

BBC Learning English

Talk about English

Academic Listening

Part 5 - Lectures: marker phrases



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This is not an accurate word-for-word transcript of the programme.

ANNOUNCER:

It's time for **Academic Listening** - a series for students at English-speaking universities. For more on the structure of a lecture, join Susan Fearn and members of the World Service class of 2001.

Susan: During the series we're entering the world of further education to focus on some of the linguistic problems experienced there and in today's programme we visit University College London. Today we look at "marker phrases" - essential vocabulary that will help you predict and understand the gradual development of the lecturer's argument.

And we've sent our reporter to University College London, where she joins students in a lecture about the Roots of English. She'll be setting them - and you - a comprehension task to help develop listening skills.

As we've said before, it's a good idea to try and predict the content of a lecture from its title. Our reporter Julia Adamson asked some of the students at University College to do just that before their lecture began. She spoke to Sara,

who's from Sweden, Denis, a student from Belarus and first, Rabia Bourkiza.

CLIP: Julia interviewing students

I'm Rabia Bourkiza I'm from Algeria. At the moment I'm waiting for the lecture and the lecture will be about the Roots of English. I think this will be about where English language comes from, and what we are speaking come from.

Can you tell me about the lecture you're about to go into, Sara?

Of course. It's about 'Roots of English' I think it's about linguistics and where language is coming from and also about certain words the meaning of the words and how the English language has developed during the centuries.

Do you know what the subject of the lecture is?

It's going to be, I think, about how the language... where the language came from, about linguistics maybe, and just maybe some grammar use - how it came and how it was born.

Susan: The title of the lecture helped those students to make predictions about the content. All three expect to hear lecturer Don Hill describe the origins of the English language - where it's come from and how it has developed.

CLIP: Lecturer

Well today's talk is about English. I'll start by describing the roots of English, the people ...

Susan: Before we return to the lecture theatre, here's a chance for *you* to do some listening practice. You'll hear the text of the introduction to Don Hill's lecture and I'd like you to try to identify the key content of the talk. What are the two main subjects that Don Hill is going to discuss ? If you've got a pen, why not write these down as headings so you can start making some notes.

CLIP: Lecturer

Well today's talk is about English. I'll start by describing the roots of English, the people who spoke the various languages or dialects from which English has come. Then go onto the registers - that is the styles of English. I'll simplify that very much and talk about two registers or styles in particular. I'll then raise the question whether one register is better than the other and give reasons for thinking that there's no simple answer to that question and then I'll sum up and that will be it.

OK - so the roots of English to start with. Now, why has English become a world language?

Susan: Well, you can compare your answers with Sara, one of the students Julia spoke to after the lecture.

CLIP: Julia interviewing students

Sara, can you tell me what the lecture was about ?

Of course. The lecture was about roots of English and also about the registers of English, and that means the roots were mostly about the historical perspective - about how England was invaded about different people - so mostly about the historical. And also the register is about the higher & lower level of English; how people use the English language.

Susan: Sara explains that the main subjects of the lecture were the *roots* of English, its historical origins, and the *registers* of English - a higher and a lower register. Don Hill told us more. As you listen you could add more details to your notes.

CLIP: Lecturer

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OK - so the roots of English to start with. Now, why has English become a world language?

Susan: Lecturers use linking words and phrases, sometimes described as marker phrases, or semantic markers.

CLIP: Christine Reeves

By semantic markers I mean using words which express the relationship between sentences. It could be a word like 'because' which indicates to you that what is going to follow is a reason.

Susan: Chris Reeves teaches at Bell Norwich, a language school in Eastern England.

CLIP: Christine Reeves

If he says 'so' then you know that you're going to expect the result. It could be a contrast, so if you're listening for contrasting words it would be a word like 'although', 'nevertheless' or 'however'. If he uses semantic markers like 'moreover', 'in addition', then you know he's going to make another point and it could be another main point - so it's very important to listen for those kind of words when you're listening to a lecture.

Susan: Chris Reeves believes that awareness of semantic markers can help you to follow a lecture. Speakers use marker phrases to introduce contrasting ideas, additional points, cause and effect or result. You might be used to seeing these

phrases in books, but recognising them in a spoken lecture can be tricky - especially if the lecturer speaks very quickly. Awareness of marker phrases like these can be helpful for understanding lectures, as one of the Language Centre students explained to our reporter.

CLIP: Julia interviewing student Denis

Some of the phrases we hear are 'on the one hand, on the other hand', 'in conclusion', this kind of stuff.

And why is that useful, knowing those phrases ?

Because this is how you make your speech brighter and more understandable for the students. It makes more sense for them - it's not just the text, academic text, it makes it more general for them; more understandable.

ANNOUNCER:

And that brings us to the end of this programme, in which we've focused on marker phrases and suggested that an awareness of a wide range of these linking phrases can help you.