A THREE-PHASE DISCOURSE ANALYSIS
OF STUDENT BUSINESS PRESENTATIONS

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Abstract: This paper is a discourse analysis study of three phases of the development of students participating in a 15-week Presentation Skills course. The four second-year business students were recorded performing presentations before instruction, in the middle of the course and at the end of the semester. The recordings were transcribed, coded and analysed to determine the changes in the structure of the content and the communicative strategies employed by the students. The results indicate that over time the participants develop a greater ability to structure their talks more clearly, yet elaborately, and signal the arrangement more overtly with the aid of organisational indicators. The functions that the students employ tend to be predominantly neutral and informative, but there is a shift to more positive, cooperative strategies in later stages. These results contribute to more effective instruction, help further develop the coding system and can represent a starting point for a more in-depth analysis of the genre.

Keywords: discourse analysis, pragmatics, language instruction, ESP, presentations

1 Introduction

This three phase discourse analysis study is part of a larger, longitudinal piece of research into the development of business presentation skills. The research is the result of the comparative analysis of the structures and strategies of business presentations of four students participating in a semester-long Presentation Skills course. Analyses and comparisons were carried out on three phases of the acquisition of this type of communication skill: before teaching, in the middle of the semester and upon the completion of the course.

Such long-term studies of the acquisition phases in the development of pragmatic skills seem to be few and far between. The most notable is Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford's 1993 longitudinal study of academic talk in which they investigate in two phases the attainment of the pragmatic competence to recognise and apply appropriate status preserving communicative strategies. In the introduction the authors discuss the fact that most of the research into pragmatic competence is of an apparently cross-sectional nature, with only Ellis and Schmidt (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993) having previously performed studies lasting over a longer period of time. Hence, the area does not seem to be widely covered and presents open prospects for investigation providing an opportunity for this research to contribute to the field with novel, though tentative findings.

The aim of the research was three-fold. First, to follow the students' progress and use the analysis to assist them in their development of the skills required for successful presenting. This would also hopefully give insights into possible areas of improvement of the Presentation Skills course for future instruction and syllabus planning. Second, to up-grade and fine-tune the previously developed and validated analytical process and coding system applied in the investigation (Sazdovska, 2004). Third, to perhaps discover wider research inferences for the field of communication skills and ascertain possible areas of future examination. These multiple aims, ranging from the micro-level of immediate instruction application to macro-level of contributing to the field of research into the development of communicative and pragmatic competence, add to the value of the investigation and will be considered in more detail in the discussion part of the paper.

There are two basic research questions:
(1)   What kind of changes are there in the structures and strategies of the students' business presentations over the length of the semester?
(2)   What type of implications do these changes have for the Presentation Skills course in which the students participated?

The second research question is particularly challenging, since there are many factors, apart from the instruction, that can contribute to the development of these skills and therefore the findings must be very tentative. Despite this, it also is a particularly exciting issue to examine, given that even the above mentioned Bardovi-Harlig and Hartford study does not include instruction or any type of explicit treatment between the two phases of the students' development. In fact, their research revealed that without overt teaching non-native speakers are likely to be slow to acquire the ability to judge the appropriateness of certain communicative strategies in the second language. Their conclusion provided a very good reason to carry out this research.

2 Theoretical background

Before discussing the methods and results of the study, it is necessary to define the basic concepts and notions mentioned here, i.e., what is meant by structures and strategies in business presentations. In the simplest of terms, the structure of a presentation is the organisation of its content into introduction, body, ending and their constituent sub-elements through grouping, ordering and linking of ideas. Strategies, on the other hand, are often referred to in the Presentation Skills textbooks as techniques and represent language functions or methods of expression by means of which the presenter can achieve certain effects on the audience or accomplish particular intentions.

These rudimental definitions are obviously lacking in the theoretical grounding needed for their use as part of a research instrument. This requirement was fulfilled through a year-long, elaborate process of developing and validating a coding system based on the notions of structure and strategy. The original starting point was a pilot study of the question and answer session of students' business presentations in which the framework for the structures and strategies was loosely built up from the two basic Presentation Skills textbooks (Comfort, 1995; Powell, 1996).

The notion of structure, however, was more thoroughly grounded in research into turn-taking (Sacks et al., 1974), sequencing of conversation openings (Schegloff, 1968) and closings (Bardovi-Harlig et al., 1991), whilst the concept of strategy was viewed as incorporating the speakers intentions, i.e. the illocutionary acts according to Speech Act Theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1969). The paper received positive feedback from Bardovi-Harlig (personal communication, 2004) and therefore the system of analysis and coding was further developed to encompass the whole of the presentation and not just the question and answer session at the end.

The development and validation of this extended coding system formed a separate study (Sazdovska, 2004). Since the organisation of the monologue part of the presentation preceding the question and answer (Q&A) session is not dictated by turn-taking, a different framework of structure needed to be employed. For this purpose the arrangement of the text content of academic writing was used as a template for the basic structure of the points of the body of the presentation including the units of signal, topic sentence, explanation, support, example and conclusion (Reid, 1988). The alternative to the basic point structure was either the chain or block type of organisation of ideas, very similar to Tirkkonen-Condit's (1985, p. 161) notions of wave and block like schemes. The wave template is a sequence or chain of ideas forming a type of list or chronological order of events, whereas the block is a grouping of ideas according to a particular argument including elements such as support, examples, causes and effects. The complete model of structural patterns can be seen in Appendix A1.

The list of strategies was also extensively elaborated during this stage. Apart from illocutionary speech acts expressing the speaker's intentions, the category was extended to include a very mixed set of members ranging from almost purely grammatical labels, such as conjunctions used for linking, to various pragmatic and rhetorical devices, such as hedging and euphemism. This very complex and lengthy list was difficult and cumbersome to use and yielded very general results, so to overcome this problem the units were categorised into 4 groups: organisational, informative, territorial and cooperative. The first two loosely correspond to Halliday's (1978) ideational and textual language functions. The category of interpersonal functions was very large, so it was further separated into territorial and cooperative types according to Widdowson's (1983) Territorial and Cooperative Imperatives. The former functions help to preserve the unique identity and personal space of the individual (territorial), while the latter decrease the distance between the speaker and the audience, emphasising the sense of belonging to the same community (cooperative or social). The territorial functions also closely correspond to Brown and Levinson's (1978) notion of negative face and cooperative or social ones to the positive politeness strategies. This classification enabled not only easier application of the instrument, but also a clearer reading of the results in terms of the tendencies for certain types of functions to appear more usually in particular stages of the presentation or with specific topics. The final list of strategies with category definitions can be seen in Appendix A2.

3 Methods

This part of the paper will discuss the investigation methods, including under separate headings, the analytical instrument, data sources, treatment (instruction) and participants in the research.

3.1 The analytical instrument

Through the process of development and validation, the two above mentioned straightforward definitions of the notions of structure and strategies have attained a more complex and compound nature, grounded in theory. They can now be used in the process of analysing and coding presentation transcriptions in two stages. First, the larger structural units are determined and labelled according to the templates in Appendix A1. These templates are flexible patterns which can be adjusted to reflect the structure of text itself. The second stage is the further separation of these units into smaller components that signal the functions i.e. the strategies (Appendix A2). During the unitising and coding a log book of notes is kept, similar to a think-aloud, to shed light on the reasoning behind the coding and to serve as support for the interpretation of the results. A sample analysis can be seen in Appendix B1 and its accompanying notes in Appendix B2.

3.2 The data sources

The texts analysed in this study are transcriptions of simulations of business presentations performed by four randomly selected students in three phases of development: before instruction, in the middle of the semester and at the end of the Presentation Skills course. This makes a total of 12 performances which were transcribed, coded in two stages (structures and strategies) and analysed. The presentations range from 3 to 16 minutes in length and consist of a monologue part, which is made up of an introduction, main points and ending, and a dialogue part, where the presenter and the audience are engaged in a question and answer session. The topics are business related, mostly covering issues such as internal company reports, investment bids, demonstrations and sales presentations.

3.3 The Presentation Skills course

The participants of the study were taking part in a 15-week-long Presentation Skills course which is part of the Core English module at the International Business School in Budapest. The college operates as an Oxford Brookes University franchise: the programmes are validated by them and the assessment is moderated by their examiners. The two primary Presentation Skills textbooks are *Effective Presentations* (Comfort, 1995), which comes with an audio and video tape, both used in class, and *Presenting in English* (Powell, 1996), the exercises of which are usually set as homework. Classes are held once a week for 90 minutes and cover topics such as introductions, linking, language, visual aids, questions, and so on. The weekly schedule of topics can be seen in Appendix C1. For the purposes of this study the most important units are the ones covering structure (units 2, 3 and 7) and those covering techniques (units 3 and 4). The students were video recorded performing in-class simulations of business presentations in week 2 prior to training (but were given instructions concerning what to prepare in week 1), in the middle of the semester, during week 9 (the so-called Mini Presentations) and at the end of the course during weeks 13 and 14 (the examination presentations). The first two sets of recordings were also used as teaching aids and were viewed in class with the students. The performances were discussed and the presenters received feedback from their peers and the teacher. The

students are assessed in two ways. There is a written test in week 12 which forms 25% of their final score and an oral examination, i.e., a 15-minute business presentation during weeks 13 and 14 (the final set of recordings) which is co-assessed by two examiners and constitutes 75% of the final mark. The marking criteria can be seen in Appendix C2 and the accompanying score sheet in Appendix C3. The over-all presentation marks that the participants were awarded by the co-examiners, as well as the points given for the criteria of structure and use of techniques, were used to support the analysis of their presentations.

3.4 The participants

The participants in the study were four (2 male and 2 female) second year students at the college. They were randomly chosen since they were not intrinsically notable, but were viewed as instrumental (McDonough & McDonough, 1997) cases in this particular research. The students' English proficiency level is advanced, as this is a prerequisite for the programme and all the subjects are taught in English. To preserve their anonymity only the initials will be used here and each of the cases will be reported separately in the next section.

4 Results

4.1 Participant A (Z.T.)

Z.T.'s first presentation was unusually short, lasting only 3 minutes. It is difficult to identify any repetitive patterns in discourse of this brevity, but there is an emergent very simple structure consisting of a cause – effect chain without any of the major introductory and finishing elements (aim, outline, length, summary, conclusion, recommendation). As can be seen in Table 1, she has a tendency at this stage to use informative, neutral functions, with some organisational and cooperative elements.

Z.T.						
	Organisational	**Informative**	**Territorial**	**Cooperative**	**Total**	**Minutes**
Pre	8	16	9	16	49	3
Mid	8	31	0	6	45	5
Post	13	36	0	16	65	7
TOTALS	29	83	9	38	159	15

Table 1. Participant A's strategies

Even though the overall number of strategies is low, the social ones appear to be rather high (as frequent as the informative ones) giving the presentation a very friendly tone, which is probably due to the choice of topic, an end-of-year commendation of employees. These complements and positive face strategies are unfortunately later at odds with a direct negation of a request from the audience, which is seen as territorial and defensive. She seems to lack the

pragmatic competence at this stage of hedging and softening the negation and for dealing with questions, in general, as she resorts to 9 territorial acts in the Q&A session.

Her second presentation was somewhat longer, lasting 5 minutes and its structure is still quite elementary containing two main block type points and again lacks some of the basic introductory and ending units. She does, however, use a hook (device for attracting the audience's attention) at the beginning. Her strategies are almost entirely informative, with some organisational and social elements. An interesting characteristic of this presentation was an aside that occurred towards the end, when the student broke the simulation to address the teacher and ask what to do next. This kind of departure was termed 'meta-talk' because even though it is outside the actual presentation it still relates to it and has the function of organising what is to follow. In this case it signalled that the student is still dependant on the instructor in terms of the proceedings.

Z.T.'s final, test presentation is a 7-minute sales presentation which was awarded rather high grades from the assessors (64% and 69%, with 5 and 4 for structure and 3 and 3.5 for use of techniques). This time, the structurally important elements of outline, summary and recommendation are included and there is a clear organisation of ideas into three points (2 blocks and a basic one) which is supported by the use of organisational strategies to signal changes in topic and link the points. There is also a notable rise in the cooperative strategies (to 16), a sign that the student is attempting to bridge the gap with the audience, which is necessary for a sales presentation.

In the case of participant A there is clear evidence of improvement, with the presentations getting longer, more developed, yet clearer and supported by organisational and occasional cooperative strategies.

4.2 Participant B (R.B.)

R.B.'s first presentation was quite a success for an absolute beginner presenter. It was a direct sales presentation with three main points (two incomplete basic ones and a chain). Typically for a novice, the outline and summary are missing, but there is a short conclusion and the arrangement is supported by the use of 12 organisational strategies. The talk is also rich in cooperative aspects making the products sound particularly appealing to the potential buyers. Unfortunately though, there are also several territorial elements mostly used defensively and signalling the student's uncertainty at this stage of development. Table 2 shows a full account of her strategies.

Participant B's second presentation was also a type of advertising, an informative talk on the school to attract new applicants. It lasted for 7 minutes and has a very simple and clear structure consisting of two main chain-like points. The introduction has an exceptionally short outline and there is a summary at the end. There is a hook (device for attracting attention) at the beginning in the form of a rhetorical question, and the number of cooperative and organisational strategies is somewhat lower than in her first attempt, probably due to the concentration on developing the structure. On the other hand, the number of territorial, self-protective strategies is significantly reduced here, and the student has clearly gained some confidence.

R.B.						
	Organisational	**Informative**	**Territorial**	**Cooperative**	**Total**	**Minutes**
Pre	12	17	6	15	50	6
Mid	10	27	1	12	50	7
Post	23	29	0	26	78	9
TOTALS	45	73	7	53	178	22

Table 2. Participant B's strategies

R.B.'s final presentation deserves special attention. It is again a sales presentation, lasting 9 minutes, and is the highest graded performance in the whole year receiving 78% (above 80% is almost never given) from both assessors, with clear maximums of 5 for structure as well as use of techniques. The arrangement of ideas in the content of the talk was exceptionally well planned and therefore the structure is at once elaborate, yet clear. A map of this outstanding organisation can be seen in Appendix D. Almost perfectly balanced and symmetrical, the talk begins with all the required elements of a good introduction. The first body point, moving 'deeper' into the presentation is a short chain of two instances. The second point is remarkably well structured. It consists of three sub-points (A, B, C) with a basic structure, but B and C sub-points have further constituents B2 (basic template) and C2 (chain type). In this way significant depth is achieved (seen in the gradual progression to the right in the Appendix D map), yet clarity is maintained via equal proportioning and very deliberate composition planning beforehand.

The clarity of the structure is also assisted by the highest number of organisational strategies (23 in total, almost equal to her 29 informative ones) used to signal turning points and to link the ideas. The presenter also engaged the audience and frequently interacted with them, resulting in a sum of 26 social or cooperative techniques (rhetorical questions, offers, suggestions, recommendations, complements) contributing to the success of the performance and the positive effect on the listeners. At the same time, there are no territorial devices in evidence, meaning that the presenter's defensive barriers have been brought down enabling open communication. This presentation can be used as a training model, especially as a textbook example of a multi-level-marketing or direct sales presentation.

Participant B was obviously a talented presenter to start with, but there are still many indications of her progress during the semester. Her confidence has improved enabling her to feel more secure without the use of defensive tactics, and the structure of her presentations is increasingly more sophisticated and supported by a very high number of organisational elements by the end of the course.

4.3 Participant C (D.O.)

D.O.'s first pre-teaching presentation is an internal company presentation and more akin to a meeting. This 6 minute performance has two wave-like points, the first of which is a cause–effect chain. The key elements of outline, summary, conclusion and recommendation are missing, but more importantly, the topic sentences are too short and not prominent enough, contributing to a 'scattered' impression of the talk. There are several organisational and cooperative devices in

use, but a unique characteristic of this presentation is the number of territorial strategies (12 in comparison to the 18 informative ones). The talk is full of commands, orders and warnings which are highly untypical of presentations and in this case are probably due to the student's choice of topic, i.e. delegating tasks to the employees. This unusually high number of territorial techniques, compared to the previous two presenters, can clearly be seen in Table 3.

D.O.						
	Organisational	**Informative**	**Territorial**	**Cooperative**	**Total**	**Minutes**
Pre	7	18	12	9	46	6
Mid	8	25	12	15	60	7
Post	9	42	1	8	60	16
TOTALS	24	85	25	32	166	29

Table 3. Participant C's strategies

Participant C's mid-semester presentation is in many aspects very similar to his first attempt. The topic is again an internal company presentation, this time to resolve a problem of shift scheduling. It is 7 minutes long and has an outline, conclusion and recommendation, but no summary. It is difficult to determine the limits of the main points, since they seem to be short and incomplete, yet on closer inspection there appear to be three. The first two consist merely of listing a possible solution to the problem and then providing a very brief and rudimental explanation for rejecting it. The third point is slightly better developed with an example and support, but there is an insufficient number of organisational signals to mark out the structure. Again, this presenter shows a tendency towards the use of territorial devices, which might be seen as necessary in a problem solving situation. This time, however, these very assertive techniques are softened more frequently, resulting in a somewhat higher number of cooperative strategies, predominantly hedges and mitigators.

D.O.'s test presentation is by far the longest of the talks held, lasting just over 16 minutes, yet in terms of structural development and number of strategies, it is similar to his previous performances, due to the unprecedented length of each unit, as well as the laboriously slow delivery. An interesting structural note of both this and his second presentation is that at the beginning of each talk the student has a tendency to give an extremely extensive introduction including a lengthy explanation or justification, including far too much background information. This unit was not even labelled in the coding, since it did not appear anywhere else and there was no conventionally agreed name for it. The two main body parts are a chain and a basic structure and again there are insufficient organisational linguistic signals to clarify the structure. The topic, this time round, is an informative session, resulting in a significant increase in the neutral informative strategies, and an almost complete elimination of the territorial elements. The aim of the presentation is somewhat unclear though, as business presentations are hardly ever made for the pure purpose of informing. This type of pattern would be more typical of an academic lecture. This was the weakest of the examination presentations analysed here and was awarded average grades with 61% and 63% overall and 3.5 and 4 for structure and 2 and 4 for use of techniques. During the semester the student progressed moderately, with some development of structure and elimination of territorial techniques.

4.4 Participant D (Z.S.)

The last of the participants chose an investment bid for a sports hall as the topic of his first presentation. It is an 8-minute presentation with only wave type parts and, typically for an initial attempt, it is missing an outline and a summary. The strategies are predictably mostly informative, but there are also many organisational elements, predominantly ordinals and chronological signals in support of the chain structure. There are some territorial devices, but their effects are softened by friendly social strategies. The unique feature of this presentation (and indeed Z.S.'s second presentation) is the sheer number of total functions used during the 8 minutes, a surprising 85 overall. This is significantly higher than the average 60 achieved by other presenters in the same amount of time. The high frequency of strategy appearance is not due to their shorter length, but to the exceptionally fast delivery of the student (averaging just under 3 words per second). Although not within the scope of this study, it would be an interesting avenue to pursue the issue of the number of functions per minute that can reasonably be expected to be comprehended by the audience. Participant D's statistics can be seen in Table 4.

His second presentation is hard to classify as a business one according to the choice of topic, i.e. changing a flat car tyre, although one might imagine circumstances under which advertising presentations could deal with a similar subject. The structure is rather weak, lacking the crucial elements of outline and summary, and the conclusion is very short. The whole presentation is a list of directions of what to do, forming a very long chain organisation. The strategies are not significantly different from his first performance, including all the categories, but being predominantly informative.

As in Participant A's second presentation, here too there is an aside and the simulation is broken. In this particular case however, it is not seen as meta-talk because the discussion outside the presentation framework is not about the presentation itself, or about how to proceed, but is an attempt (a successful one) to engage the teacher in a real conversation about cars and changing tyres. The choice of topic and this conversational attempt can be explained by the student missing his original presentation time due to a puncture and using the occasion to excuse himself. On these grounds the presentation could have been excluded from the data sources, but since the simulation break-down only occurred towards the very end, and the rest of the talk satisfies the basic criteria, it was included in the study.

Z.S.						
	Organisational	**Informative**	**Territorial**	**Cooperative**	**Total**	**Minutes**
Pre	20	45	6	14	85	8
Mid	17	41	8	19	85	8
Post	17	28	6	10	61	7
TOTALS	54	114	20	43	231	23

Table 4: Participant D strategies

Z.S.'s test presentation is incredibly similar to his pre-teaching attempt. The topic is exactly the same and he even used the same visuals. It therefore represents a unique opportunity for comparison and evaluating the student's development. This time the structure is more regular

and there is an outline and a conclusion, even though the summary is still missing. The chain simplicity of the first performance has been replaced by a somewhat more developed and more argumentative basic point structure including support and examples for the topics. The number of organisational devices is the same as previously, but since the overall number of strategies is significantly lower, and the speed of delivery reduced, the organisational units play a more pronounced role in sustaining the structure. The other proportions of techniques used are comparable to his previous talks. An interesting aspect of participant D's performance style is the number of incomplete and aborted functions. In most on-line speech production it is not unusual to have incomplete sentences and stop and restart the expression of ideas, but, usually, when the speech is resumed the original function is preserved. In Z.S.'s first presentation there were 6 un-resumed functions, in the second 9 and in the final one 6 again. This is an unusually high number compared to the other presenters (0 to maximum 2) and could be linked to the high speed of delivery. It also contributed to the structure sounding less clear than it actually might have been. The final presentation reached 67%, with 3 and 2 for structure and 1 and 1.5 for use of techniques, one of the lowest for this criterion, probably because of the incomplete functions.

The student's overall development through the semester is difficult to judge. There is an improvement in the structure, from the simpler chain arrangement to a more exemplified and supported style. The structures, on the other hand, exhibit hardly any change at all during the three phases of analysis.

The triangulation of these results, as well as the wider investigation into the Presentation Skills course in general, is part of a related longitudinal study of presentation skills development which includes additional sources of data such as lesson plans, log-books, attendance records, notes from the group discussions on the viewing of the videos and feedback forms.

5 Discussion

The results of the study indicate that in all four cases there are notable changes in the structure of the presentations over the three phases. Prior to instruction the students do not include the key elements of outline, aim, length of presentation, question time, summary, conclusion and recommendation. The structures tend to be more chain like with unclear linking. By the end of the course very few of the major units are missing and the students use a more varied and elaborate organisation. Patterns in the changes in strategy are, however, somewhat harder to identify and express. The most evident is the growth in the number of organisational elements used to highlight the structure, most commonly ordinals, chronological signals and other types of links. Occasionally there is an increase in the friendly cooperative strategies and a decrease of the defensive territorial ones, but this is not the case with all the participants. There is a clear gender division in the tendency to use the territorial devices with the male students using a total of 45 compared to the sum of 8 used by the female students.

This summary of the results provides an answer to the first research question regarding the changes in the three phases. The findings relating to the second research question concerning the teaching implications will be discussed in the next part of the paper, to be followed by points pertaining to the other two levels of the multiple aims, i.e., the implications that this research has

for the analytical coding instrument and the possible wider connotations it might have for further research into the field.

5.1 Teaching implications

The immediate teaching application possibilities for the results of the research are numerous. First, the individual students can benefit from such a detailed analysis of their discourse. The video recording of the first two phases were viewed and discussed in class, but due to the incredible time demands of transcribing and coding, not all the analyses had been finalised by these stages. Participant A's analysis for example was completed before her final examination presentation and the results with suggestions for improvement were sent to her via email, most probably contributing to the clearer structure and general advancement of her last performance. The full results can now be given to all the participants both for member check purposes and as indication of further improvement possibilities. This type of detailed discourse analysis can prove to be a very useful teaching aid, but is obviously impossible to do on a large-scale basis for several groups of students taking Presentation Skills classes over a semester. It does, however, hold useful potential for individual consultation and personalised training of presenters within the business community.

In terms of the Presentation Skills course and relating the results to the instruction, i.e. the second research question, the study has several repercussions. First, the fact that the improvements in the structure are more evident and pronounced can directly be related to the classes, more precisely to the amount of instruction. Structure is taught explicitly in three units (2, 3 and 7) and mentioned again at the end of the course (unit 9). A full unit is never actually devoted purely to strategies. These are set for homework as segments of several chapters and are covered in class only during some portions of units 3 and 4. It is hardly surprising then that the students should show more progress in developing structure than employing techniques. The amount of teaching is also disproportionate to the weighting in the assessment, since both structure and use of techniques are awarded maximum 5 points each, but there is considerably more input for the first criterion. The syllabus ought to be adjusted in view of these findings.

Another factor contributing to the slower development in the use of appropriate pragmatic strategies might be in connection with the debate on the teachability of these skills in the second language classroom (Kasper & Rose, 2001). It is clear that acquiring the ability to organise the content of the talk into clear and logical segments is not as dependent on cultural and interpersonal aspects as is the development of the pragmatic competence to judge the appropriateness of certain techniques and speech acts. This latter ability is not only more complex, but also "takes a much longer time to acquire than does macrolevel competence" (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993, p. 302) needed for structuring the talk. For the Presentation Skills course, this would mean teaching these elements with greater focus and also much later than weeks 4 and 5, perhaps towards the very end of the semester when students can fully appreciate the importance of using certain language strategies to achieve the aim of the presentation more successfully.

5.2 Instrument implications

The results of this study also have their consequences for the further development of the coding system used in the analysis of this particular type of discourse. The more extensively the instrument is implemented, the more enriched it becomes. With each application some fine-tuning needs to be performed so that the method is perfected and the coding can better reflect the actual text. In this study, it became apparent that the idea of splitting the interpersonal functions into territorial and cooperative ones according to Widdowson's (1983) imperatives for increasing and bridging social distance was useful in determining the general tone of the presentation and its effect on the audience in terms of the presenter's distancing. This taxonomy is also advantageous in identifying, through the coding, whether the specific intentions most frequently expressed by the speaker match the overall communicative purpose of the presentation. So, for example, employing defensive territorial tactics might be inappropriate for a sales presentation, but quite acceptable in a press conference held to protect one company's interests against its competitors. It is an interesting prospect to investigate which types of business presentations are characterised by a higher frequency of certain categories of functions.

Apart from highlighting the above advantage of the instrument, the study also indicated a slight weakness stemming from the overuse of the 'link' label in the category of organisational strategies. This proved to be, by far, the most common representative of the group and used so frequently that it became obvious that it is an umbrella term encompassing a wide range of connections in the discourse. Its frequency and generality necessitate further decomposition of this term to yield more specific indications of the relationships of the units. A model for the development of this type of structural relationship signalling can perhaps be found in Mann and Thompson's (1986) list of relational predicates (p. 67). This would mean including as organisational strategies not only overt explicit links, but also techniques of implicit relational structuring. Such detailed coding would be more flexible and exact in mirroring the reasoning behind the arrangement of the content of the presentation.

Another possible expansion of the coding instrument would be to take a top-down approach to complement the current bottom-up system. So, for each analysed presentation a method of denoting the context should be devised, including the role of the presenter and the audience, the type of presentation and subject area, and most importantly, the macro-illocution, i.e. the overall aim of the presentation. Determining this last element would enable matching the types and frequency of illocutionary acts employed with the original purpose of the presentation in order to evaluate its consistency. Such a procedure would enable the instrument to be implemented for genre analysis purposes, which leads into the next topic of this paper, the research implications.

5.3 Research implications

There are two further possible avenues to pursue in the wider investigation into this field. As just mentioned, one of these could be genre analysis, namely an endeavour to define the genre of business presentations, by examining the text characteristics with the aid of this coding instrument and also the functions that these forms of communication perform. This genre defining research would not only fill a gap in the field (since presentation skills have not yet been

defined on the basis of either theoretical or empirical research), but would also lead to findings that could be ploughed back into the teaching of the subject in the future. This could be seen as the likely way forward, since according to Swales, one of the major aims of genre analysis is "to gain insights into the nature of genre that will be useful in ESP materials writing and teaching". (as cited in Dudley-Evans, 1987, p. 1)

The second evident research possibility is again a defining exploration, but this time enquiring into the nature of presentation skills in terms of communicative and pragmatic competence. Presentations are speech events (Hymes, 1972, p. 56) that take place in a particular speech situation and have their own norms of interpretation which are known within the business speech community. In order to be able to assess the appropriateness of certain functions, not just according to the second language norms, but also in terms of their acceptability for this particular professional community, definitions need to be provided both of the speech event itself and of the social group which partakes in this form of communication. A more thorough understanding of the standards and principles of the acceptable language behaviour and oratory performance would be beneficial also for teaching purposes in enabling the instructor to more clearly and explicitly convey these norms to the students.

6 Conclusion

The results of this study indicate that, with overt instruction provided in the Presentation Skills course, students gradually develop over the course of the semester their ability to better structure a presentation and link its parts more adequately. They progress towards more complex, yet clearly organised arrangements of the content of the presentation and manage by the end of the course to include all the key elements. Due to the syllabus design and the difficulty of providing adequate pragmatic instruction in the second language classroom, progress in the use of linguistic techniques is harder to determine, yet there is, on occasion, a shift from predominantly informative strategies to devices that help support the structure and bridge the gap with the audience.

These findings, however, are tentative, since they are based on the in-depth analysis of only four cases. It might be considered as a liability to the study that they cannot unfortunately be generalised. Nevertheless, achieving generalisability was not one of the original aims of this research. It is an exploratory investigation into the developmental stages of presentation skills acquisition which is supposed to open up new research possibilities and inroads into the fields of ESP, communicative competence, discourse analysis and pragmatics. The discussion of the results, in the previous section of this paper, has hopefully identified some of these research opportunities to be followed up in the future.

Proofread for the use of English by: Caroline Bodoczky, International Business School, Budapest.

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 APPENDIX A1

STRUCTURE UNITS

INTRODUCTION

Opening
Subject
Aim
Length
Outline
Question time
Hook

BODY - Argumentative (block)

Signal
Topic sentence
Subtopic (against)
Internal link
Subtopic (for)
Conclusion
Signal

BODY - Cause – Effect (block)

Signal
Topic sentence
Causes (list)
Internal link
Effects (list)
Conclusion
Signal

BODY - Cause - Effect (chain)

Signal
Topic sentence
Cause – Effect A
Cause – Effect B
Cause – Effect C
Conclusion
Signal

ENDING

Signal
Summary
Conclusion
Recommendation
Signal

BODY - Basic

Signal
Topic sentence
Explanation
Support
Example
Conclusion
Signal

BODY – Chronological / List (chain)

Signal
Topic sentence
Time point A
Time point B
Time point C
Conclusion
Signal

BODY - Argumentative (chain)

Signal
Topic sentence
Sub-point A
A opposition
Sub-point B
B opposition
Sub-point C
C opposition
Conclusion
Signal

QUESTION SESSION

Question invitation
Question
Welcoming
Clarification request
Clarification
Answer
Check for understanding
Check response
Cycle end signal
Q2; Q3; Q4…
Closing

APPENDIX A2

Strategy Unit Categories

ORGANISATIONAL	INFORMATIVE	TERRITORIAL	COOPERATIVE
Recommendation request	Giving context / focus	Intensifying, strengthening	Euphemism
Question invitation	Adding	Avoiding 1	Being ironic
Focus shift 2	Referring	Hedging, mitigating 3?	Joking
Repetition request	Explaining	Giving alternatives	Enticing 11
Opinion request	Opinion stating	Layered question 4	Welcoming
Explanation request	Quoting	Generalising	Addressing
Referring back	Exemplifying	Being vague 5	Greeting
Link	Paraphrase	Escaping 6	Announcing
Leave taking	Listing	Negating	Congratulating
Information request	Narrating (story)	Apology	Agreeing
Delaying	Describing	Acknowledging	Confirming
Giving up the floor	Excluding	Posing a problem	Thanking
Taking the floor	Including	Softening ?	Hoping 14
Focus narrowing	Comparing	Probing	Proposing a solution
Solution request	Contrasting	Contradicting	Recommendation
Indicating (showing on visuals)	Grouping, categorising	Calling on higher authority 7	Hypothetical question?
Summarising	Introducing 12	Pushing for an answer	Suggesting
Proposal request	Stating purpose	Emphasising ?	Complimenting
Waiting request 10	Stating condition 13	Warning	Proposing
Definition request	Stating reason	Criticizing	
	Concluding	Relativizing 8	
	Predicting	Challenging 9	
	Clarifying	Regret	
	Stating cause	Doubting 15	
	Stating effect		
	Defining		
	Stating topic		

APPENDIX A2 [continued]

I. Definitions of Categories:

a) **Organisational –** technical devices that help organise the discourse, in terms of ordering, linking and turn-taking in the Q&A session.

b) **Informative –** providing information in a neutral manner, without any additional function or personal engagement, primary focus is on content.

c) **Territorial –** interpersonal strategies used to protect the territory of the individuals and maintain their independence (negative face).

d) **Cooperative –** interpersonal strategies used to bridge the gap between the speaker and the audience, focusing on group (positive face).

Categories a) and b) are neutral, since they are not emotionally "loaded" and their primary function is to organise the discourse or convey information. Halliday's functions of language, c) and d) categories, on the other hand, have a social or interpersonal value. Those used to strengthen the individual's position, power and independence against others are territorial (C), and politeness can also be used in the opposite direction, to emphasize the group as opposed to the individual. (Brown and Levinson's *Politeness*)

II. Definitions / Examples of Units:

1. Avoiding – refusing to deal with a topic by talking about something loosely connected.
2. Focus shift – from negative to positive or vice versa, or from one area to another.
3. Hedging, mitigating – softening or distancing by means of 'if I may say so'.
4. Layered question – two or more (up to 6 found) questions within a single question turn.
5. Being vague – being unclear or too general.
6. Escaping – trying to stop the presentation and leave prematurely.
7. Calling on higher authority – shifting responsibility or sounding more authoritative.
8. Relativising – usually introduced by 'depends on' to reduce definiteness.
9. Challenging – provoking the interlocutor usually by means of short questions or tags.
10. Waiting request – 'let me check my notes'; 'please hold your questions till the end'.
11. Enticing – making something sound appealing, but not providing complete information.
12. Introducing (oneself or others) – stating name & position, usually in the introduction.
13. Stating condition – usually 'if' sentences or 'as long as'.
14. Hoping – 'hopefully' signalling optimism, bonding or supporting a particular side.
15. Doubting – apart from expressing scepticism can also signal mild criticism.

APPENDIX B1

Z.T. Pre-coding

Structure	Transcription	Strategies
Opening	P: So, good afternoon ladies and gentlemen.	greeting
Subject	Today I would like to tell you about our outstanding achievements and new opportunities for this department.	Stating purpose (1)
Aim; Length; Outline; Question time; Hook (1)		
(2) Signal (3)		
Topic sentence (4)	As most of you might remember,// last year's aaa efficiency study aa showed rather disappointing results, // as one hundred and three days of the year they were aaa regarded as a waste of time (shows quote sign with hands).	Giving context, focus // explaining (2)// Exemplifying (3)
Cause – Effect A	However, // due to the aa better working conditions and aa more aaa more flexible opportunities enjoyed during January // this number decreased to eighty days.	Contrasting link// stating cause // staging effect
Cause – Effect B	This already gives us a better picture about the efforts of the enthusiastic staff members here (palm indicates audience) are even more important // (hand cheering)… For me it seems that you get more committed to the your job // and this really makes me glad, aaa //so what I would like to emphasise is that <u>you</u> guys are really doing a great job now (hands cheering).	Stating cause // paraphrasing // stating effect // Emphasising (6)
Cause – Effect C	To be more precise, // the e<u>ffici</u>ency result of this year aa are so good // that our management decided to introduce a new aa award system. // This means that from now on you will have the opportunity to vote for the worker of the year.	Focusing link (4) // stating cause // stating effect // Concluding (5)
Conclusion (5)	At first you may think ah well this is not such a great deal, // but who will think it's not such a bad sounding title if I add that these workers will get one week off with aa a paid holiday.	Giving context // enticing (7)
Signal (6)		
Topic sentence	I bet now everybody is interested as I have here the winners for this year here in this envelope (opens envelope, reads).	Announcing
Point A	First, // aaa Z.O., the head of our su<u>ccess</u>ful marketing company group is awarded for increasing our market share by 33% (walks over to Z.O., hands him the envelope). // Congratulations!	Listing // announcing (8) // congratulating

Key: red figures refer to the structure comments and blue figures refer to the strategies comments listed in Appendix B2.

APPENDIX B2

<div align="center">

Researcher's notes on Z.T. Pre-coding

</div>

Structure

1. Missing intro elements
2. hard to decide what the following elements are; seems to be some sort of chain, maybe cause – effect, chronology? No… I'll try coding with c-e chain
3. signal not there (reason for hard identification)
4. topic sentence either not present or I can't find it; no c-e (hard to say what caused what in this sentence so I'll take it as topic, but it seems more like problem or background
5. might be a conclusion but also resembles a hook
6. both end and new point signals missing

Strategies

1. stating purpose or topic?
2. could also be describing
3. paraphrasing?
4. 'link' in organisational cat. is too general, might be needed to specify what the link is doing: logical, chronological, narrowing etc. Goes back to point A as well, originally I just put in contrasting there, but it's a link.
5. paraphrasing? If paraphrasing is so frequent it might be a 'higher' category, like 'informing'
6. complementing?
7. rhetorical (hypothetical) question?
8. complementing?

APPENDIX C1

Schedule for Presentation Skills classes

Week	Date	*Effective Presentations* (Comfort, 1995)	Homework: *Presenting in English* (Powell, 1996) *Business Builder* (Emmerson, 1999)
Week 1	13 – 16 Sep	Introduction	Find books
Week 2	20 – 22 Sep	Unit 1: What's the point?	1.1 to1.6 (BB 7.12 topics)
Week 3	27 – 29 Sep	Unit 2: Making a start	6.1 to 6.6 (BB 7.1a; 7.1b)
Week 4	4 – 6 Oct	Unit 3: Linking the parts	6.7 to 6.12 (BB 7.2a; 7.2b)
Week 5	11 – 13 Oct	Unit 4: The right kind of language	3.1; 3.2; 3.3; 3.6; 5.1 to 5.5 (BB 7.3)
Week 6	18 – 20 Oct	Unit 5: Visuals	2.1 to 2.6
Week 7	25 – 27 Oct	Unit 6: Body language	4.1 to 4.11
Week 8	1 – 3 Nov	Unit 7: Finishing off	Prepare for mini presentation
Week 9	8 – 10 Nov	**MINI PRESENTATIONS**	5.6 to 5.15
Week 10	15 – 17 Nov	Unit 8: Question time	7.1; 7.3; 7.4; 7.6 to 7.9
Week 11	22 – 24 Nov	Unit 9: Putting it all together	Prepare for test
Week 12	3 Dec	**TEST**	Prepare for presentation
Week 13	6 – 8 Dec	**STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**	Prepare for presentation
Week 14	13 – 15 Dec	**STUDENT PRESENTATIONS**	-
Week 15	20 – 22 Dec	Consultations	-

APPENDIX C2

Marking criteria for presentations

CRITERIA		5	4	3	2	1	0
STRUCTURE	• Clear introduction, aim, body, ending • Logical arrangement • Thread of argument easy to follow by means of excellent signposting and wide ranging signalling devices • Appropriate timing of presentation, appropriate proportion of structural elements						
VISUALS	• Stimulating design • Easy to read • Support key points • Professionally handled						
CONTACT WITH AUDIENCE	• Rapport is created • Hooks appropriately used • Context and content relevant, geared to the audience, seriously and consciously covered • Very clear objective, relevant to audience						
USE OF VOICE	• Only minimal reference to notes, no reading of presentation • Appropriate chunking, stressing, pausing, pacing, pronunciation and intonation • Interest arousing voice						
QUESTIONS	• Questions are handled professionally • Inviting questions openly, welcoming • Clarifying questions • Checking if questioner is satisfied with the answer • Giving diplomatic answers						
BODY LANGUAGE	• Appropriate body language • Appearance, gestures, movement, use of space • Facial expressions eye contact • Posture						
USE OF LANGUAGE	• Fluent with only one or two minor grammatical errors • Wide range of vocabulary						
USE OF TECHNIQUES	• Evidence of using at least 3 of the techniques appropriate to context and audience. (Use of repetition, dramatic contrasts, tripling, machine-gunning, build-ups, knock-downs, simplification, focusing, "thee", intensifying adjectives, softening and rhetorical questions)						

OVERALL IMPRESSION	This presenter can be considered a professional presenter with appropriate body language, presentation and language skills.	**0-10%***

* This percentage mark is added to the converted BABS percentage (the final result) to improve the mark. It should be used in exceptional cases to round up border line cases if we feel it is appropriate.

APPENDIX C2 [continued]

Calculating the mark

The marking is based on the 0-5 scale, and the final mark can be established by averaging the separate marks for the SIX criteria, except for Overall Impression, which can be added after the mark has been converted to a percentage.

Conversion table:

0-5 scale	Percentage
5.00	70-(80)%
4.00	60-69%
3.00	50-59%
2.00	40-49%
1.00	20-39%
0	0-19%

APPENDIX C3

Score sheet for presentations

NAME	CRITERIA								Average	Overall Impression 0-10%	TOTAL
	Structure 0-5	Visuals 0-5	Contact with Audience 0-5	Use of Voice 0-5	Questions 0-5	Body Language 0-5	Use of Language 0-5	Use of Techniques 0-5			
Examiner A:											
R.B.	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	4.62	+10	77%
D.O.	3.5	1	3	3	3	3	4	2	2.81	+3	61%
Z.S.	3	3.5	4	3	2	5	2	1.5	3	+5	67%
Z.T.	5	5	5	4	4.5	4.5	4.5	3.5	4	+9	69%
Examiner B:											
R.B.	5	5	5	5	4	4	5	5	4.8	+10	78%
D.O.	4	1	4	4	3	5	5	4	3.8	+5	63%
Z.S.	2	4	4	5	4.5	4.5	3.5	1	4.2	+5	67%
Z.T.	4	4.5	5	4.5	3	3.5	4	3	3.9	+5	64%

APPENDIX D

R.B.'s test structure map

Opening
Subject
Outline
Length
Question time Signal
                              Topic sentence 1
                              Time point a
                              Time point b
                              Conclusion   Signal
                                               Topic sentence 2 (3 points)
                                                              Topic sentence A
                                                              Explanation
                                                              Support
                                                              Example

                                                              Signal
                                                              Topic sentence B1
                                                              Explanation
                                                              Support
                                                              Example   Signal
                                                                               Topic sentence B2
                                                                               Explanation
                                                                               Example
                                                                               Explanation
                                                                               Example
                                               Signal
                                               Topic sentence C1
                                               Explanation
                                               Support
                                               Example
                                               Support   Signal
                                                                Topic sentence C2
                                                                Time point a
                                                                Time point b
                                                                Time point c
Signal
Summary
        Summary
Recommendation
Signal
Question invitation
Closing