Analysing Stance in a CLIL University Context: Non-native Speaker Use of Personal Pronouns and Modal Verbs

E. Dafouz and B. Núñez
Department of English Language and Linguistics, Faculty of Philology, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Madrid, Spain

C. Sancho
Department of Applied Linguistics, Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Madrid, Spain

In recent years, many European countries have witnessed a rapid implementation of the CLIL approach at tertiary level. In Spain, although English has been introduced as the language of instruction in some master and doctoral courses, the application of the CLIL approach is still isolated. Similarly, little research has been done into CLIL discursive features and teacher–student positioning in the Spanish university context. Focusing on university lectures by non-native speakers, the present paper explores the use of two relevant areas of stance: (i) pronominal forms, and their discursive functions; and (ii) modal verbs occurring within verbal clusters that accompany pronouns. The study is based on a quantitative analysis of these two linguistic devices in terms of number of occurrences and frequency. The results show that inclusive we is by far the most frequent pronominal form, functioning as a solidarity mechanism and helping to establish common ground. Furthermore, the functions assigned to the two most recurrent modal verbs, can and have to, are found to minimise also the speaker’s authority while inserted within a problem-solving framework and guiding the steps of scientific reasoning.

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Introduction

Foreign language (FL) medium instruction at tertiary level is becoming a fast reality in many European countries. Universities in Finland, the Netherlands, Austria, Belgium and Sweden, to name a few, have adopted English as the means of instruction, especially at postgraduate level (Wilkinson, 2004). In the case of Spain, universities are slowly incorporating English as the lingua franca (ELF), mainly in Master and Doctoral programmes in an attempt to face the growing globalising challenges of today’s world. The need to attract international students, promote teacher–student exchanges and ultimately adapt higher education institutions to the new demands of the job market have favoured the rapid implementation of content and language integrated classrooms (CLIL) in a myriad of contexts.

Focusing on the Spanish milieu, the implementation of a CLIL approach is still isolated, with hardly any institutional provision (but see Price & Fonseca,
2006). In addition, while some empirical research is currently being carried out in primary and secondary levels (see Llinares et al., forthcoming), to our knowledge, very little has been done in the tertiary context, most studies predominantly focusing on methodological concerns and questions of syllabus design and language planning.

The purpose of this paper, part of a larger project describing CLIL discursive characteristics at tertiary level,1 is to explore the linguistic and pragmatic features of university lectures in an international audience setting. Obviously, the description of such a complex academic speech event/genre as a lecture covers many features. Thus, at this stage, our work will concentrate specifically on the construction of speaker stance. Stance (Biber et al., 1999) was chosen here for two main reasons. First, because this notion will help us delve into the way university lecturers and students conceptualise their roles and behave linguistically and pragmatically in the new CLIL frameworks. Secondly, because stance encompasses an ample variety of linguistic and discursive elements (e.g. modal verbs, qualification devices, adverbial constructions, hedges, etc.) that enable us to operate under a flexible open-ended framework for further descriptions of CLIL classrooms. Within stance, this study focuses on two of the most visible indicators of attitude towards propositional content and classroom audience, namely pronoun use, specifically pronouns I, you and we, and the verbal clusters associated with them (mainly concentrating on modal and semi-modal verbs). It should be noted that our interest in these features is corpus-driven, as quantitative analysis reveals that these were the most outstanding items found in our data, numerically speaking.

We believe this study to be of importance in the CLIL environment for three main reasons. First, because it will help to raise awareness among the university authorities, teachers and educational planners of the new realities and necessities that the tertiary level demands for the successful implementation of a content and language integrated approach. Secondly, it will identify some of the linguistic and pragmatic choices that lecturers make in the construction of their attitudes, beliefs and opinions towards the propositional content presented and the audience addressed; and thirdly, it will hopefully enable a smooth transition between previous educational levels and favour continuity in the students’ learning of content through a FL.

**Stance in University Lectures**

The university teaching context is extremely broad and complex. Nevertheless, of all the instructional methods used, lecturing is still, in the 21st century, the most widely used format. Quoting Goffman (1981: 165), in Morell (2004), lectures are ‘institutionalized extended holdings of the floor in which one speaker imparts his view on a subject, these thoughts comprising what can be called a “text”’.

The reasons for lecture predominance are varied: lectures can accommodate large numbers of students, they can convey considerable amounts of information to large audiences with relative efficacy, and they can be adaptable to divergent needs. By contrast, they do not seem to promote
higher-order skills such as conceptual understanding, independent learning or problem-solving activities and are seldom interactive (Saroyan & Snell, 1997). Moreover, we must not forget that lectures also encode individual, societal and cultural views and beliefs on teaching (Flowerdew & Miller, 1995; Musumeci, 1996) and on the interaction between lecturers and learners.

Given that lectures are the predominant teaching style in higher education and that teachers and students report that over 75% of class time is usually used by the instructor (see Dafouz et al., forthcoming; Morell, 2004), in our view, it is of great importance to identify what goes on in that particular context from a linguistic and pragmatic point of view. This articulation of ‘what goes on’ receives in our study the heading of stance. Stance can be defined as ‘the dialogically enacted positioning of a social agent with respect to alignment, power, knowledge, belief, evidence, affect, and other socially salient categories’ (Du Bois, 2000: 1). Studies of stance include, as mentioned above, the analysis of modal and semi-modal verbs, qualification devices, adverbial constructions and complement clause constructions, among others. Also, a number of different methodologies ranging from detailed descriptions of single texts to (more recently) large computer-based corpora have been implemented in the analysis of stance.

Regarding academic registers, several studies have investigated academic language in written form (Hyland, 1998, 2001), as well as spoken academic discourse (Flowerdew, 1994), specifically in native speaker contexts. Keck and Biber’s (2004) research on modal verbs across university genres reveals that the use of these items is more frequent in spoken than written registers and that there are differences in the use of particular modal classes. For example, can is by far the most common modal of possibility, whereas will is the most frequent of prediction modals. The frequencies of necessity modals show a clear preference for must in writing and for have to in speaking. As Keck and Biber (2004: 4) point out, ‘students encounter a wide amount of registers in university settings – lectures, textbooks, study groups, course syllabi, etc – and understanding the stance expressed in these various settings is obviously crucial to academic success’. Another interesting survey of modality in academic discourse is the one by Crawford Camiciottoli (2004) in cross-cultural business lectures. Her study, comparing native and non-native lecturers and the interactional strategies they activate, discloses that can and will are the most frequent verbs, with the rest of the modals verbs under-represented. By groups, the native speakers preferred both may and would, while the non-native opted for can. These findings match other research on modal use by native and non-native speakers in EFL contexts (see Neff et al., 2004); they also stress the particular problems that epistemic meanings pose for non-native speakers, and the lack of attention that language teaching materials pay to such a pragmatically complex phenomenon.

The choice of personal pronouns also encodes views and beliefs of what the teacher and student roles are in the lecture context, and thus are also included in this study under the stance umbrella. In this line of research (but without explicit reference to the notion of stance), we find the studies by Crawford Camiciottoli (2004, 2005), Fortanet (2004) and Morell (2004), all of which share an interest for the different resources that lecturers activate to enhance student
participation. In particular, Fortanet’s work analyses the presence of the personal pronouns I, you and we in the MICASE corpus. This study compares its findings with those obtained by Rounds (1987a,b), observing that the presence of the pronoun I is more frequent in the MICASE corpus than in Rounds’, which leads Fortanet to suggest that this difference could be due to changes in the rhetorical characteristics of lectures.

Morell (2004) compares textual and interpersonal discursive features in three interactive and three non-interactive lectures and concludes that interactive lectures were found to use a greater amount of personal pronouns, elicitation markers, and referential and display questions as well as more negotiation.

Crawford Camiciottoli (2005) compared the differences that a native speaker introduced in a lecture on Japanese economy addressed to an Italian audience versus the original delivery to a UK audience. The findings point at a slower speech rate, more redundancies, a higher number of interpersonal features (elicitation, personal pronouns) and references to the local culture of the speaker as the characteristics of the intercultural lecture. With this exception, little work has been done in the area of intercultural academic discourse, a particular instructional situation which is becoming more and more common as we move into a globalised world. In fact, in the Spanish context where our research operates, the gradual implementation of international programmes at tertiary level calls for urgent empirical analysis.

The Corpus, the Setting and the Method

The corpus

The corpus of this study is based on the transcriptions of three university lectures of around 60 minutes each and consists of about 20,000 words. These lectures are a subset of a wider pool of data being currently gathered for further analysis into university teaching styles under the CLIL heading (Dafouz et al., forthcoming). In addition to audio- and video-recordings, the students and instructors enrolled in the course completed a short questionnaire concerning demographic information (i.e. age, nationality, gender, etc.), FL competence and previous experience with learning/teaching content through a FL. Video-recorded interviews with two of the lecturing participants and six student-volunteers were also used as qualitative data.

The setting

The students

A total of 26 students attended this summer course organised by the BEST programme. BEST stands for Board of European Students of Technology and, quoting their website, ‘it is an international programme which aims to help European students to become more internationally minded, by reaching a better understanding of European cultures and developing capacities to work on an international basis’. Their final priority is to offer high-quality services for students all over Europe, ‘bringing all the partners in the “student-company-university” triangle closer’. Students of 14 different nationalities
(Belgians, Croatians, Danes, Swedes, Spaniards, etc.) used English as a lingua franca and self-reported, on average, a high-intermediate to advanced level of English command. Of the 26 students analysed, 18 reported lectures to be the most widely used teaching format in their home country, with teacher time amounting to 75% and student's the remainder 25%. As for experience in integrated learning, 13 students (i.e. 50%) reported to have had previous contact with learning through a FL, and 50% reported this to be their first time. When asked about the possible differences between learning in their L1 and learning through a FL, six students claimed that there was virtually no difference, while 20 agreed that the major differences were concerned with the need to have extra supportive materials (handouts, diagrams, complement readings, etc.) and an emphasis on the teacher’s part to make the structure and the purpose of the class explicitly clear. Less uniformly, responses were divided into the need for a slower pace of instruction, more repetition of key concepts and more room for questions and periodic summaries. By and large, the students who conform to our study reported to be extremely interested in the course and in the opportunity to come to Spain and meet students from other parts of the world.

**The lecturers and the course**

The lecturers who participated in our survey are three male native speakers of Spanish and permanent teachers at the Faculty of Aeronautical Engineering at the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM). All three teachers volunteered to participate in the course and regarded the experience both as a good opportunity to promote the internationalisation of the Aeronautical degree and as a personal challenge. While two of the speakers had experience in lecturing through English, for one of them it was the first time. From the questionnaire distributed we learned that the lecturers’ self-reported level of English ranged between intermediate to high intermediate. In Spain, like in other European countries (e.g. Finland, Italy or France), university lecturers specialise in a particular area/topic in which they usually research and teach, thus double qualifications are not common. Lecturers, therefore, achieve a good command of English through personal interest or international experiences (i.e. education abroad). In our data the three lecturers were 36, 51 and 55 years old and their teaching experience was 4, 19 and 25 years respectively.

The academic course we observed lasted two weeks and comprised 12 teaching hours. Of those 12 teaching hours, the data underlying this study covers approximately three hours, which were transcribed for analysis. The course was officially entitled *Feel the speed. Feel the engineering. What’s behind Formula 1 cars*, and its main objective, according to the organisers, was to offer an attractive approach while imparting useful technical information. Admittedly, although the academic level of the course was high, there was no final assessment involved, which is a divergent point in contrast to other regular lectures. The topics and length of the different lectures are summarised below:

Lecture 1 (L1) (56:34 minutes/5208 words): *Thinking about Formula One engines: A technical approach*. This lecture presented the technical
constraints as well as the regulations that had to be taken into account when designing a Formula One engine.

Lecture 2 (L2) (63:44 minutes/5712 words): Composite materials in Formula One cars. The content of this talk focused on the type of composite materials that can be used in Formula One cars and the characteristics, advantages and disadvantages of certain materials over others.

Lecture 3 (L3) (60:22 minutes/7260 words): Aerodynamics and Formula One engines. This lecture introduced the basic notions of aerodynamics and then moved on to explaining the boundary layer and presented examples of wind tunnel tests.

Methodology

As established by the research objectives, the first step of the study was to focus on the number of occurrences of personal pronouns, particularly in the frequency of we, you and I tokens in our spoken data. Each researcher was assigned the transcription of a full lecture and then the findings were discussed in group to disambiguate difficult cases. The audio-recordings and the transcriptions were revised by all three researchers to ensure reliability. For example, there were several problems identifying particular words, especially technical ones related to the specific discipline (Aeronautical Engineering), as well as certain differences in pronoun identification (we versus you). Thus recordings had to be listened to in group various times.

Regarding the uses of the pronoun we, various studies (Fortanet, 2004; Kuo, 1998; Rounds, 1987a, inter alia) distinguish between inclusive-we and exclusive-we, the former referring to the lecturer together with the students and the latter to the lecturer and his academic/engineering peers (i.e. excluding the student listeners).

In our analysis of modal verbs and semi-modals we follow Biber et al.’s (1999: 490–495) classification which groups these verbs into three main categories according to their semantic meanings:

- Permission/possibility/ability: can, could, may, might
- Obligation/necessity: must, should, have (got) to, need to
- Volition/prediction: will, would, be going to

Results and Discussion

After transcribing and analysing the three lectures that comprise this study, the most noticeable feature was the remarkable presence of the pronoun we compared to the lower number of the other two personal pronouns (e.g. I, you). Table 1 summarises these findings.

As can be seen in the table, Lecture 1 (L1) uses we almost constantly; nearly three times per minute, while the figure gradually decreases in the case of Lecture 2 (L2) and is used approximately 1 time per minute in Lecture 3 (L3). Generally speaking and from the analysis of the surrounding co-text, there seems to be a higher presence of inclusive-we (i.e. lecturer + audience), thus
shortening the distance between participants and establishing common
ground:

L1: (1) Then \textbf{we} have to ask, remember that the question \textbf{we} tried to solve yesterday was: where is the limit of the rpm? And \textbf{we} thought about the compressibility problems.

L2: (2) What \textbf{we’ll} do today is look at the composite materials \ldots and \textbf{we’ll} discuss some of its general features.

L3: (3) \textbf{We} are speaking about very very strong forces.
(4) Ok. What \textbf{we} are going to use? Very few principles of the law. The first one is the conservation of \ldots mass, Ok?
(5) \textbf{We} need to introduce some hypothesis.
(6) The world will be extremely different if \textbf{we} live in our world without viscosity (...), because \textbf{we} live because of viscosity. Because without viscosity \textbf{we} cannot live.

As to the use of the pronoun \textit{you}, our analysis points at two main objectives from lecturers: one, the pronoun functions as \textit{direct reference to the learners}, enabling the lecturer to interact with the students, asking them questions or picking up on a previous point, as in the examples below:

L1: (7) What do \textbf{you} think about the regulation in this situation?
(8) Yes, \textbf{you’re} understanding the main idea of the regulations.
(9) Then we have here a reduction that as \textbf{you} said it is not as important as the increment we have here.

L2: (10) \textbf{You} may ask questions whenever \textbf{you} just decide.

The second function is the \textit{indefinite reference}, where ‘\textbf{you}’ means ‘one’ or ‘any person’ (any engineer). This use mostly appears in conditional sentences where the meanings of condition and purpose overlap, or in those conditionals expressing logical cause-effect relationships operating under certain conditions:

L1: (11) If \textbf{you} want to obtain the power in kilowatts, \textbf{you} have to divide by 60.
(i.e. to obtain the power in kilowatts, divide by 60)
(12) And if \textbf{you} use pure injection, \textbf{you} can obtain more or less a 6\% more power.
(i.e. if pure injection is used, more or less a 6\% more power can be obtained)
Another interesting use of you can be found in the following excerpts from L2, where the instructor shifts from inclusive-we to you on addressing learners, in an attempt to move from a theoretical explanation to a more practical one easily followed by students with illustrative examples:

**L2:**

13. Currently we have carbon fibre but in the future we will keep having the same? We will see later. Imagine a part like this one you can easily change the thickness. (...) You can try this with other fibres and you’ll see that is very difficult.

14. We are multiplying by ten the price from the raw material to the final product ... so you buy a bicycle that may cost (sic) 2 kilograms, but it may cost you 1000€, is a fair price.

15. Imagine that you have a bicycle of carbon fibre, every time that you do that you may produce small cracks that will damage the structure.

Concerning the use of the personal pronoun I, the data show that they are less numerous in the lectures surveyed, with the obvious exception of Lecture 3. On the whole, lecturers use I to refer to their personal experience, knowledge, circumstances or even limitations, versus their professional or academic figure (which is encoded in we), represented as shown in the examples below:

**L1:**

16. I’ve always used the kilowatts, I haven’t used the horsepower

**L2:**

17. I have to apologise for my poor English. In fact, I tried to improve it. I stayed one year abroad and attended classes so what I have is the best I can do.

18. I think the number was close to ...

**L3:**

19. I don’t know, how do you say ‘inflar’? When you put air into a tyre – a car tyre – inflate!

20. For instance, here you can see the flow pattern around a typical aircraft. I think it’s a kind of Mirage

21. I’m not sure.

22. For me it is very difficult to speak in English, I think my mouth is not prepared for this language.

23. Well, probably if I had to explain in Spanish, I would explain better.

In the case of L2, the quantitative results for I are somewhat misleading as there is a greater presence of first person pronoun than second you. This would suggest that the speaker centralises his view of the event. However, on closer examination, it was found that of the 61 instances of I, 20 were used at the beginning of the class when the lecturer was introducing himself, 7 for self-reference and the remaining 34 were repetitions of the reformulating expression I mean. This utterance was employed as the sole device to rephrase ideas, paraphrase, and expand on previous statements.
L2: (24) Stiffness means that the structure does not bend under low (?) I mean, the deformation is very low.

Given that *we* predominates over the other two pronouns, the second step in the quantitative analysis was to observe the presence of clusters associated with it. This search will help us to identify the discursive contexts in which the pronoun is mostly used. Table 2 shows the 12 clusters found in our data.

Table 2 proves that the highest number of occurrences of *we* was accompanied by a verb in present simple tense (91 occurrences). These verbs vary depending on the subtopic of the talk, but often appear embedded in a conditional clause. In L1 (17 instances) the most common verbs were *increase* and *decrease*, given that the speaker was calculating mathematical formulæ. In L2, the structure *we change* was the most common with 4 examples and in L3 it is the verb *use* conjugated in different tenses (8 tokens) and referring to the diverse methods of calculus and analysis employed. Differences by lectures are included in Table 3.

The second more frequent cluster was *we have +a/the/zero article*. The use of *we have* as a presentational device is common to all three lecturers (83 occurrences), often accompanied by deictics of the type *here, now, there*. However, there are differences as to the frequency. L1 exclusively uses this strategy to present a new topic or to contextualise the different aspects of his talk. There are 45 instances of this cluster:

L1: (25) (...) *we have this*: the density of the air and normally... normally... we use for the density of the air the pressure.

(26) *Here we have* the less area, then *we have* the maximum velocity.

### Table 2 Distribution by clusters of *we* in the three lectures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Clusters</th>
<th>Occurrences</th>
<th>Frequency %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. We + present simple verb</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>5.01</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. We have + a, the, zero article</td>
<td>83</td>
<td>4.57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. We can</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>3.42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. We have to</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>2.54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. We + present cont.</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>1.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. We + past tense</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>1.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. We + will</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>1.27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. We + need</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. We want to</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>0.77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. We have + past part</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>0.72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. We may + verb</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. We could have + past part</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The situation that we have now is that we have developed, err, sorry, we have developed an expression for the power. In another situation we have a loss of air in the chamber.

In the case of L2 this use of *we have* as a presentational device halves to 22 instances and in 3, there are 16 examples of this structure.

L2: (29) **Here we have** again the criteria of the stiffness, so there is an indication of the value to be attained.

L3: (30) **What we have here**, as we will see later, is two special fibres.

In addition to presentational *we have*, Lecturers 2 and 3 used other devices to introduce new topics or subtopics in their talk, such as: concerning, *it is said that* (L2), *there is/are, regarding*, or the use of rhetorical questions or personal comment to attract students’ attention, all of which suggests a wider variety of resources and more lecturing expertise.

L2: (32) **Concerning** the suspension, it is said that it cannot be adjusted.

L3: (33) **All right**, this is one of the few – the analysis of the behaviour of liquids under microgravity conditions, **and well . . . How can you get microgravity?**

Satellite development. This is very interesting. I think you–you you will interest in this project.

The presence of the cluster *we can* is also prominent in our data. Results make evident that besides the purely semantic value of possibility and ability, this cluster is used by the lecturers to illustrate the different steps students might take to solve a problem. With it the teacher suggests a number of possible options, while at the same time *we can* seems to be functioning as a hedge softening his demand that students follow a particular procedure or line of reasoning:

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### Table 3: Most frequent cluster distribution by lecture

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lecture 1</th>
<th>Lecture 2</th>
<th>Lecture 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. we have a, the, zero</td>
<td>1. we+ present s. verb</td>
<td>1. we have + present s. verb</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. we have to</td>
<td>2. we have + a, the, zero</td>
<td>2. we + past tense</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. we can</td>
<td>3. we will</td>
<td>3. we have + a, the, zero</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. we + present s. verb</td>
<td>4. we can</td>
<td>4. we + present cont.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. we want to</td>
<td>5. we + present cont.</td>
<td>5. we can</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(27) The situation that **we have now** is that we have developed, err, sorry, we have developed an expression for the power.

(28) **In another situation we have** a loss of air in the chamber.
And we can do the first calculation. We can now, for example we can put here the maximum volumetric efficiency that we can use.

And then we can use an ideal gas low for fuel, for the vapour of fuel and... or the air to calculate this... and we can calculate the real pressure of the air. If we introduce here the ideal gas low in this partial pressure – we can do the same for his partial pressure – we obtain the expression that we have here.

Once we have this problem solved, we can calculate pressure distribution, the lift forces and so on.

It is interesting to note that in our data we can is also used to explain matters of physical law that determine what is possible and what is not. Thus, the teacher is acting as an expert evaluator of possible and impossible technical or procedural combinations.

We can increase the thickness of the skin very progressively but there are some rules about that.

We cannot easily change this [the elastic model of the material] unless we can change the chemical bonds, however, we can calculate theoretically how much it would be needed to break the chemical bond.

and since we have Magmatics, we can introduce models and we can make predictions, and after that we can check those predictions in a wind tunnel test. (...) So that in this case, the only thing we can do is to make a lot of tests in wind tunnels and try to get some idea of how things are working.

As regards the presence of we have to, results show that although numerous (46 occurrences), this cluster is not evenly distributed among the lectures, and L1 groups nearly all the uses (42 occurrences), whereas L2 and L3 only use them twice. The dense concentration in L1 hints at a personal strategy rather than at a general tendency followed by lecturers. Interpretations here can be twofold: it may be the lecturer’s lack of expertise in the teaching in English or in the use of modality that leads him to this constant repetition, or the speaker consciously uses this form to convey information with certainty and authority, as it is frequently used to present evidence and draw conclusions based on it.

If we have more fuel than air, we have to introduce the function (...) then we have to put here the thermal efficiency ... We have to multiply by the mechanical efficiency and the diagram efficiency.

And we have the piston. This is the characteristic velocity of the piston (...) If we want to decrease this velocity (...) we have to decrease the velocity of the piston. We have to wait to do that.

In the case of L3, the speaker seems to combine the use of have to with need to, which also conveys content expertise and authority but is less forceful.
We have to design an aircraft from the point of view of Aerodynamics. and finally we have to introduce a kind of reversibility in the process, which is the Second Law of Thermodynamics. We need to introduce some hypothesis about the structure of the fluid. We need to make approximations. We need to analyse every phenomenon, and try to select only what aspects are dominant in the phenomenon, and the aspects which are not relevant, drop out.

The use of we + will shows the highest concentration in L2 (23 occurrences). The discursive function of this structure is to organise the talk by anticipating the different topics, sections or steps that it will follow. In other words, we will functions as an announcer or prospective marker.

Then we will look into for about twenty minutes, we will look at the basic knowledge of composite materials. (...) we will see an example of composite material and we will follow the whole process from design to manufacturing.

By way of recapitulation, it may be stated that in the present analysis both pronoun use and modal verbs are intended to create a communal learning atmosphere by establishing common ground, shortening interpersonal distance and minimising the speaker’s authority.

Conclusion

This small-scale study has explored the construction of stance in university lectures by analysing the use of the personal pronouns I, you and we and the most frequent verbal clusters, especially focusing on the functions of modal and semi-modal verbs that accompany them. Regarding pronouns, the results showed that we holds a very high presence in the three lectures analysed, while you and, last, I are less frequent numerically speaking. Our findings, however, do not coincide with other studies on academic lectures (see Fortanet, 2004) where the occurrences for I considerably exceeded those of we and you. Reasons for such differences might be in principle connected with the discipline under analysis, the nature of the course or lecture, determinant of the clusters with which these pronouns operate, and the lecturers involved (native versus non-native and veteran versus novice, these latter presumably being less skilful at handling solidarity or inclusive strategies). The pervasive use of we with an inclusive value, even in the FL speech of novice lecturers, seems to suggest that they adopt a role of cooperation and identification with the audience. However, our data also reveal that, in addition to a solidarity strategy, we works as a macro-organisational principle guiding both lecturers and students throughout the speech event. The other pronominal forms, I and you, are used for self-reference and direct addressing or illustrative generalisations, respectively. Self-reference uses cover functions such as indicating
personal experience, individual responsibilities and even apologies for the lack of linguistic skills.

As for verbal clusters, *we + present tense* proved to be the most frequent one. Interestingly, only two clusters containing modal verbs (*we can* and *we have to*) are found among the five more frequent combinations. The uses of *can* and *have to* seem to go beyond the prototypical meanings commonly assigned to them. Thus, *can* is not only used to express possibility or permission as to what is possible/permitted to do according to scientific rules, but it is also used to open up space for negotiation. These two main uses confer *can* a solidarity function both within a problem-solving framework, where teacher and students work together, and within the interpersonal dimension of meaning, where the teacher uses the cluster *we can* to indicate the time for a class break.

In a similar vein, the form *have to* appears to free itself from the meaning of ‘obligation’, as it follows from the fact that it is mainly used to present the steps to follow in the scientific line of reasoning. Although, obviously, the speaker presents himself as the source of knowledge indicating what has to be done under specific circumstances and scientific constraints, it is precisely these two factors (and not the speaker’s authority) that determine the actions to be taken. Other forms such as *may*, *need* or *might* have very little representation and, again, are not evenly distributed among lecturers.

The above observations seem to point to a gradual change in the construction of stance on the part of lecturers, with university instructors, at least in Spain, becoming more accessible to students – a change that is partially reflected in their use of *inclusive-we* and especially modal verb *can*, and the near-absence of modals of obligation. Both teachers and students need to recognise the functions of modals and make an effort to understand the saliency of the information accompanying these modal expressions if they wish to succeed in academic contexts where the presence of such features is very high.

Due to the limited quantity of data, it is not possible to reach generalisations concerning modal verb usage and pronoun preferences in academic lectures by non-native speakers. However, in addition to providing evidence of the CLIL classroom discourse, this work has also tried to demonstrate that general semantic classes such as possibility, necessity and obligation do not always grasp the full range of meanings and discursive functions that both modals and personal pronouns convey. Factors like the teaching goals and styles, the professors’ competence in the FL or the role of the students, as well as the speech event under analysis (in this case the lecture), must be taken into consideration when interpreting the function of these linguistic features. The function of *we* in our data may also follow different patterns, given the lecturer–audience unfamiliarity of the first session analysed in comparison to ordinary classroom sessions, where relationships are well consolidated (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2005). What remains to be seen is how linguistic competence in the FL affects the lecturers’ choices of pronouns and modals as well as the semantic and discursive uses they ascribe to these linguistic forms. Also, it would be interesting to analyse to what extent the lecturers’ L1 may shape or condition their choice of modal verbs and pronoun usage (i.e. transfer phenomena).
Regarding CLIL considerations, this exploratory research has tried to render explicit characteristics of a particular teaching style (the lecture), which is by far the most widely used instructional method in university contexts. Our findings reveal that the CLIL lecturers in our study adopt an accessible tone in their discourse and favour student intervention with the use of certain modals (especially can) and the widespread presence of the plural pronoun we. Teachers promote a democratic atmosphere, probably because they themselves are not language experts and so display a logical over-mindfulness of content verbalisation, as has been detected in their overt captatio benevolentiae resources. In this sense, the use of a FL as vehicle of instruction may act as a catalyst to balance the highly asymmetrical roles performed by teachers and students in some conservative university communities, not very much accustomed to group work (i.e. case studies, class discussions), planning (i.e. syllabus design) or assessment (e.g. peer evaluation as complementary to that by the teacher). The co-presence of non-native speakers in the classroom undoubtedly fosters mutual scaffolding between students and on a teacher–student basis, increasing participation and providing alternative models of interaction more suited to the shared, supportive construction of knowledge encouraged by the European Space for Higher Education.

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Correspondence

Any correspondence should be directed to Emma Dafouz, Department of English Language and Linguistics, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, Ciudad Universitaria s/n, Madrid 28040, Spain (edafouz@filol.ucm.es).

Notes

1. The first stage of this study examined the attitudes that both content teachers and students in a tertiary setting (Universidad Complutense de Madrid and Universidad Politécnica) display towards the implementation of a CLIL approach. The data, gathered through a questionnaire distributed in five different disciplines (i.e. Economics and Business Administration, English Language and Linguistics, Chemistry, Health Sciences and Aeronautical Engineering), has served to identify the subjects’ different needs – from a linguistic and methodological perspective – and the effects of CLIL in their teaching/learning contexts (see Dafouz et al., forthcoming).
2. The MICASE corpus consists of approximately 1.7 million words transcribed from a variety of speech events covering lectures, lab sessions, seminars, dissertation defences, tutorials, etc., all held at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.
3. The website address, which includes information regarding underlying principles, courses and events, is www.BEST.eu.org (accessed 12.7.06).
4. Exceptionally, a single participant informed of having habitual technical tuition in English at his Polish university.
5. At this point, we have concentrated on pronouns in subject position but will need to revise uses in object position (us, you) in future research. Other personal pronouns (i.e. he/she, they) or the use of the impersonal construction one (i.e. one can add a layer) are not included in this analysis as their presence proved to be insignificant.

6. As the scope of this study has not been to distinguish between inclusive-we and exclusive-we, further research may need to provide a more detailed analysis of this particular use.

References


