

UCL LANGUAGE CENTRE



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# Listener recognition of information order in academic lectures

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# Aims

- To see how students handle earlier information gaps in listening tasks
- To explore the use of it-clefts for this purpose

# Lecture task types 1: dictation gapfill - a hearing test

- This first section of the lecture looks at the origins of money with reference to some British as well as (0) **global** examples. Let me start straightaway with a definition of terms and draw a clear distinction between 'money' as a broad (1) ..... and its embodiments in the coins and notes found across most parts of the world today, and probably in your pockets too. According to Philip Grierson in his book 'Numismatics', money in its widest (2) ..... has to include 'primitive' money, and the term therefore encompasses both natural products and precious objects. Natural products have been used as money in communities of all sizes, whereas precious objects as money were found in more (3) ..... societies. I will be introducing some examples of both types in a moment.

# Lecture task types 2: word spots

Socrates questioned everyone's beliefs, including **his own**. He evaluated all knowledge and greatly valued self-generated knowledge – therefore he started his teaching by creating doubt. He believed knowledge was the key rather than **true belief**.

**Socrates**

questioned everyone's beliefs, including **(11)** \_\_\_\_\_

Knowledge = key NOT **(12)** \_\_\_\_\_

## Notes

Tweed & Lehman reduced the Soc. method to 5:

- a) Tendency to Q.
- b)...evaluate
- c) Esteem for self-generated knowledge
- d) Focus on error to evoke **(13)** \_\_\_\_\_
- e) Search for knowledge

# Lecture task types 2: keys at end of sentences

- Because of time constraints, there is much that I can't include today. For example, there is the fascinating history of Islamic coinage, which was used across vast territories of the Islamic world. And concerning the various currencies in Asia, there is the incredibly long history of the Chinese coins which we know of in English as 'cash'. Chinese cash were round coins with a distinctive square hole that enabled them to be collected together on strings. Also Byzantine coins in the Eastern half of the Roman Empire had a fascinating history, and included unique coins that were not flat but made in the shape of a cone. Gold coins from Spanish America too have had a strong impact on the world, particularly the 8 *reales* coin, known in English as 'pieces of eight', rivals to English guineas and sovereigns.

## Coins

Can't include:

- Islamic coinage
- Chinese coins or (1) \_\_\_\_\_  
(1 mark)
- Byzantine coins, some in a (2) \_\_\_\_\_ (1 mark) shape
- Or Spanish American gold coins

# Redistribution of text information

- One way of redistributing information is fronting, eg by it-clefts

## Example:

- we need to address the higher-level needs (unmarked)
- it's the higher-level needs that we need to address (marked)  
(Large lecture, Behavior Theory Management [LEL185SU066](#), MICASE)

- It-clefts are probably the commonest way of fronting information in spoken academic English.

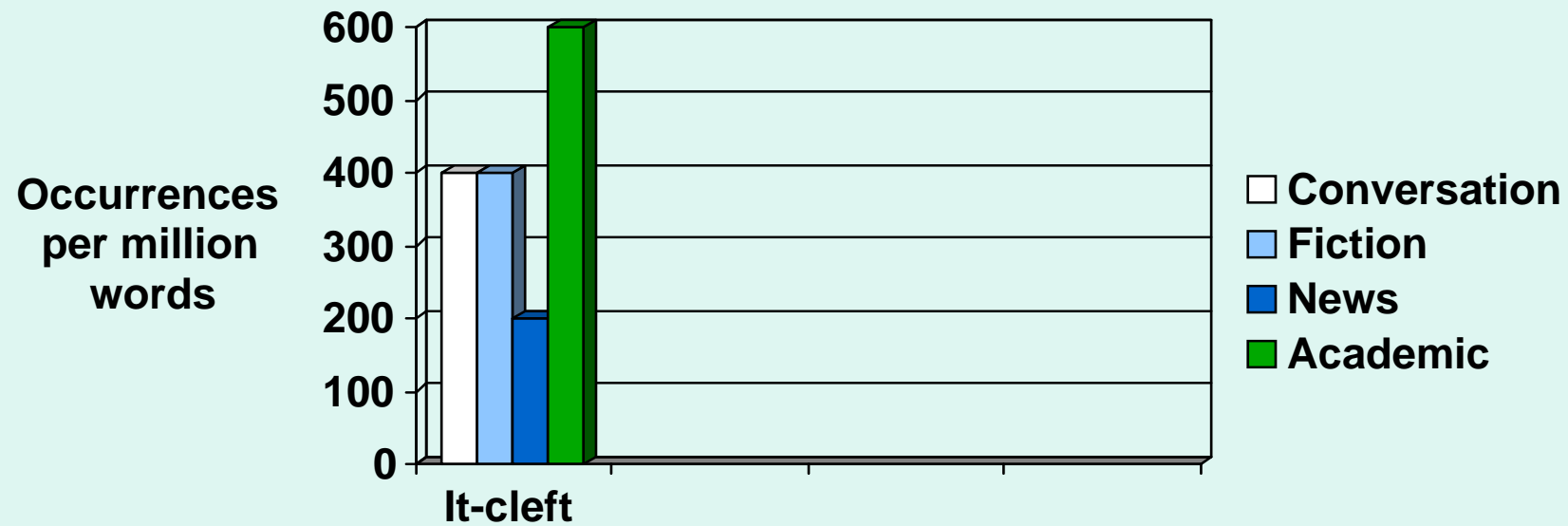
# It-clefts

It	is	the higher order needs	that we need to address
the pronoun <i>it</i>	a form of the verb <i>be</i> (+ negator / adverb)	the specially focused element	a relative-like dependent clause introduced by <i>that, who / which</i> or zero

(Biber et al, 1999: 959)

# Distribution of it-cleft constructions across registers

(Biber et al 1999: 961)



# Micase (the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English)

152 transcripts available

30 large lectures (14 it-clefts in 10 lectures)

32 small lectures (9 it-clefts in 8 lectures; more interactive)

# Micase (the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English)

you take care of those first, and then you move up the ladder and typically within an organization, **it's the higher-level needs that** we need to address. right? now, unfortunately though Maslow's hierarchy is s incredibly appealing there's been no empirical research supporting it.

(Large lecture, Behavior Theory Management [LEL185SU066](#) )

# Study

257 participants

3 live lectures

5 recorded lectures

Mock listening exam (no it-clefts)

Teaching intervention

# Summary of data

Date	Topic	Mode	It-cleft(s)	Sample	Success
5.8.09	Shakespeare	live	spoken	97	0
12.8.09	Pavilion	live	spoken	102	6 / 1
13.8.09	Obama	recorded	written	93	47
19.8.09	Bilingualism	live	spoken	75	5 / 0
20.8.09	Coins	recorded	spoken	111	46 / 1
25.8.09	Reith	recorded	written	92	45 / 19
15.9.09	Education	recorded	0	75	N/A
17.9.09	Sleep	recorded	written + spoken	143	113 / 97
19-21.9.09	It-clefts	teaching material	spoken +/- written	176	N/A
22.9.09	Digital visual literacy	recorded	spoken + written	209	75 / 131

# Live lectures

- Shakespeare
- Brighton Royal Pavilion
- Bilingualism

# Success criteria for live lectures

= ability to reproduce /  
paraphrase 3 parts of it-  
cleft:

- subject (focused element )
- main verb
- complement

eg speaker: *it was his personal  
tastes that shaped the  
building, that shaped the  
Royal Pavilion*

notes:

*George's taste influence  
building*

*his taste shaped RP basic  
design*

# Shakespeare lecture

- **it was the body that most clearly signified the feelings and the intent of a character.**
- 0 / 97

# Interviews

- with 9 students who wrote 'body' or 'physical acting'

# Yumi

- I couldn't understand her main point, what is important.

# Brighton Royal Pavilion Lecture

## lecture

- it was his personal tastes that shaped the building, that shaped the Royal Pavilion.
- 6 / 102
- it's really the in-depth knowledge of the conservation team that ensures the building will survive and will seem an authentic version of the 1820s interior.
- 1 / 102

# Bilingualism lecture

- it's context er that language use is dependent on.
- 5 / 75
- it's monolingualism that is seen as the norm and bilingualism as deviant.
- 0 / 75

# Obama listening test

It's the answer told by lines that stretched around schools and churches in numbers this nation has never seen, by people who waited three hours and four hours, many for the first time in their lives, because they believed that this time must be different, that their voices could be that difference.

- Because felt **it was their (3) *voices* (2 marks) that** could make the difference this time.
- $47 / 93 = 50\%$

# Coins listening test

•For the agricultural Kikuyu, it was the **number, or head, of cattle that** defined wealth.

•**It was the resources available to a community that** decided the choice of items.

- In Africa, Kikuyu wealth depended on (10) *\_number\_ / \_head\_* of cattle rather than their quality.
- 46 / 111 (41%)
- Item chosen depended on culture, + community (15) *\_resources\_* (3 marks).
- 1 / 111 (<1%)

# Reith listening test

• Today, biotech companies are in hot pursuit of memory-enhancing drugs, or 'cognition enhancers' - as they call them - for human beings. One obvious market for such drugs consists of those who suffer from serious memory disorders, such as Alzheimer's or dementia.

• We choose our friends and spouses at least partly on the basis of qualities we find attractive. But we do not choose our children.

- - **it's those with severe memory (5) *\_disorders\_* (3 marks), eg Alzheimer's, who will be of interest to biotech companies.**
- 45 / 92 (49%)
- **It's (9) *\_friends\_* (2 marks) and partners that people choose for their characteristics, not their own children.**
- 19 / 92 (21%)

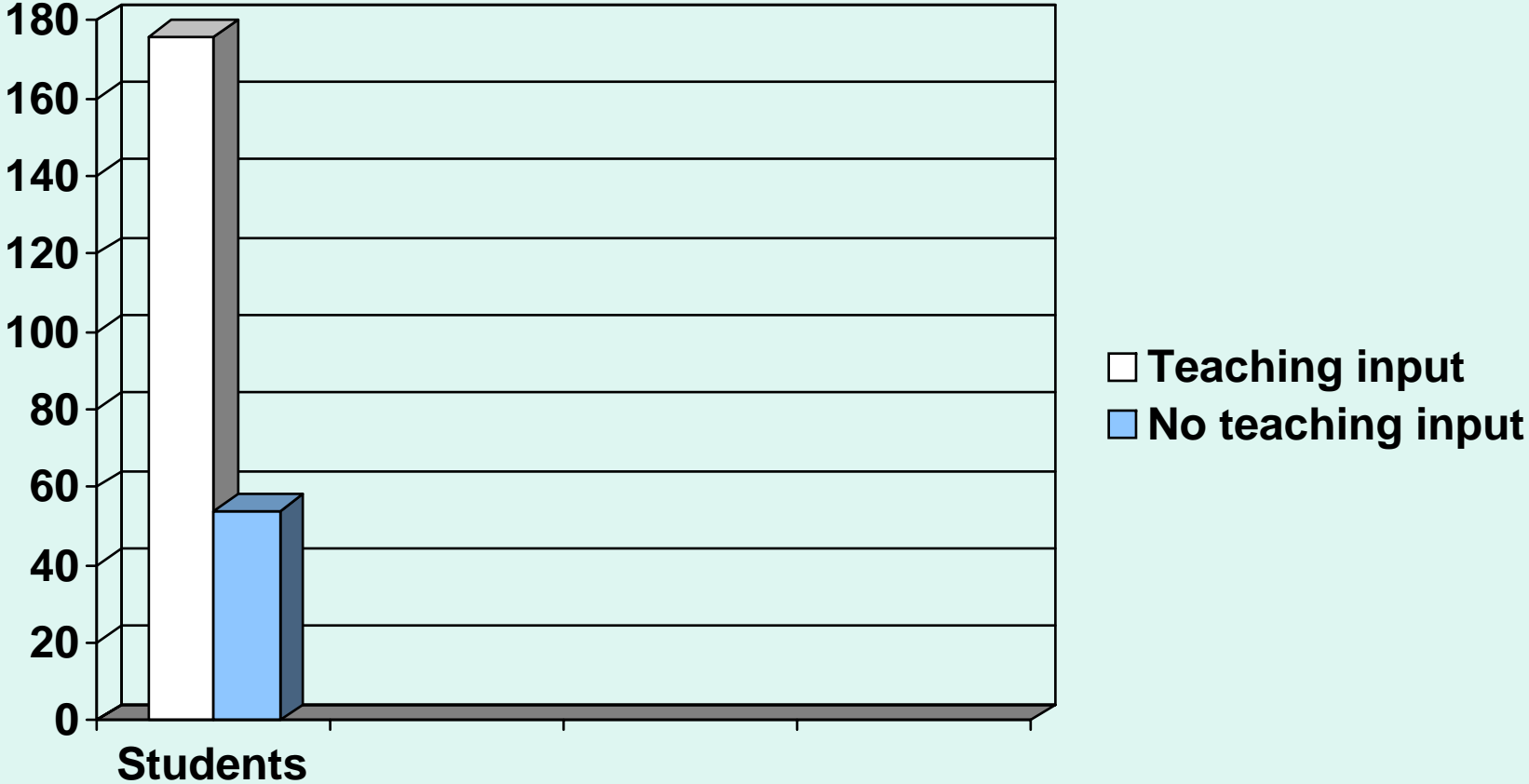
# Sleep listening test

•both body temperature and demand for calories decrease during sleep, as compared to wakefulness.

•...or 'what' we know (for example, **it's Paris that's** the capital of France ...

- - eg **it's through lower body (5) *temperature* and reduced calorie requirement that sleep helps an organism's conservation.**
- 113 / 143 (79%)
- eg the name of the **French (8) *capital* .**
- 97 / 143 (68%)

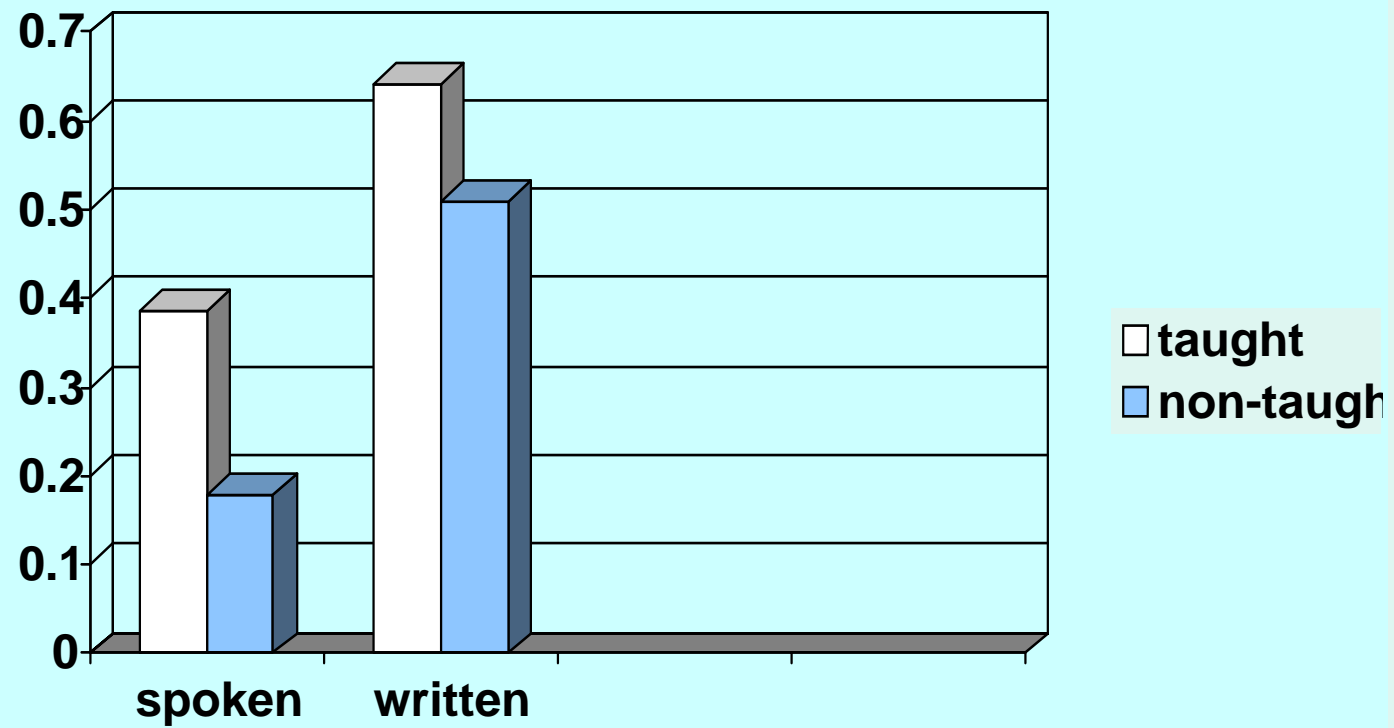
# Intervention 19 - 21.9.9 (176 vs 54)



# Digital visual literacy - final listening exam

- **It's colour that** creates this context.
- You may conclude, for example, that the dominance of English on the Web has led to a 'universal' digital visual grammar of webpages.
- Context + words / images created by (21) *\_colour\_* - e.g. Flint blue unifies and organises page.
- 75 / 209 (36%)
- One possibility = **it's English domination of the Web that's** resulted in (23) *\_universal\_* digital visual grammar'.
- 131 / 209 (63%)

## Results after interver



## 2-way ANCOVA (Analysis of covariance) final exam and intervention

- Repeated measures = spoken it-cleft and written it-cleft (exam)
- Between-subjects = total score (exam)
- Covariate = teaching intervention

# Results

- There was a main effect of group ( $F(1,186) = 4.187, p = .04$ ) with the taught group correctly identifying more it clefts in both the written and spoken forms.
- There was a significant effect of the DVL total test score and the condition (the it-cleft) ( $F(1,186) = 7.334, p = .01$ ), indicating that general listening comprehension was correlated with it-cleft identification.

- There was no significant interaction between group (taught or not) and modality, ie whether written or spoken it-cleft ( $F(1,186) = 1.038, p = .31$ ).

# Implications

- It is feasible to test non-end information by using it-clefts
- Students can be trained to identify them

# References

Biber, D, Johansson, S, Leech , G, Conrad, S and Finegan, E  
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