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Specialised syntax for specialised texts? A comparison of the preferred syntactic patterns in proceedings article and conference presentation introductions¹.

This study compares the syntactic choices adopted by speakers in the introductory sections to their conference presentations with those made in the introductions to the corresponding proceedings articles. Within the setting of an international physics conference I will evaluate the relative importance of content-related features, epistemological concerns and specific contextual constraints on speakers' and writers' decisions to privilege certain syntactic patterns. The syntactic features focussed upon include: the active/passive voice distinction, noun-group and personal pronoun distribution, extraposition, pseudo-cleft constructions and the use of 'existential' *there*.

Introduction

It is now widely acknowledged that different LSP domains should not be considered as forming any autonomous sub-system of a given so-called general language (Lerat 1995, Eggs 2002). The language patterns used for example in physics research articles in English are not specific to this discipline or text type but form part of the common core of the English language. However, certain syntactic and lexical features can also be considered to be highly appropriate, and indeed characteristic of a particular text, and isolating these features is an essential role of the LSP analyst.

In order to capture these distinctive features of specialised LSP text, a contrastive approach can often be particularly insightful. Such comparisons can either be made horizontally - comparing for example the functioning of research articles across different disciplines (e.g. medicine versus economics) - or vertically - comparing different types of specialised text that occur within a particular field or discipline (e.g. research articles versus popularised scientific accounts). In this article I will focus on some specialised uses of syntax from the vertical perspective. Within the context of an international conference in physics, I will thus compare some of the specific syntactic patterns used in the introductory sections of oral presentations made at the conference with those employed in the corresponding article introduction, as published in the Proceedings following the conference².

The article will be broadly situated within a genre perspective (Swales 1990; Bhatia 1993), whereby a number of syntactic features of the two specialised events are examined in relation to certain discourse features of the precise communicative contexts. The introductory sections to conference presentations and research articles can be considered as representing a particularly crucial sub-genre in scientific and academic discourse. Introductions have a vital rhetorical role to play both in positioning research and in establishing the credibility of the researchers (Swales 1990; Burgess 2002). For these reasons they are also perhaps one of the most difficult sub-genres to master, and for many novice researchers and non native speakers

¹ This paper draws heavily on previous work done in collaboration with Elizabeth Rowley-Jolivet: Rowley-Jolivet & Carter-Thomas 2003; Carter-Thomas & Rowley-Jolivet 2001. I would also like to thank Elizabeth Rowley-Jolivet for giving me permission to exploit the present corpus - the details of which can be found in the appendix.

² The conference presentations analysed here are of the traditional before-print type. See Raisanen (2002) for a discussion on the differences between the before-print and after-print conference fora).

present indeed a particular hurdle both in their oral and written form (Burgess 2002; Shalom 2002, Rowley-Jolivet & Carter-Thomas 2003).

Although, however, article introductions have been extensively studied over the last two decades, in particular with relation to their rhetorically-based move structure (Swales 1990; Dudley-Evans 1994; Samraj 2002), research on the conference presentation introduction, and indeed on conference presentations in general, has only more recently begun to appear (cf. Ventola *et al* 2002). In the following section of this article I will therefore briefly summarise some of the principle contextual features and functions distinguishing the conference presentation introduction from that of the more widely discussed research article. Such a comparison will then provide the framework necessary for the discussion of the differing syntactic patterns noted in the two communicative events in the main part of this article.

1. Comparison of contextual features and functions

Conference presentations can be considered to some extent as the spoken analogue of the conference proceedings article. Both are managed by the same discourse community; the text producers and receivers are disciplinary 'experts' and shared knowledge is extensive. The information load conveyed in both cases is consequently high. Moreover the presentation and articles in the present corpus were produced by the same participants: the speaker is one of the authors of the corresponding proceedings paper, the titles and topics are the same and they were produced on the occasion of the same conference. However the specific contextual environment surrounding the two events and the mode of delivery can be seen to have an impact both on their more macroscopic organisation and also on the different language resources brought into play at the more microscopic level.

In a recent study (Carter-Thomas & Rowley-Jolivet 2003) a number of features were identified in relation to the macroscopic rhetorical structure of conference presentation introductions³. We saw that despite displaying the same basic rhetorical movement as reflected in the CARS⁴ model of research article introductions, with a funnel-down effect from the general to the particular, the presentations also contained a number of specific features directly related to the enunciative context. These differences can be summarised in three main areas as follows:

- Interpersonal-relations

One of most striking differences noted in the structural organisation of conference presentation introductions concerned the importance attached to the creation of an 'interpersonal framework', a category absent in the proceeding articles. The presence of the live audience in the conference auditorium generates a need for a direct contact between the speaker and the participants, which we termed 'listener orientation'. Such contact can occur at various other stages in the talk but is particularly marked in the introduction, when speakers frequently address remarks to the audience (and chairman), thanking them, greeting them and generally attempting to create a rapport with those present. Another sub-step in this 'interpersonal framework' category, likewise absent from the proceedings paper introductions, concerned 'acknowledgements' to co-authors and other various collaborators and funding agencies. Such acknowledgements occur at the end of research articles but are made early on in the talk, as part of a politeness strategy.

- Live communicative event

The presence of the live audience and the fact that the conference presentation, even if semi-prepared and/or rehearsed, is a real-time event also has a bearing on its structural and linguistic organisation. The high density informational load of research communication has to be adapted at all times to the demands of oral delivery. This has considerable implications

³ See also Carter-Thomas & Rowley-Jolivet 2003 for the means used to determine the cut-off points of conference presentation introductions.

⁴ CARS: 'Create a Research Space' (cf. Swales 1990)

both for the real-time production and the processing of information. Unlike the reader, the listener in the auditorium is obliged to follow linearly. A prominent early step in presentation introduction is the indication of the structure or scope of the talk, providing thus the listeners with explicit signalling as to what the talk will cover and in what order. Such a step not only occurred less frequently in the articles examined but also when presents tended to appear at the end of the introduction.

- Content and epistemological context

Due not only to the constraints of real-time delivery but also to the strict time constraints imposed at scientific conferences, speakers are obliged to make a certain number of choices as to the quantity and type of information that can be effectively transmitted to the audience. In the introductions to conference presentations the full literature review, for example, which is very much a prominent feature of the article introduction is generally absent. There are, however, frequent references to other talks at the conference, with speakers at pains to show how their particular research fits into the more local epistemology (a category specific therefore to the presentations which we termed ‘conference context’) and the more immediate context shared with the live audience. The absence of a full-blown literature review also reflects perhaps the different epistemological function of the conference presentation. Within the allotted speaking time the presenter has convey as succinctly as possible the importance of his research contribution. The novelty or news value of this research will thus take precedence over explicit references to more general shared background knowledge.

Having thus reviewed some of the ways in which the particular enunciative context and conditions impact on the structural organisation of conference presentation introductions, attention will now be turned to a comparison of a number of syntactic features. We will discuss to what extent the enunciative conditions outlined above also influence the choice of syntactic arrangements as revealed on the textual surface in the two events.

2. Comparison of syntactic features

The comparison is based on the analysis of the transcriptions of 13 conference presentation introductions given by native speakers of English and the corresponding introductory sections in the proceedings papers. The details concerning the length of the extracts analysed and their respective verbal densities can be found on the following table:

	Presentations	Articles
Total number of words	4339	3669
Average length	334 words	282 words
Verbal density	1: 10	1:14

Table 1: Comparative length of the 13 presentation and 13 article introductions

As the above table shows the conference presentation introductions are firstly longer than those in the corresponding proceedings articles, with 334 words on average as against 282 in the articles. This is undoubtedly due in part to the natural redundancy of oral language (even when dealing with the semi-prepared or rehearsed variety at issue) which inevitably contains a certain number of false starts and repetitions. Another reasons for their greater length can also perhaps be linked to the fact that the presentation introductions fulfil other important interpersonal functions we saw earlier that are not present in the articles introductions: - acknowledging co-authors, thanking the chairman and generally setting up a personal relationship with the audience. The clauses in the presentation introductions however, are comparatively shorter, due to the demands of real-time processing (both for producer and receiver), with a verbal density of only 1: 10. as opposed to that of 1: 14 in the articles.

2.1 Distribution of noun and pronoun subject groups

When we consider the composition of the clausal subject in the two corpora, there are also striking differences:

	Presentations	Articles
Noun group subjects	52%	89%
Pronoun subjects:	48% (201)	11% (29)
Of which personal pronoun subjects	40% (168)	5% (14)

Table 2: Comparison of clausal subjects

Whereas the majority of clausal subjects in the article introductions are noun groups, almost 50% of clausal subjects in the presentations are pronouns. This once again can be related in part to the constraints of real-time oral delivery. For example, the complex nominal group subject and passive combination from the following article introduction would be extremely difficult to produce, and particularly to process in real time:

(1) *The coupling impedance between the slow space charge wave on the electron beam and the surface harmonics of the backward TMO1 can be modified...* (A14).

This difficulty can be explained in terms of the linguistic notion of thematic or information structure (the theme/rheme, topic/comment division). The general information flow in English is from left to right, with speakers and writers normally placing clause initially those items of information that they wish the receiver to interpret as ‘given’, with ‘new’ information concerning the theme occurring towards the end of the clause in the rheme. In (1) the very heavy clausal subject presented as theme places a high cognitive load on receivers, obliging them to retain the complex noun group in short-term memory whilst processing the remainder. Such an information packaging strategy is clearly unsuited to the demands of the real-time processing. Clausal subjects in the presentations, on the contrary, composed of lightly modified nominal groups or pronouns facilitate the real-time production and understanding of information.

Questions relating to the different interpersonal relations created in the two events also however play a decisive role. The total number of personal pronoun subjects in the articles is only 5%, whereas 40% of clausal subjects in the talks are personal pronouns. If we look at the distribution of the personal pronoun in the two events the figures are even more striking. In the articles the only personal pronoun at all to be used with any frequency is *We* with 12 occurrences – a figure that is more than quadrupled however in the presentation introductions. The personal pronouns *You* and *I* are absent altogether in the article introductions. In the presentations, however speakers make frequent use of a variety of personal pronoun subjects.

	Presentations	Articles
I	61	0
You	42	0
One	4	1
We	58	12
They (animate)	3	1
Personal pronoun subjects	168	14

Table 3: Distribution of personal pronoun subjects

This marked difference in the distribution of personal pronouns in the presentations and article introductions has important implications for the type of interpersonal relation created.

As Hyland (1999; 2001) has shown, research article writers in the hard sciences are reluctant to assert a strong authorial presence. He interprets this difference as stemming principally from the differing textual practices along the hard/soft disciplinary divide, with first person pronouns occurring far more frequently in the humanities and social sciences than in the hard sciences (2001: 215). The figures above (table 3) would seem to suggest, however, that the question of mode also plays a decisive role. The influence of the live conference environment would seem to encourage speakers to abandon the distanced impersonal stance of the article writer and favour a more overt personal engagement, expressed by the high frequency of both *I* and *We* pronouns in the presentations (cf. Fortanet 2004). This modal difference is also evident in the use of the second person personal pronoun *You* which is completely absent in the article introductions, but once again frequent in the presentations.

Concerning firstly the use of the pronoun *we*, it is interesting to note that in the article introductions *we* is only used in an exclusive sense. There are no cases of inclusive *we* where the referent includes the audience and/or other people. The rare occurrences of *we* in the articles refer to the co-authors of the multi-authored article and occur primarily when authors outline their research aims:

(2) *We are specifically interested in exploring analytical methods for the investigation of nonlinear beam-field interactions (A15)*

(3) *We would like to produce energetic neutrals (A17)*

In the presentation introductions, however, *we* is employed both with inclusive and exclusive values. With its exclusive value *we* is often used by the conference speaker, not as a 'royal-we' but to refer to the different actions undertaken collectively by the research team:

(4) *We've looked at a number of configurations of blumleins (P3)*

(5) *We've been building pulse generators... for over 10 years now (P9)*

Speakers thus underline their commitment to the research actions undertaken, rather than sheltering behind a more impersonal formulation. When used with its inclusive sense recourse to the pronoun also enables the speaker to actively involve the listeners in the research decisions and hypotheses:

(6) *Maybe we need to stop thinking about these devices as classical devices (P14)*

(7) *So what we can have then is effectively a laminar plasma nozzle (P17)*

In this way conference speakers interact directly with the audience, downplaying their role as 'experts' and instead installing a feeling of connivance by demonstrating their shared membership of the disciplinary community.

In the use of *you*, the conference speaker's desire to involve the audience in the research issues raised is again particularly evident:

(8) *You know that plasma can very well generate nanoparticles. It's however difficult... (P16)*

(9) *As you probably know electric charges tend to be unstable... (P19)*

The speaker thus appeals directly to the listeners present, emphasising their shared knowledge of the subject. The conference speakers' acute awareness of the listeners' presence can likewise be witnessed in the frequent invitations to the audience to focus on the visual information displayed on an overhead display in the shared conference environment:

(10) *For this effort, as you can see the prime power source was placed on top... (P5)*

(11) *So you can see that the flow becomes singular... (P17)*

On some occasions the value of *you* is vaguer. The reference does not explicitly include the listeners present in the auditorium but applies more to the scientific community at large:

(12) *... the sheath is so thin you don't have room to do neutralisation (P17)*

(13) *Laser excitation is not very efficient especially if you have to use multi photon excitation (P19)*

However, even if the listeners are not explicitly addressed in such examples they are nevertheless still represented as potential protagonists. A far greater feeling of inclusion is

therefore created than with a purely impersonal structure, which would invariably be used in a corresponding written version.

The frequent use of the pronoun *I* in the conference presentations, as opposed to the very impersonal formulations favoured by the proceedings article writers, is above all evidence of the high degree of explicit personal involvement of conference speakers. The speakers' authority is thus established on very different grounds from that in the corresponding article. Whereas article writers typically mask their rhetorical identities behind a depersonalised objectivised stance (Luukka & Markkanen 1997), the rhetorical identity projected by the conference speaker is that of a real person who confidently accepts the high-profile representation of self. This explicit personal stance is evident in the individual speakers' attitudes to the actual organisation of the talk in progress, in their attitude to the scientific content transmitted, but also in remarks directly addressed to the listeners, where speakers can be considered as actually installing a dialogue with the audience. In the first case the use of *I* forms part of a metatextual strategy where, very frequently combined with the future simple tense, the speaker signposts the organisation of his talk for listeners. In this way speakers thus accept explicit responsibility for the interpretative framework presented:

(14) *My talk today on...has three objectives. The first, I'll look at a simple axisymmetric Milo configuration, ... I'll then go on to ... And I'll also throughout the talk ... (P11)*

(15) *I'll begin by very briefly reviewing a method (P16)*

Speakers are also however keen to indicate their personal involvement in the actual research project presented, underlining certain problems encountered as the 'experiencer':

(16) *I found it's very difficult to turn on ... and so I launched off into a little study... (P13)*

On other occasions too the speaker does not hesitate to address the listeners directly, thanking them for attending the talk (17), commenting on a talk's mathematical bent (18) or pointing out the importance of certain issues raised (19):

(17) *I'd like to thank all of you hardy souls for hanging out.. (P5)*

(18) *The talk is of necessity somewhat mathematical... I hope most of the math will be familiar (P15)*

(19) *And that is one point I hope you go away with (P14)*

The speaker's authority is in this way explicitly stated.

The live environment can thus be seen to have a direct influence on the choice of clausal subjects. Both the contextual constraints on the real-time processing of information and the different interpersonal relations speakers and writers are keen to install at the outset of their articles or presentations impact strongly on the respective choices adopted by speakers and writers. Differences in the contextual and epistemological environment also however exert an influence on many other syntax-related features, and in the remainder of this article I will outline some other important areas of variation.

2.2 Use of specialised structures

The syntactic structures that will be focused upon are amongst those often referred to as 'specialised structures' in the literature - structures that enable the enunciator to manipulate the usual ordering of clause constituents and thus explicitly denote a particular information packaging arrangement. Unmarked information packaging arrangements in English are usually rendered by the canonical SVO⁵ configuration, where the grammatical subject of an active verb provides the thematic anchorage, and with the verb complex and object constituting the *new* or rhematic part of the clause. However this SVO order is not always sufficient or appropriate to create contextually coherent text. One of the means speakers and writers have at their disposal for signalling a more precise pragmatic interpretation is the use of certain specialised syntactic structures. The structures examined here are the passive, extraposition, pseudo-clefts and the existential 'there' construction.

⁵ Subject, Verb, Object

	Presentations	Articles
Total verbs	425	262
Passives	34 (8%)	76 (29%)
Extraposition	4 (0.9%)	7 (2.7%)
Pseudo-clefts	8	0
Exisential constructions	9	2
Inversion	0	0

Table 4: Distribution of specialised structures

It can be clearly seen from Table 4 that there are marked differences in the frequency of occurrence of the structures examined. Structures involving extraposition and the passive are far more widely called upon in the article introductions than in the presentations. Pseudo-clefts and existential constructions, on the other hand, are extremely rare (if used at all) in the articles, thus indicating that the information structuring strategies adopted are highly mode dependent. There were no occurrences of inversion in either the presentation or article introductions. This last result is initially surprising, as past research⁶ has shown inversion to be a frequent feature of scientific talks. The fact that speakers in the present sample have no recourse to this structure is perhaps linked to certain specific characteristics of the introductory section of talks. References to diagrams and various visual information, for example, where inversion is often used (“on the left are the measurements...”) are rare in this part of the presentation.

The extremely frequent use of the passive in the article introductions reflects a generally observed tendency in written scientific research, where the passive has often been considered as one of the principle means of achieving impersonality and distance in a text. This can be related to the important role played by the passive in information packaging, whereby unmarked information structure is matched with syntax. By using a passive the text producer can thematise and present as ‘Given’ what would normally have been a syntactic object, and thus part of the rheme, in an active clause. The high proportion of passives in the article introductions can therefore be seen to correlate with the high number of inanimate noun groups as subject already remarked upon (cf. Table 2). In this way writers can present the information transmitted from an impersonal perspective:

(20) *Bulmien losses were found to be negligible* (A3)

(21) *Narrow beams of nanoparticles can be used* (A16)

In the presentation introductions, on the other hand, such passives constructions are rare. Speakers prefer, as we have seen above, to express their actions and opinions directly, taking full responsibility and even underlining their participation in the research undertaken.

(22) *We use a low flow rate of gas...* (P18)

(23) *I have put together a low voltage hundred-kilowatt repetitive source* (P13)

In the following examples, taken from a corresponding article and presentation, an almost identical content, formulated with an impersonal subject and passive voice in the article is expressed using a personal pronoun and active verb in the corresponding presentation:

(24) *A transferred arc system, in which an arc is struck from a thoriated tungsten cathode to a metal bath anode, is a convenient way of producing a superheated stream of metal vapour* (A18)

(25) *We strike an arc between a thoriated tungsten cathode and a metal bath and that produces a superheated metal vapour* (P18)

The brief initially positioned clausal themes of the two short co-ordinated clauses in (25), ‘We’ and ‘that,’ followed by the active verb forms, greatly facilitate the listeners’ real-time

⁶ See Carter-Thomas & Rowley-Jolivet 2001 for the use of inversion in other parts of the scientific conference presentation

processing of the information. The formulation in the oral version also contributes to creating a livelier atmosphere and interpersonal relations based on shared interest and empathy, rather than on the impersonality and prudent reserve typical of the article.

The greater recourse to structures involving extraposition in the articles can also be explained by considerations relating to the different interpersonal relations created in the two events. Extraposition is frequently used in scientific writing as a hedging device (Hewings & Hewings 2002), as it provides the writer with the means to thematise his comment or evaluation in the extraposed clause, whilst at the same time, like the passive, maintaining the impersonal tone expected in scientific articles:

(26) *It is expected that technological innovation will lead to advances in long pulse BWO operation...* (A14)

(27) *It is well known that ferroelectric ceramics have relative dielectric constants* (A4)

In the CP introductions however, speakers tend to express their evaluation and comments far more openly: *We know, we need, we can, I believe etc....*

Speakers take active responsibility for the research presented and there is therefore far less need for the hedging tactics provided by extraposition.

If constructions involving passives and extraposition are relatively less needed in the context of the presentation introductions, other structures such as pseudo-clefts and existentials show the opposite modal distribution. Recourse to pseudo-clefts, for example, can be considered directly motivated by the specific enunciative features of the presentation introductions. Firstly, in response to certain constraints of real-time oral delivery, pseudo-clefts provide the speaker with the means to slow down the discourse flow, whilst at the same time signalling the salience of the upcoming information:

(28) *So what do I mean by pulse sharpening using non-linear ferroelectric dielectrics ?*

Well, what we're talking about here is pulses in the voltage range of 10 to 40 KeV... (P4).

This example comes right at the beginning of a presentation introduction, just after the announcement of the topic. The information in the 'WH' part of the cleft is thus presupposed. The speaker has just raised the issue, the title of his talk, in a rhetorical question. By segmenting the discourse into two distinct parts in this way, the speaker is able to slow down the pace and to prepare and forewarn the audience for the important explanation contained in the second part of the proposition. Without the cleft and the preceding rhetorical question the information would have received less impact. Such an information packaging strategy would undoubtedly however be considered too repetitive (and perhaps even patronising) in a written equivalent.

Recourse to pseudo-clefts in the presentation introductions can also be linked to the particular interpersonal relations created between speakers and their audiences in the conference setting. Pseudo-cleft can be considered as part of an interactive strategy, whereby conference speakers introduce a certain dialogic quality into their presentations. In (28) the speaker actually asks the question himself but in most pseudo-clefts, there would seem to be an underlying presupposed question that either the audience is likely to ask at that stage, or that the researchers themselves asked at that point:

(Qu: How can you accelerate the ions?)

(29) *To accelerate the ions in the bulk, it turns out what you need is an accelerating force* (P13).

(Qu: What is this talk about?)

(30) *So what this talk is about is a theory we have developed for generating focused beams* (P16)

In this way, as in the case of rhetorical questions, of which there are also several in the presentation introductions, the speaker institutes a fictionalised dialogue with the audience. The listeners are made to feel involved in the research project described.

A third reason motivating the use of the pseudo-cleft in the conference presentation introduction is maybe linked to the specific epistemological role of conference presentations (cf. Rowley-Jolivet 2002), in which speakers are frequently at pains to underline the novelty

or importance of their particular research contributions. As already pointed out in the discussion of example (28) above, pseudo-clefts enable speakers to specifically signal the salience of particular items of information. Through the implied questioning indicated by the *Wh* element presenters are thus able to preview and highlight the novelty or originality of their research claims in a suitably interactive way.

Another specialised syntactic structure that enables a particular focussing on the *new* in this manner is provided by existential constructions:

(31) *There's also a different (...) way of laser excitation and it's not very well known... and this is the subject of my talk* (P19).

Once this new referent has been introduced it can then be taken up as theme of subsequent clauses as (31) illustrates. The fact that this structure occurs with greater frequency in the presentation introductions than in those of the article is perhaps also due to the fact that existential *there* can also fulfil an enumerative function in talks:

(32) *There are limitations (...) and this model is useful for looking at that. There's the materials problem, both due to the arc radiation....* (P18).

The organisation of the listing in this manner helps the listeners to process the sequential information. In a written equivalent the enumeration could often be expressed by page layout or punctuation (colons, bullets etc.).

Concluding remarks

The introductory sections to proceedings articles on the one hand, and conference presentations on the other, have an important role when it comes to setting research into perspective and demonstrating the authority of the researchers. The specific contextual and epistemological features associated with the two events mean however that there are considerable differences in the way the introduction functions in the two events. In consequence, many of the structural and syntactic features considered highly appropriate for the proceedings article introduction prove to be highly inappropriate when transferred to that of the live conference presentation.

The three main features that impact on the structural organisation of the conference presentation, namely the different interpersonal relations created, the specific epistemological context and the issue of live delivery, also have a far-reaching influence on the language resources brought into play. The influence of interpersonal relations is very striking and is perhaps of particular importance in the opening stages of the presentation. Conference speakers generally aim to build a more personal relationship with the audience, one based on connivance and empathy rather than the prudent reserve characteristic of written science. They therefore have far less recourse to passives and extraposition, but instead adopt very pro-active strategies (first person pronouns and active verbs), taking full responsibility for the research presented. At the same time conference speakers take care to involve the audience in the research questions raised, as can be seen in certain other pronoun choices (use of the 2nd person pronoun and the inclusive 'we'), and in the implementation of fictionalised dialogic strategies (rhetorical questions and pseudo-cleft structures). The different epistemological function of scientific conference presentations can also be seen to influence certain other syntactic strategies. Within the often strict time constraints of scientific conferences speakers have to make choices as to both the quantity and type of information that can be effectively transmitted. It is important for conference speakers to make an impact on the audience, and pseudo-clefts and existential construction in that they enable a particular focussing on the 'New', help in getting across to the audience the novelty or originality of research claims. The issue of live delivery also naturally has a strong influence on the syntactic choices adopted. Conference speakers in the sample studied, favour much shorter clauses and brief thematic subjects (lightly modified noun groups or pronouns), thus facilitating both the production and reception of the information transmitted. Pseudo-clefts are once again a useful strategy in this

respect, allowing the speaker, through the segmentation of the clause, to slow down the discourse pace.

For teaching purposes, it seems important to underline to novice researchers and non-native speakers that a conference presentation introduction cannot be based upon a written model. We are dealing with two separate sub-genres which, despite sharing a certain content, are produced within a different contextual and epistemological environment. The syntactic choices adopted should therefore reflect these differences.

The traditional English grammar manual in which the English language is treated as a single entity has for some years now come under increasing criticism. It is tempting indeed to ask whether general English exists at all, and attempts to regard language in a vacuum with no consideration for the discourse context can indeed be counter-productive:

“... Any global characterisation of ‘General English’ should be regarded with caution (...) teachers of advanced students should focus on the English of particular varieties, in naturally occurring discourse, rather than ‘general’ patterns that are culled from linguists’ intuitions and do not reflect the grammar of any variety “(Biber, Conrad, & Reppen, 1994:179).

The recent corpus-based Longman Grammar of Spoken and Written English (Biber & al 1999), in which different grammatical patterns are related to their frequency of use in several registers, can be seen to partly respond to such concerns. As LSP specialists, it is up to us however, to further isolate the more specific social and linguistic practices prevalent in specialised texts in different LSP domains.

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Appendix

The comparative corpus of 13 article introductions (A) and 13 presentation introductions (P), were produced on the occasions of 2 international physics conferences in 1994 and 2001 and comprise the following:

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| A2 – P2 | Sandia National Laboratories' high power electromagnetic impulse sources. |
| A3 – P3 | Stacked Blumlein pulse generators: versatile sources of high power repetitive waveforms. |
| A4 – P4 | High voltage pulse sharpening using nonlinear ferroelectric ceramic dielectrics. |
| A5 – P5 | Lightweight, tactical prime power for mobile pulsed power applications. |
| A9 – P9 | The development of high peak power solid state pulse generators. |
| A11 – P11 | Milo experiments and computer simulations. |
| A13 – P13 | Low-voltage, explosive whisker emission cathode studies. |
| A14 – P14 | Efficiency enhancement of high power vacuum backward-wave oscillators driven by short pulse and long pulse electron beams. |
| A15 – P15 | Nonlinear space-charge waves in an axially uniform waveguiding structure. |
| A16 – P16 | Focused beam deposition of plasma-synthesized nanoparticles. |
| A17 – P17 | Theory and preliminary design of a neutral etcher based on an ECR plasma. |
| A18 – P18 | Modeling of a transferred-arc metal evaporator. |
| A19 – P19 | RF energy coupling to atmospheric pressure nonequilibrium plasmas. |