



**LANGUAGE
CENTRE**
Masaryk University

English for University Studies: English in Academic Context and Skills

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English for
University Studies
by Lu

Background of the lecturer

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Teaching experience: in Taiwan (10 years), in Czechia (5 years).

Professional interests: language, culture and thought.

Personal interests: travel, religion.

Married, 2 kids.

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Your turn (5)

- Work in pairs and go over the following questions:
- List of questions to go over:
- What is your name?
- Where are you from?
- What language do you speak as your first language?
- What is your cultural background?
- What brought you to this course?

Question: Why do you need English?

- What does it mean “to study in a university” and what is English good for?
- Operate in an international environment
- People from different cultures
- English as the lingua franca/working language
- Read texts in English
- Introduce your idea in English.
- Disagree and let others know.

Pushing it further... (10)

- Does the first language you speak give you any problem in learning English?
- Does the (learning) culture you are used to give you any problem in communicating internationally?
- How do you think I can help you overcome the difficulties?

Course objectives

- To improve language skills for university studies
- Integrated in nature, developing basic academic skills:
- Listening, speaking, reading, writing.

Suggested readings and resources

- Books to follow:
 - Vocabulary: Word Power
 - EAP Now: English for Academic Purposes
- Online resources:
 - TED talks
 - CNN student news

Occasions to use English in academic context (15)

- On what occasions do you use English in the university?
- Lectures
- Seminars
- Tutorials
- Presentations
- Interviews
- Informal academic discussions
- Socializing (with peers)

Dimensions of communication

- Formality
 - Interactivity
 - Persuasiveness
 - Informative
 - Personal/impersonal
-
- Now based on the above criteria, define the nature of the samples of the academic language. Discuss how each sample is different.

Define the occasions

- There are samples of English on formal academic occasions. Assess them based on the foregoing criteria:
- Sample 1 (1:20- 2:19)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F0USIqEP-MA>
- Sample 2 (- 2:00)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-8Zo-NiQFtU>

Important skill for advanced learning: Shadowing

- Listen to the text once—choose a topic that fits your interest/need.
- Listen to the text a few more times to try to figure out the rough message through multiple hearings.
- Listen to the text while reading the transcript and look up any words you are not confident about.
- Listen to the text and repeat with a minimum delay—rinse and repeat until you can read it confidently at the same speed as the recording, then do it a couple of more times.
- Now listen to each of the clips again to practice.

Sample 3-4

- There are samples of English used in academic seminars. Assess them also based on the foregoing criteria.
- Sample 3: Seminar (on poetry) (- 1:55, *2)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=omveFR-2hmg>
- Sample 4: Line game (0:27- 6:18, *1)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYYf-mUmPqI>

Sample 5

- You will see a panel discussion in English (Sample 6) and the introduction that precedes it (Sample 5). Assess the language usage based on the foregoing criteria.
- Sample 5: Introduction to a panel: (use Chrome; - 5:02)
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I8uUjtiaXqE>
- Listen again. What is the announcement mainly about?

Sample 6-9

- The clip presents a panel discussion on learning a new language (16:00-26:30). Analyze the language usage on the foregoing criteria.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I8uUjtiaXqE>

- In the meantime, summarize each speaker's message:
 - Maxine:
 - Lily:
 - Lera:
 - John:

Have your own say

- How does that correspond to your own experience? Pick up on some points in the clip and prepare a one-minute speech to share with the class.

Summary for Sessions 1-2

- Your learning English is all about:
 - Your language background
 - Your need (what university English looks like):
Types of occasions where English is used:
Ceremonies
Seminars
Panel discussions
- Skill of shadowing as an integrated way of learning
- Session 3: Vocabulary

Shadowing Practice 1

- Now listen to Sample 1 again. Summarize the message. In the meantime, jot down the words and expressions you are not confident about.
- Do the same for Sample 2-5.

More materials for learning new languages

- Lonsdale on mastering a language in six months:
- <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d0yGdNEWdn0>
- Efromovich on techniques to learn languages
- https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-WLHr1_EVtQ

What is the difference between language in the academic context and outside of it?

Academic language

- is more precise, used as a tool to explain our ideas, report the results of research to other people.

It is used to:

- *explain, describe, define, justify, give examples, sequence, evaluate, be time-specific, signal cause and effect, hypothesize, generalize, compare and contrast, and adopt specialized vocabulary.*

Non-academic language is more often used:

- to express feelings or concepts and ideas on an everyday basis (*greeting others, sharing experiences and personal views, meeting others...*).

**Read the two paragraphs in your handouts (task 3, page 2).
In pairs, discuss the difference in style.**

non-academic language uses:

- contractions (e.g. *can't, won't, isn't*)
- short forms of words (e.g. *cos* for because, *w8* for wait)
- slang (e.g. *dude, cash, cool*)
- imprecise words (e.g. *some, a lot, thing*)
- personal pronouns (e.g. *I, my, we*)
- cliches (e.g. *a coin has two sides*)

Academic language is:

- informed and informative; i.e. has a clear purpose, structure and audience
- critical and objective
- analytical
- rational (not emotional or opinion based)
- complex (in terms of grammar and vocabulary)
- responsible
- hedged (use of cautious language)
- non-repetitive
- persuasive
- formal (neutral in style, precise and accurate)

Ways of achieving formality

- right choice of words (~~colloquial, idiomatic, phrasal verbs~~)
- nominalisation (frequent use of nouns)
- avoiding negative forms of verbs if possible
- avoiding repetition
- scarce use of personal pronouns (~~I, you, we~~)
- hedging (modifiers, modal verbs, absence of general statements)
- cohesion
- correct grammar

Formality - word level

- formal words are often longer than their informal equivalents. They are single words, not multi-words and they are often of **Latin or French origin**, unlike the informal ones, which are more often of Anglo-Saxon origin. In formal language, multi-verb words are substituted with a **one-word synonym**.
- Verbs such as get/have/mean/make/do/give/put tend to be substituted with **expressions with more precise meaning**
- Similarly, common adjectives such as *big/small /good /bad* and adverbs such as *sometimes/always/a bit* are substituted with expressions with more precise meaning.

examples

Vague meaning	More precise meaning
answer	solution
a way	approach, method, technique
to mean	indicate, imply suggest
to get	obtain, achieve, gain, acquire, attain
to do	conduct, perform, operate, function
big	substantial, considerable, significant
bad	inappropriate, unsuitable, inconvenient
a lot	dramatically, significantly, considerably
fast	rapidly

Analyzing texts to decide level of formality

- ***Read the extracts below and use them as samples of two different styles in terms of formality. Which extract is more academic? How does it differ from the less formal form of language?***

Text A

- Some writers (but their names aren't very important) reckon lecturers should tell students what things they want them to do during a course, things like assessment and grading. Lots of students I've talked to reckon they don't know what their lecturers want. Also cos they aren't native English speakers they need more help than other students. A couple of students have gotten their mates from overseas to check all their essays and other stuff to make sure they were ok. And another guy gets his wife to check everything he writes to check it's on the right topic and hasn't got any mistakes.

- Several writers (Samuelowicz 1987; Drury & Webb 1990; Silva 1992) have drawn attention to the need for lecturers to make explicit their expectations for the whole course, including assessment items and grading procedures. A considerable number of participants in the present study reported that they were uncertain of what lecturers expected of them as graduate students. They also perceived that they, as non-native English speakers, needed very explicit directions and much more guidance than English-speaking students. Two participants said that they had to ask international students to proof-read their assignments, overheads and handouts for seminars to ensure they were appropriate. One person reported that his wife proof-read and edited all of his assignments to ensure they were relevant to the topic and error free.

Production practice: Levels of formality

- Work in pairs. Pick a topic and give a one-minute talk on the topic chosen. Imagine that your audience is a group of friends.
 - My trip/live to Brno.
 - My English learning experience.
 - The education in my own country.
- Now do the same, but imagine your audience is a group of professors.

Raise the level of formality of each of the following sentences by bearing in mind the points discussed previously

- 1. If you fail the test, you won't be employed by the company.
- 2. Ok, what are the causes of low employee morale? Many possibilities exist.
- 3. You can clearly see the differences between these two processes.
- 4. A small bit of oxygen is added to the solution gradually.
- 5. These special tax laws have been approved in some counties in the U.K.: Cumbria, Dorset, Devon, West Midlands, East Anglia, etc.
- 6. The subjects didn't have much difficulty with the task.

- Sample answers:
- 1. Should you fail the test, you will not be employed by the company.
- 2. Let us consider the causes of low employee morale. A significant number can be mentioned.
- 3. The differences between these two processes is evident.
- 4. A small amount of oxygen is gradually added to the solution.
- 5. These special tax laws have been approved in some counties in the U.K. such as Cumbria, Dorset, Devon, West Midlands or East Anglia.
- 6. The subjects found the task easy to perform.

Task: Rewrite the email (like speaking to a professor).

Hi Jim,

sorry I can't make it for the match tomorrow. You know, I tore the ligament in my left ankle when I was cycling and the doctor said I should take it easy and not do much for a couple of days, so what can I do. Hey, do you think Mike replace me? Let me know if it's ok with you and I'll ask him.

See you,

David

Sample letter

Dear professor Smith,

I am writing to apologize for my absence from the university match tomorrow. Unfortunately, I tore the ligament in my ankle during the PE lesson and I will be unable to participate in the match since the doctor advised me to rest for several days.

I hope I am not complicating the situation too much and I would like to thank you for understanding.

Sincerely,

David Graham

Homework

Write a paragraph which explains your decision to register for the course.

Imagine it is part of your academic assignment, so the language that you use should be formal.

Converter link

- <https://www.clipconverter.cc/>