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EMI: Lecture language

Whether lecturing in Polish or English, the 'types' of language you use serve distinct functions, but are all vital.

At any one point during a lecture, you may find yourself chatting with students, explaining the complexities of a concept or asking students to work together on a task. The language you use in each of these instances differs significantly, and as a lecturer you should be able to recognise and use it.

Three types of language

At the beginning and end of a lecture, and perhaps at moments in between, you are likely to use '**Social language,**' also known as Basic Interpersonal Communication Skills (BICS). This is the language used for small talk, and to build a rapport with and between students – 'The weather's terrible, isn't it?' 'Did you see the football last night?' or 'How was your weekend?'

A second type of lecture language is '**Content language,**' also known as Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency (CALP). This is the language used to convey the content of the lecture, that is, specific vocabulary, grammatical structures and functions. This is further divided into subject specific vocabulary (the technical vocabulary for the specific subject) and academic vocabulary (vocabulary used across all academic disciplines).

Finally, there is the language used to actually conduct a lecture: '**Classroom language.'** This consists of signposting language which guides students through the lecture and helps them understand how the content of the lecture fits together. Moreover, it enables the lecturer to get feedback and organise student interaction. It may also be used to highlight the importance of certain concepts and may indicate what the lecturer thinks of these.

The latter category is perhaps the most neglected by those lecturing in another language – it comes automatically in your native language, but if you're focusing on conveying a lot of new information (content) to students, you may forget to use this type often enough. For that reason, it's worth taking a closer look at it.

Classroom language is largely made up of signposting language or discourse markers. There are two categories:

Macro-markers signal lecture content, movement between topics, and relationships between topics. Some examples include:

'Today, I'd like to look at…'

'In this lecture, I'll be talking about…'

'There are four parts to the presentation…'

'Let's now move on to…'

'This leads me to my next point…'

'So far we've looked at…'

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'Now let's focus on…'

'So, to sum up…'

Micro-markers are used to comment on content, fill pauses, and connect ideas, among other things. Examples of these include:

'As I was saying,…'

'Actually,…'

'So,…'

'Well,…'

'In fact,…'

'Anyway,…'

'By the way,…'

'In other words,…'

'Obviously,…'

Although such words and phrases are easy enough in themselves, it's important to remember to use them. In fact, in an EMI lecture, classroom language probably needs to be used more than in a lecture conducted in Polish. Students attending EMI lectures need all the help they can get when it comes to understanding new content. Without classroom language to frame the content, students may be left drowning in a sea of information.

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