Discussing numerical data in Linguistics conference presentations: The use of graphs and tables

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Since the early 2000's, the development of specific corpus tools and inspiring work by a number of scholars (Ventola, Shalom, & Thompson, 2002) has slowly brought the academic interest into line with the unquestionably central role played by conference presentations in most fields. In the last few years the inherently multimodal character of this genre has also drawn increasing attention (Carter-Thomas & Rowley-Jolivet, 2003; Rowley-Jolivet, 2012). Much work has tended to focus on the profuse use of visual aids in the so-called "hard" sciences. However, the fast spread of quantitative methodology in many fields in the humanities and the social sciences has run parallel to the increasing use of visual support at conferences and has consequently brought to the foreground the need for descriptive work on this dimension of conference presentations in these disciplines.

In the present paper, I will offer a descriptive account of the use of visual elements for the presentation of complex numerical results. Data for the analysis have been drawn from a small corpus containing forty paper presentations videoed at five international Linguistics conferences held between 2007 and 2013. Around 100 episodes containing discussions of graphs or tables have been extracted from the corpus in order to study their structural features, as well as their characteristic discourse patterns, with the aim of answering a set of related questions: is there an established sequence of (compulsory/optional) moves? To what extent does the number of variables or the complexity of relations among them determine choice of visual display? Can speaker expertise be related to the choice of presentation strategy? Can observed variability be explained in terms of interactional functions or user variables such as expertise or nativeness? A preliminary descriptive account will be offered as a first step towards a deeper knowledge of this key multimodal genre.

References

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Biodata

Mario Cal Varela has a background in sociolinguistics and variation studies, but in the last few years his research interests have moved into the field of English for Academic Purposes, where he has collaborated in the NIUS project, a needs analysis of the research and teaching staff of the University of Santiago de Compostela (USC), and more recently in the compilation of a corpus of conference presentations in English, still in progress. As a member of the SPERTUS research group based at the USC, his current research focuses on spoken English, with a specific interest in the genre of conference presentations.