

## 5 A Multimodal Approach to Persuasion in Conference Presentations

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### 5.1 INTRODUCTION

The mastery of a genre such as conference presentations is a key to success in many academic contexts. However, mastery of any genre implies not only a deep understanding of its communicative situation and its communicative purpose, but also an awareness of the variety of semiotic resources available, which go far beyond speech. Especially in the case of oral genres such as conference presentations, research has frequently overlooked the fact that speakers can resort to much more than words to convey their meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; van Leeuwen, 2004; Kress, 2010). This is precisely the gap that a multimodal approach to genre analysis tries to fill.

Multimodality intersects with discourse by focusing on the variety of available semiotic modes from which users of genres can select to better suit their needs in particular communicative situations. The more acquainted users are with these modes, the more likely they are to convey their meaning successfully and use genres effectively. Among these modes, three of them are particularly salient in oral genres: gestures and head movements (both kinesic features) and intonation (paralinguistic feature). They are virtually unavoidable in any instance of oral discourse and they deeply affect the way the message is perceived.

In the case of conference presentations, these modes can also contribute to the communicative purpose of the genre: presenting a scientific novelty to the scientific community and persuading this community that the research described is valuable. In this sense, conference presentations play a crucial role in the dissemination of scientific knowledge, as argued by Rowley-Jolivet (1999).

By means of a case study, I aim to demonstrate that academics resort to a variety of semiotic modes to make their conference presentations more persuasive. In particular, I attempt to address the following research questions:

1. How do intonation, head movements and gestures contribute to create a persuasive conference presentation?
2. To what extent is persuasion in conference presentation genre-specific?

In the next section, I provide a brief literature review of different approaches to academic discourse and genres that highlights the suitability of a multimodal approach to the study of an oral persuasive genre such as conference presentations. I then examine the conference presentation itself, focusing on its multimodal nature and its persuasive character. The remaining sections of the chapter are dedicated to a case study of an analysis of a conference presentation, which aims to highlight the contribution of the multimodal approach towards understanding how a persuasive message is designed in this genre.

## 5.2 APPROACHES TO ACADEMIC DISCOURSE ANALYSIS

Discourse analysis (often abbreviated as DA) is an approach to the study of discourse that focuses on how language is actually used (Fasold, 1990). There are different trends within DA, but they all agree that we need to avoid looking at language as an abstract system independent from its users. Instead, DA focuses on how people use language to show their attitude, to express feelings, to exchange information and to socialize, among other aims (Brown & Yule, 1983; Schiffrin, 1994). DA also emphasizes the need to take into account the *purpose* of using certain linguistic forms, instead of studying them in isolation. According to Swales (1990), this purpose is usually determined by the *discourse community* and its social practice, and this communicative purpose allows us to differentiate between different types of discourse. We can often associate a discourse community with a professional community, which makes it possible to speak of professional discourses such as business discourse, legal discourse, academic discourse, etc. Each type of discourse is, in turn, manifested in different genres.

Regarding academic discourse in particular, Hyland (2009) identifies the following main trends in the study of academic discourse:

1. A textual trend, which focuses on language choices, meanings and patterns in texts. Within these trends, we could include corpus analysis and genre analysis.
2. A contextual trend, which takes the wider situational aspects as a point of departure and looks at how language is socially enacted in specific situations.
3. A critical trend, which tries to bring to the fore the ideologies and relations of power revealed through texts.

I consider the present study to be included in the field of genre analysis, and therefore devote the next section to a discussion of the relevant literature.

### 5.3 APPROACHES TO GENRE ANALYSIS

In his seminal study on genres in academic settings, Swales (1990) describes genres as communicative events with a recognizable communicative purpose within a discourse community. Over the years, Swales's conception of genres has proved very influential and, as pointed out by Valeiras and Ruiz (in press), many authors have developed and expanded on the original concepts introduced by him (Paré & Smart, 1994; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Yates & Orlikowski, 2002; Virtanen & Halmari, 2005).

Two crucial aspects that recur in the literature on genres are *recursiveness* and *regularity*. A genre is recognizable by its recurrent use in particular situations, as well as by regularities in form, content and purpose (Paré & Smart, 1994; Yates & Orlikowski, 2002). Likewise, *acceptance by a community* is a requirement for a genre to be considered as such. Through this acceptance, a genre raises expectations in its community (Paré & Smart, 1994; Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995; Yates & Orlikowski, 2002). This connection with a *community of use* also highlights a genre as a social and professional tool that allows users to become competent members of a community (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995). Furthermore, the genre–society relationship entails a reciprocal influence, which Paré and Smart (1994) call *duality of structure*. On the other hand, genres are *dynamic* entities that change according to users' needs and also respond to social changes (Berkenkotter & Huckin, 1995).

As society and the way people communicate evolve, new texts that do not seem to fit into existing genre typologies emerge and a revision of the concept of genre is needed. Along this line, Kress (2003, p. 36) emphasizes the need to move from a theory that accounts for language alone to “a theory that can account equally well for gesture, speech, image, writing, 3D objects, colour, music and no doubt others.” Kress describes genres as dynamic entities that are the result of a creative process. This is particularly salient in the case of persuasive genres, as pointed out by Halmari and Virtanen (2005). Since persuasion is more effective when it is unexpected (O'Keefe, 2002; Perloff, 2003), it also prompts genre dynamism and the integration of new elements (i.e., new semiotic modes) that consequently add to the description of the genre.

A multimodal approach to genre analysis is based on the assumption that the genre-creation process is multimodal because users select among different modes to express meaning (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Kress, 2003; Norris, 2004; Kress & van Leeuwen, 2006). The concepts of *mode* and *media*, which are central to multimodal analysis, can help to shed light on the production and interpretation processes involved in genres. Jewitt (2004) clarifies the difference between these concepts, stating that modes enable *representation* of meaning, while media allow for the *dissemination* of meaning. Kress (2003) further claims that the production process of a text is closely related to design. Users design the most appropriate way of communicating their meaning in a given situation. This implies choosing the most suitable combination of modes, bearing in mind that each mode has different affordances and epistemological

commitments. At the same time, the practices of the community in which the genre is used also impose certain restrictions and rule out certain things as unacceptable. These issues will be discussed further in relation to conference presentations in the following section.

#### 5.4 THE CONFERENCE PRESENTATION AS A GENRE

The conference presentation can be classified as an academic genre since it is mainly used by discourse communities within academia. In order to better understand the nature of this genre and the way it is related to other genres within academic discourse, I draw on Fortanet's (2005) classification of spoken academic genres, which uses the purpose of the genre as the main criterion and distinguishes three main categories:

1. *Classroom genres*, within which we can include lectures, seminars, students' presentations and oral exams, among others.
2. *Institutional genres*, which include academic year opening lectures, honoris causa speeches and rectors' addresses to the faculty, among others.
3. *Research genres*, which can be further subdivided into a) *conference genres* that include plenary lectures, poster presentations, workshops and conference presentations, which are central to this study, and b) *other research genres* such as PhD thesis defenses, master's thesis presentations, etc.

Classroom genres seem to have been privileged in research on spoken academic discourse, but conference presentations have recently attracted the attention of many scholars who have tackled its study from different angles. Among these, we can mention Dubois (1982), who presents a detailed account of biomedical conferences. Later Rowley-Jolivet (1999, p. 179) claimed what she termed the "pivotal role" of conference presentations in academic research, and identified three main functions of this genre: to present a scientific novelty, to give visibility to research and to reinforce social cohesion within the discourse community. This work was expanded by Rowley-Jolivet and Carter-Thomas (2003, 2005), who studied presentations from three different approaches (see the discussion in the next section). They also compared the rhetorical structure of conference introductions with research article introductions. In these studies, they highlight an important feature of conference presentations that is of particular relevance for this chapter: They are not only novelty-oriented and informative, but they are also inherently persuasive. This idea is shared by Räisänen (1999, 2002), who suggests that the function of conference presentations is to publicize, critically discuss and ratify research. Another issue of particular relevance raised in the literature on conference presentations is the immediacy in time and place in relation to an expert audience with whom a great amount of

shared knowledge can be expected. This is discussed by Hood and Forey (2005) and Rowley-Jolivet & Carter-Thomas (2005), who maintain that the immediacy of an audience and the consequent need for real-time processing strongly influence the way a presentation is designed.

The relationship of conference presentations with other genres has also been the focus of several studies that see this genre as part of a macrogeneric event embedded in the wider conference experience. With the term *semiotic spanning*, Ventola (2002) tries to explain the connection between the presentation itself and the discursive practices of the participants during the whole conference event. This implies that every presentation an academic delivers is necessarily influenced by the previous presentations in the conference event and the future presentations that will come after it, as well as by related genres such as the abstract or the research article. This relationship has also been explained through the concept of *genre chain*, which identifies a chronological sequence of academic genres that are produced during the unfolding of a communicative event, e.g., Call for papers–Abstract–Presentation–Research article (Räsänen, 2002; Shalom, 2002).

The idea that a conference presentation is associated with (and influenced by) a written paper is also discussed by Rowley-Jolivet (1999), Rowley-Jolivet and Carter-Thomas (2005) and Hood and Forey (2005). Presentations are a way of testing research before a definitive paper is published. They may also present research that is still ongoing. This dynamic process is usually diluted and idealized in the written paper (Hyland, 2009). For this reason, we can argue that a conference presentation is a process genre (Swales, 1990; Rowley-Jolivet & Carter-Thomas, 2005), since it often takes place while research is still in progress.

There are also some interesting studies that deal with specific sections of conference presentations. The discussion session or Q&A has been dealt with by Shalom (1993), Wulff, Swales & Keller (2009) and Querol-Julián (2011). I follow Wulff et al. (2009) in considering the Q&A session as part of the conference presentation and not as a separate genre, because I consider the communicative situation and purpose still to remain much the same, despite the more active role of the audience during this session. For the same reason, I also consider the chair's introduction as part of the conference presentation genre.

Rather than concentrating specifically on genre, other studies have dealt with the narrative discourse of presentations (Thompson, 2002), or the language used within them (Ruiz-Garrido & Fortanet-Gómez, 2008). Finally, Hood & Forey (2005) and Hyland (2009) identified several challenges when studying conference presentations as a genre. On the one hand, we need to consider their inherent *variety*. Presentations can range from a one-hour plenary to a short parallel session, they can present research at various levels of completion, and their audience can differ in size and homogeneity. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the difficulties of collecting and coding *multimodal data*. The multimodal nature of conference presentations is the focus of the next section of this chapter.

### 5.4.1 Multimodality in Conference Presentations

Dubois (1982) was among the first to draw attention to the multimodal nature of presentations, pointing out the increasing importance and abundance of visuals, as well as their role in helping to structure the presentation.

Later, Carter-Thomas and Rowley-Jolivet (2003) suggested that the study of conference presentations must be approached from three different perspectives:

1. A microscopic bottom-up analysis to identify recurrent linguistic features and relate these choices to the communicative context (but which fails to account for the rhetorical macrostructure of the text)
2. A macroscopic top-down analysis (analysis of moves) to explore the rhetorical structure (but which fails to account for the variety of modes employed)
3. A multimodal approach to account for the essential role of visuals in presentations, and how the affordances of this mode make it particularly suitable for easy processing during real-time delivery

The role of visuals is also dealt with in Rowley-Jolivet's work (2002, 2005), in which she claimed that visuals constitute a major resource for meaning-making in presentations. Moreover, because they provide immediate access to data discussed, visuals serve to reinforce newness and immediacy of the presentation. Hyland (2009) further claimed that visuals fulfill the three metafunctions postulated in systemic functional linguistics, and thus can provide information, help to structure the talk and appeal to the imagination of the audience. Finally, with a slightly different focus, Bellés and Fortanet (2004) discussed the characteristics of the handouts used in academic presentations in the field of linguistics, identifying references, schematic outlines and short summaries as common traits in their corpus.

From this brief and selective review, we see that visuals have enjoyed a privileged treatment in multimodal analyses of conference presentations. However, some studies have also looked at the role of kinesic or paralinguistic features in academic discourse. With reference to classroom settings, English (1985) discussed the role of kinesics in academic lectures to facilitate understanding. Pozzer-Ardenghi and Roth (2005) pointed out how gestures in lectures can reduce the ambiguity of visuals, while Crawford Camiciottoli (2007) included nonverbal behavior in her description of business lectures. Regarding academic research genres, Rendle-Short (2006) found that presenters in seminars announce silent periods through paralinguistics and kinesics. Hood and Forey (2005), in their multimodal study of introductions of plenary presentations, showed how gestures express attitudinal meaning and encourage alignment between audience and presenter. Räisänen and Fortanet (2006) tackled the use of nonverbal communication in conference presentations, looking at gestures, gaze, facial expression and posture.

They concluded that discussion sessions display a greater variety of kinesic features than the monologic presentation. Finally, Querol-Julián (2011) provided a detailed study of the multimodal expression of evaluation in discussion sessions of specialized conference paper presentations.

In this chapter, I focus on paralinguistic and kinesic features (i.e., intonation, head movements and gestures) as crucial meaning-making resources in oral discourse in general, and conference presentations in particular. I draw on the above-cited research to analyze the multimodal expression of persuasion in this genre, arguing that conference speakers use a variety of modes to deliver a persuasive presentation.

### 5.4.2 Persuasion in Conference Presentations

Because their primary aim is to convince an audience of the validity, originality and usefulness of a piece of research (Rowley-Jolivet, 1999; Räisänen, 1999, 2002; Rowley-Jolivet & Carter-Thomas, 2003, 2005), conference presentations can be considered to be a persuasive genre. According to authors such as O'Keefe (2002), Perloff (2003) and Halmari and Virtanen (2005), persuasive messages tend to be more effective when a) speakers have credibility and the audience can identify with them, b) the message is made memorable, c) the message is innovative and surprising and d) the message is perceived as not imposed, but inferred.

In this chapter, I attempt to demonstrate that paraverbal and kinesic features play a key role in providing a conference presentation with the above-mentioned characteristics to make it more persuasive, i.e., speakers communicate a persuasive message through the use of different modes. Towards this aim, I have focused on four persuasive strategies that can be hypothesized to be enacted through intonation, head movements and gestures, as well as with words (Brazil, 1997; Kendon, 2004; Hood & Forey, 2005; Querol-Julián, 2011). These strategies, as discussed in Valeiras and Ruiz (in press), are the following:

1. *Emphasis*: This refers to highlighting parts of the message so that they receive more attention. Intonation can contribute through the use of prominent syllables. It can also be used in combination with rhetorical devices that make the text more memorable, such as lexical creativity (Lakoff, 1982; Bamford, 2007, 2008).
2. *Evaluation*: This occurs when speakers evaluate something and are thus implicitly inviting the listener to accept their point of view (Bamford, 2007; Querol-Julián, 2011). Hood and Forey (2005) point out how speakers can include multimodal expressions of attitude in their introductions that subtly evaluate their presentations in positive terms and seek alignment with their audience. Also along this line, Pomerantz (1986) notes how extreme case formulations are frequently used to legitimize claims when speakers expect possible counterclaims. Interestingly,

these claims are commonly accompanied by head shakes, which seem to deny in advance a potential counter-argument (Kendon, 2002).

3. *Projection of understanding of the situation*: This allows speakers to present some parts of the message as shared with the audience and agreed upon, as opposed to new and open to discussion. Intonation, for example, plays an important role in this. It can be used in combination with inclusive pronouns that can help establish rapport with the audience and enhance the sense of shared knowledge (Fortanet, 2002; Bamford, 2007, 2008; Rowley-Jolivet & Carter-Thomas, 2005). Gestures can also help create this sense of inclusivity, bringing the audience into the discussion and establishing common ground (Hood and Forey, 2005; Holler, 2010).
4. *Anticipation and direction of responses*: This happens when speakers tend to predict reactions and adapt their discourse accordingly in order to obtain a desirable response. Very frequently, we do this with gestures and head movements (e.g., gestures or head shakes to prevent potential counterclaims) and also with intonation (e.g., a final high pitch shows that the speaker expects the listener to be surprised) (Brazil, 1997).

However, some modern research on persuasion (O'Keefe, 2002; Perloff, 2003) suggests that a persuasive message cannot be created as a template, but needs to be adapted to particular circumstances. In the specific case of conference presentations, this means that it is necessary to take into account how persuasion adapts to the communicative situation and especially to the community addressed. Hyland (2006, 2009) points out that belonging to a community means engaging with their discourses and practices. Thus, when speakers produce meaning in interaction with a community, their rhetorical choices are determined by their purpose, the setting and the audience. In Hyland's own words, "Persuasion in the academy [. . .] involves using language to relate independent beliefs to shared experience" (2009, p.13). Here I go a step further and argue that persuasion in academic contexts involves using not only *language*, but a *combination of semiotic modes*.

According to Thompson (2002) and Hyland (2006), humanities lack the highly formalized reporting system of hard sciences and, for this reason, researchers cannot minimize their presence that easily. Instead, they require more personal projection in their texts to prompt solidarity, acceptance and credibility and create a convincing discourse. Rowley-Jolivet and Carter-Thomas (2005), however, maintain that the greater presence of the researcher may also be due to the requirements of the communicative situation of the oral presentation, which calls for more interactive efforts to engage with the audience as opposed to written genres. Engaging with the audience, according to Hyland (2006), is a twofold process. On the one hand, it means addressing the audience as participants in an argument, and on the other, it means anticipating potential responses and directing the audience towards intended interpretations.



Persuasion in conference presentations, therefore, is discipline-dependent and contextually dependent, and also requires the speaker to meet the following conditions: a) prove the originality and value of the piece of research described, b) prove that it has been done according to disciplinary rules, c) share practices and admit responsibility for decisions and d) be part of the whole communicative event in which research is being disseminated.

As Hyland (2006, p. 21) puts it, “We are more likely to persuade readers of our ideas if we shape our message so as to appeal to appropriate community recognized relationships.” In the case study presented in the remainder of this chapter, I show how speakers make an effort to fulfill these conditions in order to communicate their research persuasively.

## 5.5 DATA AND METHODOLOGY

### 5.5.1 The Conference Event<sup>1</sup>

ABC (Association for Business Communication) is an international organization devoted to business communication. The organization holds an annual general conference, as well as other events organized by its four regional branches. These events are announced through a call for abstracts, which is also the basis for the selection of the presentations that will form the event. In the specific case of the symposium that concerns this study, there are plans to publish a volume compiling the different contributions. The event was devoted to exploring the two ‘ends’ of professional discourse research: a) obtaining data for analysis on the one hand (the “ins”) and b) translating these data into useful recommendations for practitioners on the other (the “outs”). The conference presentation selected for analysis was scheduled on the second day of the event (devoted to the “outs” of professional discourse). It presents a case study of business English students doing an internship at a company. The presentation will be followed up by a written paper that will be part of the above-mentioned volume.

In this presentation, I have identified the following semiotic modes:

1. Verbal linguistic elements, i.e., the text delivered by the speakers
2. Paralanguage: intonation, pauses, nonverbal vocalizations, among others
3. Kinesics: gestures, body posture, head movements, gaze, among others
4. Image (visuals): projected on screen as the presentation proceeds
5. Writing: written text projected in the same way as images

All of these modes, and potentially more that could be identified and added, help express meaning and play an important role in communicating a persuasive message.

### 5.5.2 The Methodology

The methodology employed for the study combined a multimodal analysis of four modes (i.e., speech, intonation, head movements and gestures), which was integrated with ethnographic interviews with speakers to enable a triangulation of results.

First, a video recording of one conference presentation in the field of business discourse was taken using one stative camera focused on two speakers who co-presented. The presentation included a Q&A session at the end. The video was later transcribed orthographically. Shortly after the presentation, interviews were held with both speakers individually to gain insight into their views about the presentations and the communicative event. Towards this aim, the interviews included questions about their purpose and the preparation of their presentation. In addition, speakers were also asked about other presentations that they had seen that day in order to include their point of view as part of the audience. These interviews allowed me to probe into key aspects such as:

- What speakers assumed is a good presentation
- What speakers assumed was expected of them and how they prepared accordingly
- What speakers were trying to achieve with their presentation
- Their self-evaluation of the effectiveness of their presentation
- The relationship of the presentation with the corresponding written paper

The next step was an analysis of the macrostructure of the presentation. From this analysis, integrated with the information obtained from the interviews with speakers, a series of potentially persuasive points were identified. These are moments in the presentation which are particularly rich in terms of persuasive efforts from the speakers, and are also especially rich in modal density (Norris, 2004). This approach was adopted to avoid prioritizing any semiotic mode in particular, which has proved useful to keep the focus on the multimodal ensemble as a whole and the way different modes interact to encode a persuasive message. If each mode had been studied in isolation, this comprehensive view would not have been possible, and it would have been difficult to avoid the tendency to focus on the verbal element as the primary semiotic source.

A multimodal analysis of the expression of persuasion in these rich points constituted the next step of the process. Despite an effort to focus on the multimodal ensemble, for the sake of feasibility this study only focuses on a limited number of modes, i.e., speech, intonation, head movements and gestures, while leaving out others such as proxemics, gaze or visuals, which can equally contribute to the message. The reason why the modes specified above have been selected is that they have received less attention in

academic discourse (compared, for example, to visuals), and yet they are quite conspicuous whenever we speak. Indeed, it is possible to give a presentation without visuals, even if it would probably be more difficult. However, it would be virtually impossible to deliver a presentation using a flat intonation throughout or without moving at all.

The speakers' gestures were analyzed following the work of Kendon (2004) and McNeill (1992). Where possible, their terminology has been applied for easier identification and description of the gesture. Particular attention was paid to the interaction of the gestures with the other modes studied, and how they work together in the expression of meaning. In the case of head movements, my analysis drew mainly on the research of McClave (2000) and Kendon (2002), focusing especially on amplitude and repetition, as well as interplay with other modes. The approach adopted for the analysis of intonation is Discourse Intonation (DI) (Brazil, 1997). DI looks at the communicative value of intonation by analyzing four systems in which speakers can make a range of meaningful choices. Through these choices speakers project a particular understanding of the communicative situation, direct the interpretation of the message or favor certain responses, all of which can function as highly persuasive tools. Table 5.1 offers a summary of these.

Finally, the results obtained from the analysis described above were discussed with the speakers themselves, who confirmed some of them but, more interestingly, also provided alternative interpretations that highly enriched the analysis.

*Table 5.1* Discourse Intonation (Adapted from Brazil, 1997)

System	Definition	Options
Prominence	Prominent syllables are louder and longer	Prominent vs. non-prominent
Tone	Pitch movement	Rise-fall Fall Level Rise Fall-rise
Key	Relative pitch of onset syllables in relation to the onset syllable of the previous tone unit. (onset = first prominent syllable in a tone unit) (tone unit = basic intonation unit consisting of at least one prominent syllable)	High Mid Low
Termination	Relative pitch of tonic syllables in relation to the onset syllable in the same tone unit (tonic = prominent syllable in a tone unit that carries pitch movement)	High Mid Low

Before proceeding to the results of the analysis, I would like to make a further comment about the modes selected. I have differentiated intonation as a separate mode rather than including it within speech because I consider it capable of fulfilling Halliday's metafunctions (Halliday & Greaves, 2008). In addition, I argue that people in general exploit it communicatively to a great extent, even if not so consciously or systematically as words. We are all familiar with the expression "it's not what you say, it's the way you say it." Therefore, it meets the two requirements suggested by Kress (2010) to be considered a mode.

## 5.6 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, I provide an overview of my results regarding the macrostructure and the multimodal analysis of persuasive rich points. I close this section by contrasting my results with the views of the speakers.

### 5.6.1 Macrostructure of the Presentation

The presentation macrostructure is illustrated in Table 5.2. As usual in academic conferences, there is an introduction by the chair before the presentation itself. In this case, the presentation is co-presented, and four turns are established for the two speakers, who alternate. The presentation is followed by a Q&A session with four questions/comments and a closing remark from the chair.

*Table 5.2* Macrostructure of the presentation

(1) Chair introduction		
(2) Monologue section	Self-introductions of both speakers	
	1st turn of speaker 1	
	1st turn of speaker 2	
	2nd turn of speaker 1	
	2nd turn of speaker 2	
(3) Q&A section	Question 1	Answer of speaker 1
	Question 2	Answer of speaker 2
	Comment 3	Answer of speaker 2
		Answer of speaker 1
	Question 4	Answer of speaker 2
		Answer of speaker 1
(4) Closing remarks of chair		

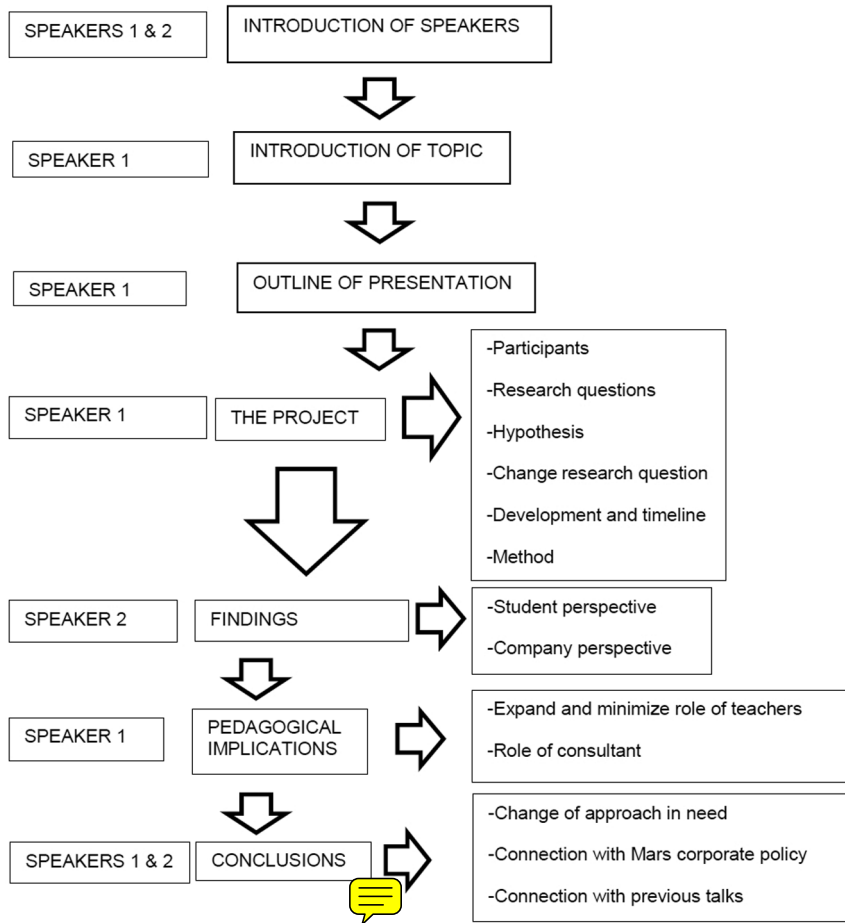


Figure 5.1 Macrostructure of the monologue section

The macrostructure of the monologue section can be represented schematically as shown in Figure 5.1.

### 5.6.2 Multimodal Analysis of Persuasion

The main point of this presentation (as confirmed by the interviews) is the tension between academic and professional profiles, and the complex interplay between key players in an internship project. Therefore, it could be expected that a) references to this tension will be particularly persuasive, b) this persuasion will be expressed multimodally and c) intonation, gestures and head movements are likely to play an important role in the multimodal ensemble.

These hypotheses were confirmed by the analysis. Many of the points that were identified as particularly persuasive correspond to the discussion of the results and the implications that can be derived from them. In addition, they are also related to the tension identified as the main point of the presentation. On the other hand, it should also be noted that these points also constitute the original contribution of this research, which further explains the need to highlight them and make them particularly persuasive. This is connected to an attempt to conform to the discursive rules of the community (i.e., prove originality and relevance of research) that is present throughout the presentation. In the following paragraphs, I zoom in on two relevant extracts to illustrate these points.

In Figure 5.2 below, Speaker 1 is discussing one of the main findings of their study, i.e., during an internship project, the role of the teacher must be diminished so that students can evolve to become professionals. As the speaker is pronouncing the utterance “we should stop at a certain point” he makes an open hand prone gesture (Kendon, 2004) that implies the idea of ‘stop’ or ‘halt,’ and interestingly coincides with the word “stop.” This word is also made prominent because it is the tonic syllable of the tone unit (Brazil 1997). The speaker is thus emphasizing the idea of stopping, which is a main finding, through intonation and gesture.

Figure 5.3 is another example of highlighting a main finding multimodally. Speaker 2 is commenting that students need to be encouraged to become “truly consultants.” As the word “truly” is pronounced it receives prominence and, at the same time, a finger bunch gesture (Kendon 2004) is made that ends in a closed fist, signifying the idea of ‘seizing’ something,



Figure 5.2 “We should stop”

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of ‘grasping’ the exact meaning of something. This meaning complements what is expressed by the word “truly.”

Hyland’s (2006) claim that the presence of the researcher is rather prominent and serves to give credibility to research in humanities is confirmed by both speakers’ emphasis on the honest sharing of the research experience and the process. In addition, references to the researchers themselves are relevant here, as expressed by the pronouns “our” and “we,” also reinforced through gestures, as Figure 5.4 exemplifies:

Note how Speaker 2 points to herself as she mentions “our everyday practice,” directing attention to the figure of the researcher and the progress of the research process. Interestingly, the word “our” also receives prominence.

Both speakers mention several times that they changed their research questions as they progressed in their research, and they seem to emphasize this point throughout the presentation. My interpretation of this is as follows: This change is something that could be objected to, given the assumptions among the scientific community on how research should be done. Because of this, the decision is carefully justified, and particularly persuasive efforts can be expected whenever there is a reference to this change. There is a special need to persuade the audience that the study presented

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Figure 5.3 “Become truly consultants”



Figure 5.4 “Our everyday practice”

has been done according to accepted conventions in the discourse community that forms the audience. This was, however, refuted by later discussion with speakers. Both emphasized that the reason for the emphasis on the change of research question was to build an interesting narrative about the research process, and mainly stemmed from an interest in sharing research experiences with the audience. This is, in turn, very revealing about generic practices and expectations: Oral presentations allow for this sharing of research experiences, while written papers do not. Both speakers referred to this difference in their interviews, as I expand on in the next section. Some examples clarifying this point are:

(example 1) WE //CHANGED //our RESEARCH question

(example 2) WE felt//it was time for US//to CHANGE our APPROACH<sup>2</sup>

Both ideas are conveyed in utterances made up of shorter tone units than usual and with prominence on key words such as “change,” “we,” “us,” “research” or “approach.”

Speaker 1 repeats several times during his first turn that they were scheduled in the “outs”-themed section for the sake of consistency. I interpret this as a way of proving the relevance of their presentation in the whole



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communicative event, and of showing that the presentation coheres with it. This is further supported by the references to other presentations. The following example illustrates this point:

(example 3) WE were *SCHEDULED*// to*DAY*// in the *OUT* sessions/

Note how the word “today” is singled out as a tone unit in itself, and “out” is the tonic syllable of the next tone unit, both becoming prominent.

During the Q&A session, for both speakers the nodding of the head during the posing of a question serves as a backchannel, but it sometimes becomes particularly emphatic and assumes an interpersonal and modal meaning (i.e., showing alignment). A good example of this is the third question in the discussion session, which takes the form of a comment:

(example 4) I feel also as a student, they don't feel that's legitimate to step into the company or be very aggressive or very authoritative.

During this comment (which was actually longer than the extract shown above), both speakers nod subtly as they start listening. As the discussant makes her point, both nod more frequently and emphatically. My interpretation is that this is a way of anticipating a positive response or, in other words, a way of showing agreement with the views expressed in the comment. This is in line with Querol-Julián's (2011) findings in her multimodal study of Q&A sessions in conference presentations. It is also supported by the fact that Speaker 2 uses a high key (involving a higher pitch) as she answers, which according to Brazil (1997) is adjudicating, and can be paraphrased as “you are right” as shown in example (5):

(example 5) Yes, thank you so much. I'm glad you brought that out.

### 5.6.3 Insights from Speaker Interviews

Ethnographic interviews with both speakers shed additional light on the results presented in the previous section. They also allowed me to compare the results with the speakers' views. In some cases, the speakers confirmed these results. In others, however, they gave alternative views that differed from my interpretations. In both cases, their insights provided the case study with more objectivity and made the analysis considerably richer.

#### 5.6.3.1 Views on the Presentation and the Event

For both speakers, it was their second experience at the ABC conference, but Speaker 1 seemed to make a closer connection and draw more from his experience at the first conference. In fact, he mentioned that his motivation to attend this second conference was derived from his successful experience the first time.

Speaker 2 admitted during the interview that, although it was not the first time she participated in an ABC conference, she felt “like an outsider.” This leads me to think that she was making a greater effort to create rapport and build common ground with the audience. In my opinion, this explains her more frequent hedging, which gives her presentation an overall humble tone. In example (6), we see this during her discussion of the students’ perception of the communication flow between themselves and the company, which she admits was not positive.

(example 6) So we looked at the interviews on the complex interactions between the company and the students and we noticed a couple of things. I’ll guide you through some of the quotes here. The students were basically not that happy, that’s a way of summarizing it.

In example (7), the attempt to sound noncategorical materializes through paralinguistic and kinesic cues instead of lexically: a pause immediately before and a longer syllable duration in “difficulty,” accompanied by a minimizing hand gesture signifying something small.

(example 7) So when we, as researchers, confronted the company with this—well, difficulty in working together, the trust, the giving access, they were totally surprised.

The frequent open hand supine gestures through which she offers and shares ideas with her audience with palms facing up, suggesting honesty and willingness to draw on shared knowledge, seem to serve the same purpose (Holler 2010). This is further supported by her acknowledgement during the interview that she tried to find a common ground with the audience by appealing to shared teaching experiences, whereas in more familiar contexts she tends to be more direct. Interestingly, she mentioned that she particularly liked another presentation in the conference because the speaker was ‘humble but confident,’ which is very much in line with the relationship she seems to be trying to establish with her audience.

Concerning the emphasis on being scheduled on the “outs”-themed section of the conference, both speakers agreed that it was an effort to make their contribution cohere with the whole communicative event. This is in line with Speaker 2’s efforts to make references to other contributions at the end of the presentation.

Finally, concerning the difference between the oral presentation and the paper that will be based on it, Speaker 1 claimed that the paper will be more result-oriented, while the oral presentation is more apt for methodological discussion. A reason for this is that he considers a presentation to be more flexible and interactive than a written paper. Speaker 2 believes the main difference between them is that the presentation needs to “sell something quickly,” while the paper will focus on the importance of the contribution.

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In the written paper, there is no room for honest sharing of research experiences. Speaker 1 also gave a lot of importance to visuals in this presentation because he thinks they help make the presentation more to the point and therefore more effective, which is in line with Speaker 2's idea of "selling something quickly."

### 5.6.3.2 *Other Issues*

Regarding the change of the research question, Speaker 1 claimed that there was no need to justify it in his opinion. Rather, it is a metareflection that he considered would be more interesting for the audience (and in this he agreed with Speaker 2). He added that sharing the process is more interesting in the case of group work rather than in the case of an individual researcher. Speaker 1 also mentioned that he particularly liked a specific presentation because the speaker was "honest," which connects with this idea of sharing research experiences in a transparent way.

Speaker 2 explained that this change was somehow prompted by the initial results obtained, and rather than feeling the need to justify this decision, she thought it was a good hook for the audience, who she assumed would be more interested in an honest and transparent narrative of the research process.

In relation to the head nods during the Q&A session, both speakers found the possibility of anticipating a positive response plausible, but Speaker 2 added that in her case she uses these nods to help her maintain concentration after the draining experience of presenting.

## 5.7 CONCLUSIONS

A multimodal approach to conference presentations allows for a more comprehensive perspective on how a persuasive message is communicated. Throughout this chapter, I have shown how it is actually a complex interplay of different modes that makes a presentation persuasive. Towards this aim, I have combined a multimodal analysis of a video-recorded presentation with interviews that provided insight into the speakers' views and allowed contrasting interpretations.

The number and complexity of modes that contribute to the genre of conference presentations is a challenge for any comprehensive study. There are other modes not dealt with in this chapter, such as posture or gaze, which equally contribute to creating a persuasive message. The study of these modes can constitute an interesting and enlightening line for further research. In addition, a wider corpus of conference presentations should be collected and analyzed for the sake of representativeness.

In this chapter, I have illustrated through a case study how speakers present their research in a persuasive way by resorting to intonation, gestures and head movements. A mode such as intonation serves as a signposting

tool, highlighting important aspects, directing interpretation and monitoring responses. Through intonation, a speaker marks what is assumed as shared knowledge and what is expected to be accepted as an innovative and valuable contribution to the field. It is no coincidence that in the conference presentation analyzed, many of the richest points in terms of persuasion correspond to the discussion of results and their relevance or applicability. Rather than explicitly evaluating these results verbally (which would probably not fit into discourse practices), speakers direct attention to them and highlight them as new and potentially interesting through intonation, i.e., giving them prominence in their tone units.

Gestures and head movements, on the other hand, frequently reinforce and complement meaning expressed with words, or even substitute for them. Interestingly, many of the rich points referred to in the previous paragraph are also supported by hand gestures that either complete or reinforce the meaning expressed through other modes. Gestures and head movements also make it possible to express in a subtle way aspects of meaning that would be problematic to express with words in the communicative situation of a conference (e.g., strong agreement or disagreement). This was particularly evident during the Q&A session, where discourse is highly controlled by academic hedging. We have seen in the example analyzed that head nods can be used to anticipate strong agreement with the views expressed by a member of the audience who poses a question or makes a comment.

Persuasion in conference presentations is also highly dependent on the communicative event. This implies proving that the presentation fits into the broader conference and coheres with other presentations. The high number of references to other presentations and the way these are made prominent through intonation indicates that both speakers are aware of this in the example analyzed.

Finally, persuasion in conference presentation also implies respect for disciplinary practices. In the case analyzed in this study, this entailed a number of aspects such as focusing on honest and transparent sharing of research methods, taking responsibility of research decisions, as well as highlighting the novelty, value and applicability or usefulness of the results obtained. It is also interesting to note that these practices may change from one discipline to another, and probably in a conference in a different field we could expect a different stance from the speaker.

These are all important aspects that novel researchers should be made aware of as they go through a process of enculturation into a discipline to become competent members of the community. However, they are largely neglected in academic English courses, which tend to play a stronger emphasis on language accuracy. Novel researchers are typically left on their own to infer this knowledge about the genres and communicative practices of their disciplines. This turns science communication into a stressful business, something that could be avoided if researchers were directed towards the right communicative tools and resources to effectively disseminate their

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work. Using Hyland's words (2009, p. 2), "Ultimately a theory prevails because it is presented in a way which academics recognize as persuasive: knowledge, in other words, is what people can be persuaded to accept."

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#### NOTES

1. I would like to thank Geert Jacobs, president of ABC Europe, for the useful account of the organization and its communicative practices, and for facilitating access to the conference that is the object of this study.
2. I use the following DI notation conventions: uppercase letters for prominent syllables, lowercase letters for non-prominent syllables, ~~underlining for the tonic syllable~~ and // to delimit tone units.

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