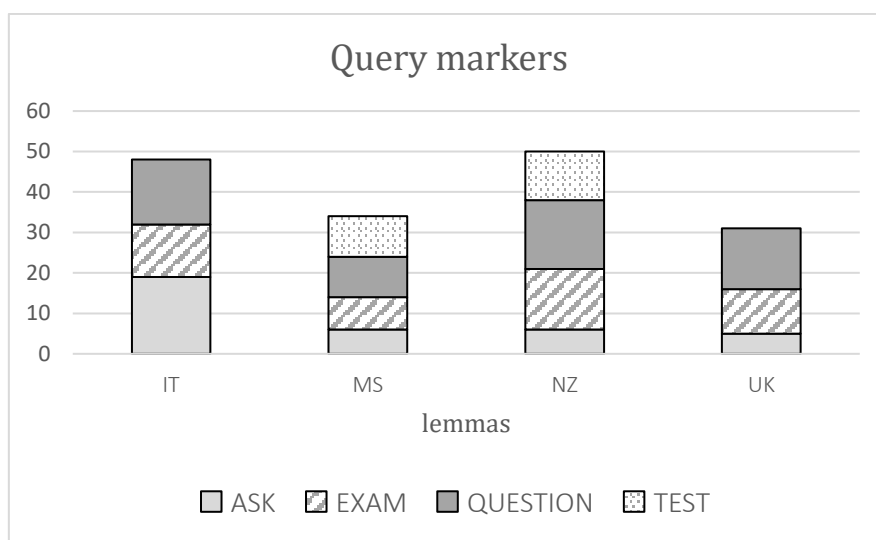

Figure 2. Frequencies of query markers according to lecture origin

We note from Figure 2 that wordforms of the lemma ASK were the most frequent query words in Italian lectures, found in nearly 40% of the assessment-related expressions in IT. ASK was much less relatively frequent in the other three subcorpora, with wordforms of QUESTION being the most frequent in the assessment-related expressions in MS (29% of the expressions in MS), NZ (34%) and UK (48%) lectures. Wordforms of TEST were to be found only in MS and NZ lectures.

While Deroey and Taverniers (2012) and Deroey (2014) found little reference to highlighting points for the purpose of assessment in the UK lectures of BASE, 163 assessment references were found in this corpus, occurring in thirty-two different lectures (highlighted in grey in Figure 3), making up 48% of the total number of lectures. However, there was much variation depending on the subcorpus. For example, only 31% of the Italian lectures in the corpus contained any assessment references at all, contrasting with 71% of MS lectures, 53% of NZ and 39% of UK lectures. Moreover, three of the five Italian lectures containing assessment references were all by Lecturer "G". This may be explained by the individual lecturer style and practice which might have influenced the use of such references as part of their idiolect. Similarly, four of the seven UK lectures containing assessment references were delivered by UK lecturer "*m*", and five of the ten NZ lectures delivered by Lecturer "*a*".

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19
IT	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H	I	G	G	G	G	J	K	L			
MS	M	N	O	P	Q	R	S	S	T	R	U	T	T	T					
NZ	*a*	*a*	*a*	*b*	*c*	*a*	*d*	*e*	*f*	*a*	*a*	*g*	*h*	*i*	*j*	*k*	*g*	*h*	*h*
UK	*l*	*l*	*m*	*n*	*m*	*o*	*o*	*n*	*p*	*l*	*l*	*m*	*m*	*m*	*n*	*l*	*l*	*l*	

Figure 3. Lectures featuring assessment references (in grey)

A similar frequency of assessment references as single markers was noted for native speakers (81) and non-native speakers (82). Differences were found within the subcorpora, however, with references used more frequently in NZ (50) than UK (31), and more frequently in IT (48) than MS (34). Individual references provided a starting point for identifying the discourse 'moves' of the lecturer with regard to assessment reference. The single query markers were then grouped manually into single discourse 'moves'. The two individual query words '*question*' and '*exams*' in example (7) are part of a single discourse move. The relevant co-text constituting the 'move' is also given within square brackets:

> (7) introduce another concept of stability but you will see that again nZ disability property or not in b but they are in a ok? [This is for sure a question at your exams ok? so it's really important to remember this.] So let me delete this part. (IT)

The assessment-related move in example (7) begins '*This is for sure*', with '*this*' being a retrospective marker making reference to some previous information. This particular move finishes with the importance marker '*it's really important to remember this*'.

While the mean number of query markers per move was 2.9 overall, there was much variation within the subcorpora. The thirty-one query markers in the UK subcorpus formed ten assessment-related moves, with two moves containing clusters of seven and eight markers, and six moves (60%) containing just one or two markers. Eight of the sixteen moves in the NZ subcorpus had just one or two markers (50%). In comparison, thirty-four query markers made up fifteen moves over ten lectures in the MS subcorpus. While there was one move with a cluster of seven markers, eleven moves (73%) consisted of just one or two markers. Similarly, eleven of the sixteen moves in the IT subcorpus (69%) had just one or two markers. The lack of clustered markers per move in the MS and IT lecture discourse suggests that references to assessment may be easily missed. Instead, students following the NZ or UK lectures may have more opportunity to take notes, given the higher number of assessment references per move. Mauranen (2006) found that ELF speakers made more effort to be clear and avoid misunderstanding by using several markers to highlight important information. This was not always borne out in this study, since the MS lecturers use cumulative references less frequently than IT lecturers. Given the utility of such explicit marking for 'cue-conscious' students (Miller & Parlett, 1974), this finding suggests that awareness-raising among lecturers as regards the cumulative effect of importance markers might be useful.

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4.2. Positioning

There is little difference between the native and non-native English subcorpora overall as regards the positioning of assessment references, with the native subcorpus having 40 retrospective and 41 prospective markers and the non-native 40 retrospective and 42 prospective markers. However, differences emerge with regard to the four subcorpora, particularly within the non-native English corpus, where the Italian lecturers are more likely to use retrospective markers (28) than prospective (20). In example (8), the retrospective marker (underlined) refers to content which has already been presented ('*concept of stability*').

> (8) introduce another concept of stability but you will see that again nZ disability property or not in b but they are in a ok? <u>This is </u>for sure *a question* at *your exams* ok? so it's really important to remember this. (IT)

Instead the MS lecturers use many more prospective markers (22) than retrospective markers (12). Prospection is more useful for student listeners than retrospection, giving them time to prepare for note-taking. Indeed, example (9) shows that one

native English-speaking lecturer is well aware of the importance of explicitly signalling content ('*that should wake you up*') and using assessment references prospectively:

(9) because they don't they don't contain Q anymore now in your er in *your exam* and in *your test* that should wake you up in *your exam* and in *your test* I I it's quite a valid *question* for me to say derive the capacitance of a capacitor from first principles (NZ)

In example (9), the query markers are positioned before the content for assessment: '*derive the capacitance of a capacitator*'. The native English speakers use both positionings equally frequently.

4.3. Modality

Moves of assessment references were divided into high or medium probability. Example (8) above contains an expression of high probability: '*This is for sure a question at your exams*', while the if-conditional '*if I was to*' in example (10) is an example of medium probability:

(10) so if I was to throw in a little ten or fifteen mark *exam question* (UK)

The lower the modality, corresponding to more ambiguity and less probability, the more a speaker can be said to 'hedge'. While Molino (2019) found little hedging in Italian lecturer discourse, the lecturers in the Italian subcorpus in my study tended to hedge slightly more often than the MS, NZ and UK lecturers, using more medium modality (eight occurrences) than high modality (seven occurrences), perhaps due to the idiosyncratic lecture discourse of one particular lecturer (Lecturer "G"). Instead, NZ, UK and MS lecturers more frequently used high than medium certainty (NZ: 10 out of 16; UK: 8 out of 10; MS: 11 out of 15), clarifying better what to expect in the assessment. While the non-native English speakers show a more standard use of modal verbs, adverbs and nouns, the native English speakers were less clear, using references such as '*which is sort of most of an exam question*', '*recycled as an exam question*', and '*when it comes to examsville*', and even '*fair game*', an idiomatic expression used twice by the same lecturer as in example (11).

(11) you've got to understand the book if you want to get a good mark in your test so this is *fair game* for an *exam question* (NZ)

The phrase '*fair game*' as in example (11) was classified as expressing high probability that the content would appear in assessment. However, a non-native English-speaking student may not be familiar with this phrase. Unilateral

idiomaticity (Seidlhofer, 2002) in non-native English contexts is unhelpful and should be avoided as it adds unnecessary complication to lecture comprehension.

4.4. Phraseology

A WordSketch was done of the individual query words *question**, *exam**, *ask**, *test**, in order to identify common phraseology. The following issues were particularly worthy of note.

4.4.1. 'question'

The nominal group *exam question* is underused by non-native English speakers, appearing only once in the non-native subcorpus. Instead it is more typical of native English speakers (16 occurrences), appearing in phrases such as:

> *[BE] an exam question*
> *[RECYCLE] + AS an exam question*

As noted in the comment to example (5) above, '*recycle*' does not commonly co-occur with '*exam question*' and thus such a collocation might lead to misunderstanding by non-native English-speaking students. Another modifier of '*question*' is the rather idiomatic '*throwaway*' as in example (12):

> (12)   occasionally I put in a little throwaway *question* (UK)

'*Throwaway*' never appears as a modifier of '*question*' in the BNC or BASE, suggesting that it is an idiosyncratic usage on the part of the lecturer. Indeed, neither the literal nor the figurative meanings of '*throwaway*' assist comprehension for the non-native English student. In comparison, premodifiers of '*question*' in non-native lecture discourse include the non-standard '*classical*' perhaps an example of idiosyncratic preference (Molino, 2019), or suggesting interference from the Italian L1: '*classico*'. Non-native English-speaking students who share the lecturer's native language are more likely to understand this, due to the 'interlanguage benefit' (Bent & Bradlow, 2003). '*normal*' (MS) was also found as premodifier of '*question*', as well as the more standard '*favourite*' (MS).

4.4.2. Use of prepositions

All thirteen occurrences of '*exam*' as a query marker in the IT lectures appeared as part of the prepositional phrase '*at (your/the) exam*'. Whereas both native English-speaking lecturers and MS feature the more standard '*in/during your exam*' or '*in your test*', the preposition *at + exam* was used by more than one IT lecturer,

suggesting L1 interference rather than idiolect. Mauranen (2015) has suggested that non-standard usage of prepositions is increasingly becoming a feature of ELF (Mauranen, 2015: 33) as an example of simplification.

4.4.3. 'ask'

Wordforms of the verb '*ask*' appear 37 times in the assessment-related moves, of which 22 were in Italian lectures. The subject of the verb '*ask*' was most frequently the first person singular in the IT examples (17 out of 22 occurrences). In comparison, the first person singular was never used in MS examples, while the plural form '*we ask*' occurred four times. These choices may indicate different institutional perspectives, with more individual responsibility in Italian lectures.

5. DISCUSSION

Previous research (Mauranen, 2006) has suggested that non-native English-speaking lecturers make particular efforts to guarantee mutual understanding. My initial hypothesis was that this would mean more explicit marking of assessment leading to greater clarity, with non-native speakers using prospective rather than retrospective references, clustering more than one marker together, using high probability, and avoiding idiomatic and/or unclear assessment references. The findings in this study confirm however that it is not useful to generalise according to native or non-native English-speaking practices *tout court* (Deroey & Johnson, 2021) but that speakers of other first languages might have different practices, perhaps depending on academic traditions in their first languages, or due to first language interference. For example, the non-native English-speaking lecturers in Malaysia, like the native English lecturers, tend to use prospective references with regard to assessment content, thus giving students time to take note. However, the Italian non-native English speakers more frequently use assessment references retrospectively. Students are more likely to miss the information signposted in this way.

A clustering or accumulation of markers in a single move around the assessment content suggests greater emphasis by the lecturer, such co-occurrence being useful for focusing students' attention. However, non-native English-speaking lecturers in both Italy and Malaysia are less likely than native speakers to make use of the cumulative effect of this reference together with other importance markers.

NZ, UK, and MS lecturers were more likely to use expressions of high probability, whereas Italian lecturers tended to 'hedge' more about assessment content, using more modal operators of medium modality. However, non-native English-speaking lecturers in general were easier to understand, since they used more standard modal verbs, adverbs and nouns to express probability than the native English speakers, who instead were more 'creative', idiomatic and therefore more opaque.

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Lexis and phraseology may vary due to native language interference. Idiomaticity might also hinder proper communication (Seidlhofer, 2002), though this might also be described as "the teacher's usual way of saying things" (Macaro, 2018: 271), and play a part in students' strategic learning behaviour, since their listening behaviour in the EMI classroom might depend more on the teacher's teaching techniques or style (Macaro, 2018). Corpus evidence clearly shows that certain lecturers have preferred ways of referring to assessment. An example is the initially opaque assessment reference '*fair game for your exam*', used twice in the same lecture by NZ Lecturer *"a"*. Students – even non-native speakers – may be 'primed' (Hoey, 2005) to interpret this correctly after several hearings.

6. CONCLUSIONS

This study has investigated the use of assessment references acting as a certain type of importance marker in the discourse of both native and non-native English-speaking lecturers in a small specialised corpus of engineering lectures. It has compared frequency of use, co-occurrence of single references and moves, retrospective or prospective relevance, modality and typical phraseology.

Importance markers guide students by indicating the lecturer's stance with regard to the contents of the presentation, highlighting the important parts, which also include the contents of course assessment. Whatever their learning styles, all students would benefit from clear signposting, co-occurrence of several assessment references, prospective reference, and high modality in referring to assessment content.

Given the importance of assessment for students' learning, assessment references might be expected to appear frequently. However, the frequency of such markers varied widely across both native and non-native English lecture discourse. Differences in frequency could be a reflection of different assessment beliefs or practices across the four sources. It is also possible that analysing a greater number of lectures, ideally including all the lectures of a single course, would have given different results.

It is not our intention to suggest that students should attend lectures and take notes only for the purposes of assessment. Indeed, if students focus on just what they need to pass the exam this would not encourage a deeper interest in learning (Ramsden, 2003). However, while lecturers should not 'teach to the test', they need to be clear as regards phraseology, positioning and co-occurrence of assessment references, since "assessment has an important role to play in teaching at all levels and preparing staff to adopt effective assessment practices is particularly important in EMI courses with international student cohorts" (Mair, 2021: 127), especially where both lecturer and students are non-native English speakers.

This study represents an initial step into examining the hitherto unexplored area of assessment references. In including them as markers of importance or

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relevance in lecturer discourse, it thus adds to previous studies by Deroey (2012, 2014, 2015), Deroey and Taverniers (2011, 2012), and Crawford Camiciottoli (2004). In also taking into account the occurrences of assessment references in moves, it follows the work of Bouziri (2019, 2020) and Ädel (2023) in shifting the focus to rhetorical aspects as urged by Liu and Hu (2021) and provides some data for further comparison.

This study is limited in the number of lectures considered and their position in the courses. In the case of summative assessment, for example, one might expect the final lectures in a course to include more reference to assessment than the introductory lectures. As regards the lecturers, this study also lacks information about their English language proficiency and experience of teaching in English, all factors which may have influenced results. Nor have we taken into account first language discourse practices in the lecture context.

As well as expanding the corpus, further research would need to investigate students' reception of assessment references and moves. It would also be important to investigate student coping strategies used in the case of idiosyncratic references, for example, as well as evaluating the effect on students of retrospective or prospective positioning in marking important content. This could be done, for example, by focusing on students' note-taking strategies.

The findings of this study have relevance for pedagogical practices and for teacher professional development, and in designing appropriate material for lecturer training courses. The preparation of teaching materials for EMI lecturers' support courses should bear in mind the importance of raising awareness among lecturers regarding the role of lexicogrammatical resources in mediating content-subjects (Lo & Lin, 2019: 155). Pedagogical applications could include more specific focus in EAP material for lecturers as regards effective language for communicating assessment.

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