

## Research Article

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# Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis for the study of lectures: active and passive uses of metadiscourse

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**Abstract:** This paper offers a Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis study of how metadiscourse is used in university lectures. Metadiscourse is frequently employed in spoken academic discourse to guide the audience through the contents of the speech, thus becoming an essential element to foster comprehension in lectures. Although lectures have been largely researched under a multimodal eye, studies looking at the multimodal nature of metadiscourse are still scarce. In fact, previous multimodal explorations of metadiscourse in lectures point towards discrepancies in the attention given by lecturers to metadiscursive instances. In this study, six face-to-face lectures in fields within Humanities were analyzed to spot all instances of organizational metadiscourse. Next, the fragments containing such metadiscourse were further explored through a Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis to identify the structure of higher-level actions and the ways in which metadiscourse was integrated as part of the modal configurations of the actions. The analysis of higher-level actions using the foreground-background continuum reveals two main roles in the use of metadiscourse: an active one, in which metadiscourse is explicitly used to guide and engage the audience, as expected; and a passive one, in which metadiscourse is rather used as a filler in the background. These results contribute to reflecting on teaching practices and raising awareness on the importance of multimodal literacy for teacher training.

**Keywords:** active and passive metadiscourse; lectures; Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis; multimodal literacy; organizational metadiscourse

## 1 Introduction

This article looks at the use of organizational metadiscourse in monologic lectures from a Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis point of view. The application of Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis' methodological tenets offers the researcher a novel overview on the use of metadiscourse – a linguistic device – as it is included within successions of multimodal actions in the lectures. In particular, this type of analysis explores the context in which metadiscursive instances occur and defines it in terms of modal density and attention/awareness levels. Such exploration reveals two main uses of metadiscourse in lectures: an active use and a passive one, depending on the levels of attention/awareness metadiscursive instances receive. In turn, this new paradigm revisits previous definitions of metadiscourse and paves the way to consider metadiscursive functions as occurring beyond language itself.

### 1.1 Lectures as a genre

Lectures are the spoken academic genre par excellence (Varó Alcaraz 2000). They entail the delivery of new information on a given topic to a group of students by experts who follow a speech plan on which they may apply

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different levels of improvisation (Malavska 2016). Lectures, however, do not form a homogeneous type of genre and two main kinds are found depending on the degree of interaction between lecturers and audiences: interactive and non-interactive (or monological) lectures (Morell 2004). Furthermore, the last decade has borne witness to the rise of online lectures (Querol-Julián and Crawford Camiciottoli 2019), a trend that has been particularly strengthened in the post-COVID era (Lockee 2021). This paper focuses only on monological lectures as defined by Waugh and Waugh (1999, pp. 35–36): “a teaching method where the lecturer talks, acts, persuades, cajoles [...] The students do not discuss in the lecture the information conveyed, or question the lecturer verbally”. These lectures, although sometimes criticized, are still a reality in many classrooms around the world and offer, in fact, some advantages: they are practical in large classes, help lecturers in the structuring process of contents, and are easily recycled (Crawford-Camiciottoli 2007).

Be that as it may, the study of lectures has received ample attention from researchers in the last decades. One of the foci of these analyses, for instance, has been put on the lecturers themselves. Within this theme, Dudley-Evans (1994) describes lecturing styles as based on the degree of the use of notes and levels of improvisation in the lectures; ranging from reading style lecturers – who read through their notes-, to conversational style lecturers – more informal and interactive, but still keeping a certain structure-, and rhetorical style lecturers – who are closer to *performers* and include many digressions. In addition, the internal structure of lectures has also been analyzed. In this regard, Young (1994) describes lectures as formed by sequences of phases that are intertwined with each other, instead of having a clearly established structure. These phases are defined following their pragmatic purpose, and they include: discourse structuring phases, conclusions, evaluations, interactions, developments of theory/content, and examples.

All these analyses are further complemented when adding a multimodal angle. For example, in Bernad-Mechó (2017), the structure of lectures in phases is analyzed using Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis. The study reveals how phases are realized by means of higher-level actions and how these are succeeded and intertwined with each other as multimodal events. This multimodal analysis brings to the fore the existence of many more types of actions (or phases) beyond the six categories previously introduced. Multimodal analyses of lectures, however, are not abundant. Ruiz-Madrid and Fortanet-Gómez (2016), and Fortanet-Gómez and Ruiz-Madrid (2016) have studied the multimodal representations of asides and humor in plenary lectures respectively. Another author, Crawford Camiciottoli (2015, 2016), looks at how explanatory sections are multimodally integrated in lectures to engage the audience. In relation to engagement, and following Dudley-Evans’s (1994) classification of lecturing styles, Bernad-Mechó and Fortanet-Gómez (2019) compare a number of lecturers and find out significant lecturing-style-related differences in the use of metadiscourse as a multimodal engagement technique to engage the audiences.

In another vein, English as a Means of Instruction lectures have also received special attention due to their growth as part of the processes of internationalization in Higher Education (Fortanet-Gómez 2020; Pérez-Llantada 2018). In fact, much interest is being placed in teacher training, and calls have been made to produce more research into how lectures in English work and how lecturers can adapt to non-native English speaking audiences (Bernad-Mechó, in press; Dafouz 2018). This is necessarily connected to the concept of multimodal literacy (Drajati et al. 2018): being able to understand how lectures (and lecturers) function at a multimodal level is paramount to train successful lecturers in the 21st century. In other words, understanding the multimodal intricacies of the discourse in lectures will raise awareness on the ways in which meaning is created beyond words and, by implementing these strategies, better lecturers may be formed.

## 1.2 Metadiscourse

One of the essential elements in the delivery of successful lectures is an appropriate use of organizational metadiscourse. Metadiscourse is a linguistic device employed by speakers (and writers) to reflect on the language they employ and it helps the audiences to make sense of the contents, organize ideas, etc. Ädel defines metadiscourse as:

text about the evolving text, or the writer’s explicit commentary on her own ongoing discourse. It displays an awareness of the current text or its language use per se and of the current writer and reader qua writer and reader (2006, p. 20).

Several taxonomies to describe the existing types of metadiscourse have been traditionally put forward (Hyland 2005). However, for the purposes of this study, Ädel’s (2010) description will be used. The reason why this classification was preferred is because it arises from a descriptive study of academic lectures (the genre under scrutiny here). Most previous taxonomies were based on written metadiscourse, and Ädel’s is the first that is strongly oral-discourse-oriented. This author distinguishes four main types of metadiscourse: metalinguistic comments, discourse organization, speech act labels, and references to the audience (see Table 1).

Metadiscourse has been widely studied in lectures. Doiz and Lasagabaster (2022), for instance, look at the importance of interactive metadiscourse in English as a Means of Instruction contexts to successfully transmit knowledge to the audiences when using a foreign language. In a similar context, Aguilar-Pérez and Khan (2022) explore the differences in the use of metadiscourse in L1 and English as a Means of Instruction lecturing and, although no significant differences are found, they point towards the need for successful teacher training that fosters student-centered pedagogies and realizes the complexity of interactions in English as a Means of Instruction contexts. Bernad-Mechó (in press), goes a step further and adds an intercultural layer to the equation, exploring how lecturers might accommodate their language for international students through organizational metadiscourse to make sure everyone is following the contents of the lecture. In fact, organizational

**Table 1:** Ädel’s (2010, p. 83) classification of metadiscourse.

METATEXT	<b>Metalinguistic comments</b>		
	REPAIRING		
	REFORMULATING		
	COMMENTING ON LINGUISTIC FORM/MEANING		
	CLARIFYING		
	MANAGING TERMINOLOGY		
	<b>Discourse organisation</b>		
	}	INTRODUCING TOPIC	Manage topic
		DELIMITING TOPIC	
		ADDING TO TOPIC	
		CONCLUDING TOPIC	
		MARKING ASIDES	
		ENUMERATING	
	}	ENDOPHORIC MARKING	Manage phorics
PREVIEWING			
REVIEWING			
CONTEXTUALISING			
<b>Speech act labels</b>			
ARGUING			
EXEMPLIFYING			
OTHER SPEECH ACT LABELLING			
AUDIENCE INTERACTION	<b>References to the audience</b>		
	MANAGING COMPREHENSION/CHANNEL		
	MANAGING AUDIENCE DISCIPLINE		
	ANTICIPATING THE AUDIENCE’S RESPONSE		
	MANAGING THE MESSAGE		
	IMAGINING SCENARIOS		

metadiscourse has proven essential to facilitate comprehension and foster engagement in academic lectures, as it indicates the directions of the lecture, connects parts of the message and fosters cohesion. In this sense, Zhang and Lo (2021) explore four English as a Means of Instruction courses in China and show how interactive metadiscourse is used for lecture organization, to create explanations and to establish connections among content, thus helping the audience make sense of and organizing the information conveyed. Finally, Thompson (2003) adds a multimodal touch and reflects on the relevance of intonation to properly use text-structuring metadiscourse to signal the organization of lectures.

Within the multimodal realm, Bernad-Mechó and Fortanet-Gómez (2019) describe how the use of metadiscourse to engage the audience as well as the semiotic resources accompanying it are constrained by the lecturing style of the lecturers. For example, reading style lecturers tend to use less dense multimodal ensembles during the use of metadiscourse, and the presence of metadiscourse is heavily marked by the written structure of the lectures. Rhetorical style lecturers, on the other hand, use less metadiscursive instances, but these, in turn, are more spontaneous and multimodally complex. Bernad-Mechó (2022) illustrates the ways in which metadiscourse is present within lectures. He finds out that organizational metadiscourse mostly occurs in *structuring segments*, i.e. organizational parts within the lectures that contain a high number of metadiscursive instances. These segments are often found along the introductions to the lectures (typically through the reviewing of previous contents, previewing of future contents and introductions of topics); the conclusions (as lecturers summarize and review, and also preview the information to be introduced in future sessions); and during topic shifts (as lecturers conclude one topic and introduce the next one). Bernad-Mechó compares these segments to content sequences with no instances of organizational metadiscourse focusing on the semiotic resources employed and finds out that structuring segments are slightly more modally dense. In other words, lecturers tend to create more complex multimodal ensembles when they are organizing the contents of the lectures (as opposed to when they teach), which, at a quantitative level, seems to point to a certain will to engage audiences and in essence, successfully carry out the metadiscursive functions of guiding the audience, facilitating comprehension, etc. These results, however are not fully conclusive and, as argued by Bernad-Mechó and Ruiz-Garrido (2022), differences can be found in the degree of complexity of multimodal ensembles when using metadiscourse, for instance, when comparing its use in L1 and English as a Means of Instruction contexts. In their study, these authors compare multimodal analyses with ethnographic interviews of lecturers and, in disagreement with Aguilar-Pérez and Khan (2022), they show how lecturers seem to devote more semiotic resources during the use of metadiscursive instances when they sense that the audience is not fully understanding and following the contents of the lecture, particularly in English as a Means of Instruction contexts in which students are non-native speakers of English. This poses the question as to whether metadiscourse is always employed as it is supposed to be in lectures (a facilitator for students). In this regard, the present study aims to explore deeper how metadiscourse is integrated within the multimodal events performed by lecturers by exploring the multimodal structures of sequences of actions and discerning the roles of metadiscourse within those sequences.

### 1.3 Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis

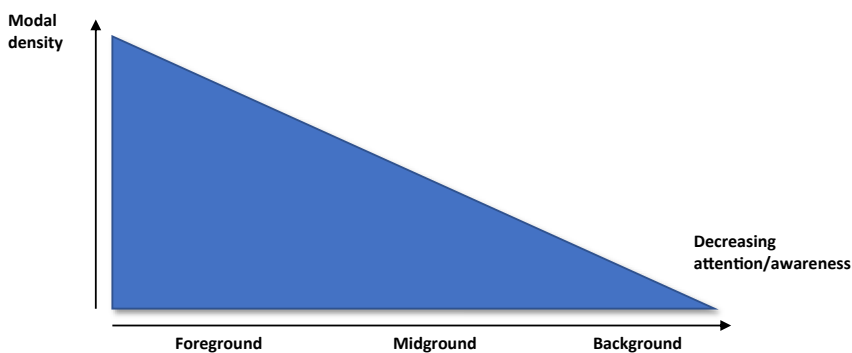
As asserted throughout this paper, multimodal analyses offer a wider view of the intricacies of communication between lecturers and audiences. In fact, such analyses expand on previous linguistic accounts of lectures and become highly applicable in teacher training contexts (Morell 2020). Essentially, the underlying principle in these new studies is the fact that all communication is inherently multimodal (Kress 2010). Against this background, lectures have been widely analyzed from a multimodal perspective in English for Specific Purposes (Crawford Camiciottoli and Bonsignori 2015), English as a Means of Instruction (Costa and Mair 2022), and L1 contexts (Bernad-Mechó 2022; Bernad-Mechó and Fortanet-Gómez 2019; Fogarty-Bourget et al. 2019). Few studies, however, have explored lectures using a Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis framework. As argued in Bernad-Mechó (2021), three main multimodal paradigms can be referred to when approaching the multimodal analysis of lectures, depending on the aims of the study: Multimodal Social Semiotics (Kress and van Leeuwen 1996) to explore the

contextual information of lectures as communicative events and the possibilities afforded by each mode; Multimodal Discourse Analysis (O'Halloran 2011) to focus on the creation of meaning through combinations of systems of semiotic resources; and Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis (Norris 2004) to focus on social actors (lecturers) and how they structure lectures as sequences of actions that receive certain attention. It is precisely the latter approach that is relevant in the present study, as it allows for a deeper qualitative dissection of lectures as communicative events, describing both the ways in which lecturers structure their speech and how meta-discourse is integrated within those structures.

In order to carry out a Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis, several methodological tools need to be considered. Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis takes Scollon's (2001) mediated action as the departure point and unit of analysis. Taking on this idea, Norris (2004) suggests two main types of action: lower-level actions, seen as the smallest interactional unit with meaning, such as a gesture or an utterance, and which are marked with a beginning and an end; and higher-level actions, which include series of lower-level actions, also marked with a beginning and an end, and which can be grouped into larger sequences of higher-level actions named scales of action (Norris 2017). In addition, higher-level actions can be defined as having specific modal configurations, i.e. modes that co-occur in a particular way towards the realization of such actions.

Higher-level actions are carried out receiving different levels of attention and awareness by the speakers. In fact, several higher-level actions may be performed at the same time, each of them with a specific level of attention. Using a foreground-background continuum (see Figure 1 below), these levels of attention are represented in a graph which labels higher-level actions as being either foregrounded (receiving high levels of attention/awareness), midgrounded, or backgrounded (receiving little attention/awareness). For example, a speaker might be performing the higher-level action of *teaching contents* with high levels of attention/awareness (in the foreground) while also performing the action of *thinking about dinner* with a low level of attention (in the background). These levels of attention/awareness are linked to the concept of modal density. Essentially, the more attention/awareness an action receives, the higher its level of density. According to Norris (2004), actions are more modally dense when they either carried out using a high number of modes (modal complexity) or when one of the modes is performed in a more intense manner (modal intensity). Lastly, the concept of semantic/pragmatic means is employed to mark the start and ending of higher-level actions. Semantic/pragmatic means entail lower-level actions which are particularly emphasized and mark shifts in the levels of attention. They perform two functions: a semantic one, as they contribute to structuring the speakers' actions; and a pragmatic one, as they communicate this shift to other participants in the interaction (Norris 2004).

The Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis of lectures has the potential to expand the current knowledge of how communication occurs in these events. Querol-Julián (2021), for instance, describes the complexity of interaction in online synchronous lectures. In particular, she demonstrates how the modal configurations realized by the speakers are aimed to engaging learners in an online setting where the lack of eye rapport is a constraint. Ruiz-Garrido and Fortanet (forthcoming), describe sequences of simultaneous higher-level actions in English as a Means of Instruction lectures and explore how the actions of *teaching English* are foregrounded throughout the



**Figure 1:** Norris's (2004, p. 99) modal density foreground-background continuum of attention/awareness.

sessions in content lectures. In another study, Bernad-Mechó (2017) shows how lecturers prepare and structure fragments containing metadiscursive instances before they are actually uttered. He also shows how metadiscourse may sometimes be performed as a background task (against its main purpose).

All in all, previous studies on lectures have reached the conclusion that metadiscourse in general, and organizational metadiscourse in particular, are essential to facilitate comprehension and successful interaction with the audience. On the other hand, although lectures have received attention from multimodal perspectives in the last decade, little research has been conducted as to how metadiscourse works multimodally in lectures. In fact, some multimodal analyses point towards the fact that metadiscourse is not always employed in the same manner, as it seems to receive diverse levels of attention (Bernad-Mechó 2017; Bernad-Mechó and Ruiz-Garrido 2022). Thus, further research is needed to discern the roles of metadiscourse as it is being used in the organization of lectures. In this sense, a Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis of the unfolding of structures in lectures might shed some light onto the actual integration of metadiscourse in multimodal ensembles. That being so, two research questions are proposed to guide the present study:

- (1) How are higher-level actions organized as successions of events in academic lectures?
- (2) How is metadiscourse integrated as part of these successions of higher-level actions?

## 2 Methodology

### 2.1 Dataset

In order to answer these research questions, a dataset of six lectures from six different courses in Humanities was created. These lectures come from a larger study in which 150 lectures were analyzed to explore the use of organizational metadiscourse in them. The lectures consist of face-to-face, largely monologic events taught at Yale University in African–American History, the American Revolution, Philosophy, the American Novel, History of Epidemics and Spanish Literature. These classes were videorecorded and subsequently uploaded, together with their linguistic transcriptions, to Yale University’s OpenCourseWare,<sup>1</sup> an online repository containing over 40 full courses in a variety of fields. Thus, a sub-corpus of six representative lectures was selected for the present study. This selection was carried out based on two main criteria. First, only lectures from the middle of the courses were selected. As argued in Bernad-Mechó (2015), lectures at the beginning or end of courses might contain higher amounts of previewing and reviewing metadiscourse respectively, as they usually serve as introductions and conclusions to entire courses. And second, an initial identification of metadiscursive instances was conducted. Only lectures that would contain an average amount of organizational metadiscourse were chosen; in other words, lectures that would show an abnormal use of organizational metadiscourse (for instance, an excess due to a lengthy introduction, or a limited use due to the presence of longer question/answer sections with the audience) were discarded. Table 2 below summarizes the dataset for this study.

**Table 2:** Description of the dataset.

Code	Class	Number of words	Duration
C1_L13	Course 1 (African–American History)	6996	48’ 52’’
C2_L13	Course 2 (The American Revolution)	8280	49’ 00’’
C3_L15	Course 3 (Philosophy: Death)	5943	44’ 14’’
C4_L13	Course 4 (The American Novel)	6208	50’ 00’’
C5_L15	Course 5 (History of Epidemics)	4913	46’ 07’’
C6_L15	Course 6 (Spanish Literature: Don Quixote)	7530	1h 00’ 51’’

<sup>1</sup> <https://ocw.yale.edu/>.

## 2.2 Analysis

Once the lectures were selected, their transcriptions were reviewed for accuracy and modified to fit the conventions for verbal transcriptions in multimodal analyses following Norris (2004) and Pirini (2015). In particular, times indicating the beginning of the utterances were included, punctuation was used to reflect basic intonation, capital letters were used for emphasis, numbers in parentheses were used to indicate the lengths of pauses in seconds, and latched utterances were marked with diagonal brackets (see examples in the subsequent section). Next, the transcriptions were manually analyzed to identify all instances of organizational metadiscourse in the six lectures following Ädel's (2010) taxonomy.

All fragments containing metadiscourse were further analyzed following a Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis approach in four main steps. First, the higher-level actions within which metadiscourse is produced were singled out as sequences of actions. In order to do so, semantic-pragmatic means marking the beginning and end of these actions were identified, and the higher-level actions *per se* were described as combinations of lower-level actions. Second, the higher-level actions were analyzed in terms of modal density, i.e. looking at the complexity of the modal configurations intervening in the production of these actions, and the degree of intensity of each mode. Third, a degree of high, medium or low attention/awareness was assigned to each higher-level action, based on their modal density across time, i.e. as they were intertwined with each other while they unveiled sequences of actions. Finally, the levels of attention/awareness were represented in foreground-background continua that would display whether a given action received full attention (foregrounded), little attention (backgrounded), or middle attention (midgrounded). By carrying out this four-step analysis, two main results were obtained: (1) an overview of how higher-level actions were organized as successions of actions (RQ1); and, in turn, (2) an interpretation of the roles of metadiscourse as part of the verbal within the specific modal configurations (RQ2), which, as argued above, would receive distinct levels of attention/awareness.

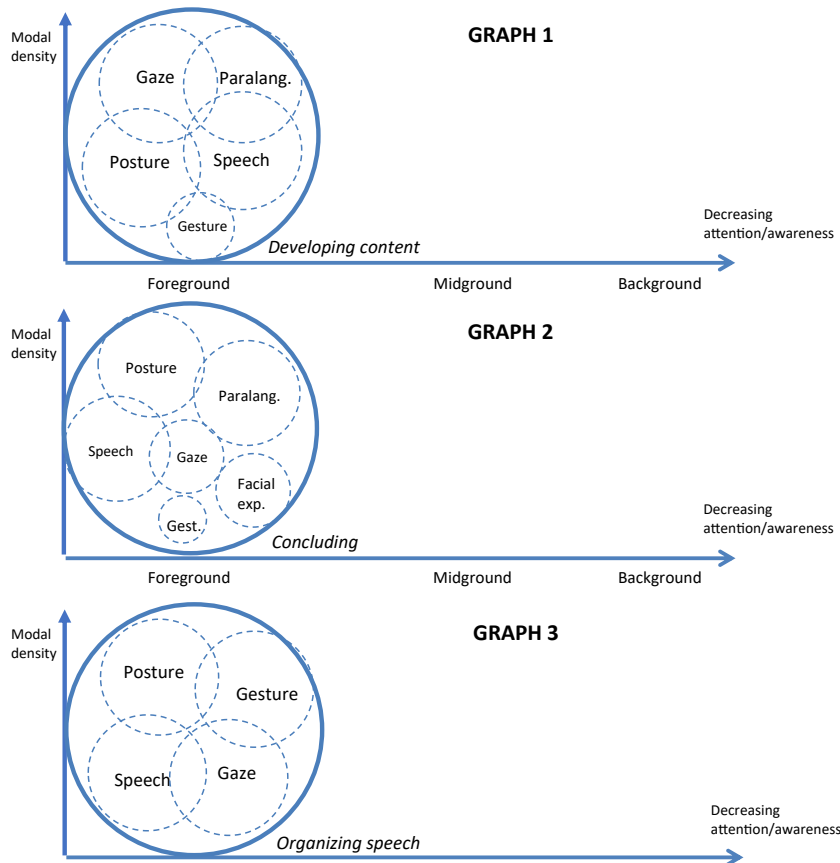
## 3 Results and discussion

In line with Bernad-Mechó (2022), most metadiscursive instances in the dataset were found as part of *structuring segments*, i.e. organizational parts within the lectures that accumulate organizational metadiscourse, commonly as introductions to the lecture or as topic shifters. These sections were separated from content parts of the lectures in which the subject matter was developed. Furthermore, short instances of metadiscourse were also found as being used spontaneously throughout the lectures. As stated above, the roles of organizational metadiscourse may be inferred by looking at the modal density determined by the specific modal configurations of the higher-level actions co-occurring during verbal metadiscursive instances. In other words, by describing the co-occurrences of higher-level actions in the foreground-background continuum and how they succeed one another, a degree of attention/awareness could be attached to each of the actions – including those in which metadiscourse was encompassed. The study of this degree of attention attached to metadiscourse in both structuring segments and spontaneous metadiscourse, revealed two main roles that seem to arise indistinctively in either of these types of fragments: an active and a passive role.

Thus, the Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis conducted on the data showed that, despite the importance of metadiscourse, the levels of attention/awareness that these sections receive are not always steady. Thus, two roles may be assigned to the use of metadiscourse: an active role when metadiscourse was purposely used in the foreground to engage the audience, guide the students through the lecture, and create cohesion, as most definitions of metadiscourse emphasize; and a passive role when metadiscourse was used in the midground as a filler of the verbal mode while the lecturers focused on other actions. Examples 1 and 2 below show two instances in which metadiscourse is used with these two different roles.

### 3.1 Active role of metadiscourse

The example below describes an instance in which metadiscourse is employed with an active role. The fragment includes a *reviewing* instance and is extracted from a structuring segment in lecture C3\_L15. The Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis demonstrates the use of *reviewing* metadiscourse as a tool to recapitulate thoughts and pave the way for the forthcoming explanation in C3\_L15. As shown in the transcription, the lecturer is transitioning between two lecturing sections. *Reviewing* metadiscourse is used to facilitate such transition. The transcript describes the verbal mode in this fragment and Figure 2 explores the changes in modal density in the sequence of higher-level actions performed.



**Figure 2:** Succession of higher-level actions in a structuring segment in C3\_L15.



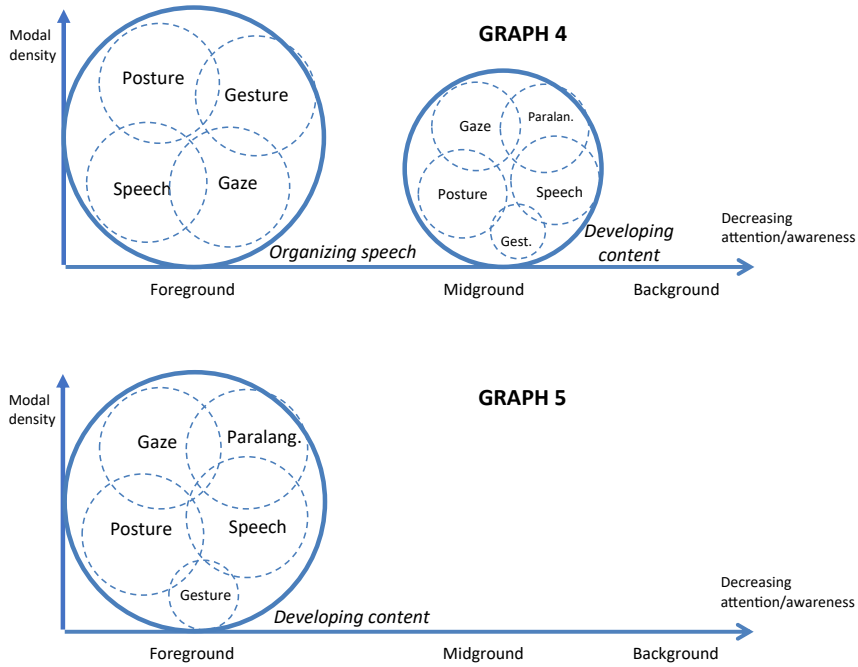
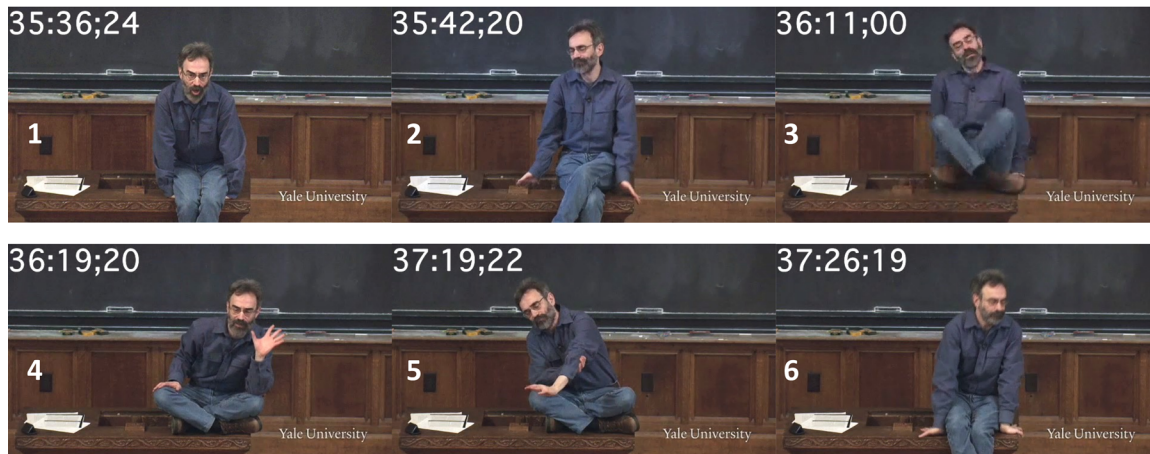


Figure 2: Continued.

**Transcript**

35:30:09 And I'm observing them from a particular perspective, from a particular STANDpoint (1)  
 35:36:24 for all that I'm not IN the picture that I'm thinking about. (2)  
 [...]  
 36:06:01 because this argument, at any rate, seems to me to be unsuccessful. (2)  
 36:11:10 Now at the start, I distinguished TWO CLAIMS people might have in mind when they say "nobody believes they're going to die"  
 └ 36:18:20 first possibility was the claim was nobody believes that they'll ever cease to exist as a person (0.5)  
 36:24:28 And I've just explained why, at least, the... the... the most FAMILIAR argument for that claim I think doesn't work. (1.5)  
 36:32:25 The second possible interpretation was this. (1.5)  
 36:36:17 Nobody beLIEVES their BODY is going to die  
 [...]  
 37:11:09 but let's, at least, try to now focus on the SECOND question (0.5)  
 37:15:07 could it be true is there any good reason to believe it is true (1) that (1.5) nobody believes, they're going to undergo, bodily death?

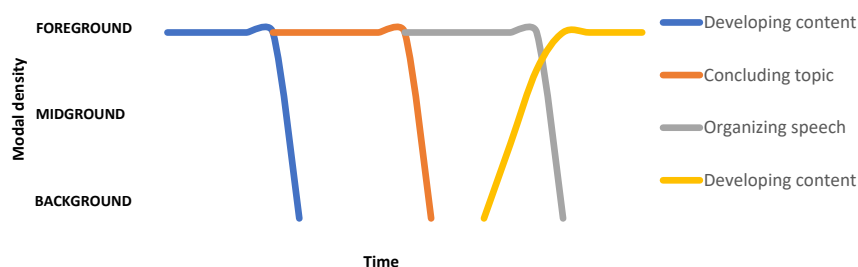


In this example, the lecturer is discussing Freud's argument about death by performing the higher-level action of *developing content* (Graph 1), which is realized through a particular modal configuration: gaze towards the audience, sitting posture, and verbal mode with peaks of intensity highlighting certain ideas: “*And I'm observing them from a particular perspective, from a particular STANDpoint [...]*” (Image 1). In 35:42:20, he performs a semantic/pragmatic means which indicates that the higher-level action of *developing content* is about to end: he changes his posture, pauses, and swallows (Image 2). At this point, he moves on to the higher-level action of *concluding* (Graph 2) and *developing content* disappears. In 36:06:01, he accelerates the pace of the verbal mode and employs a falling tone indicating the end of the utterance: “*because this argument, at any rate, seems to me to be unsuccessful*”. Once again, the lecturer pauses, changes his posture and begins a new explanation (Image 3), marking the transition between two higher-level actions: at this point, the higher-level action of *concluding* is over and a new one, *organizing speech*, is foregrounded in which the lecturer aims to guide the audience through the speech (Graph 3).

The higher-level action of *organizing speech* is performed in order to recapitulate the explanation of the lecturer up to this point. The lecturer does so through the use of the verbal mode – “*Now, at the start, I distinguished two claims people might have in mind when they say [...]*”, the emphasis in intonation, the use of beats and metaphorical gestures, and gaze towards the audience (Image 4). During this action, the lecturer also includes a reflection on the explanation that he has performed, which leads him to focus on the second question: “*But let's, at least, try to now focus on the second question. Could it be true [...] that nobody believes they're going to undergo bodily death?*”. As the lecturer is uttering this rhetorical question, he performs yet another semantic/pragmatic means; in 37:19:22 he pulls the sleeve of his shirt up and finishes the sentence (Image 5). This utterance functions as a trigger for the explanation of the lecturer. Expressed in another way, the lecturer poses a rhetorical question to the audience and thus begins a lecturing segment on “*the second question*”. Therefore, the semantic/pragmatic means indicates the presence of the higher-level action *developing content* in the midground (Graph 4). Finally, the lecturer pauses and changes his posture once again (Image 6) indicating that the new higher-level action is now foregrounded (Graph 5). Figure 3 below provides a visual interpretation of the transitions and the modal density of the higher-level actions in this fragment.

- In the sequence of higher-level actions analyzed, *reviewing* metadiscourse is used on several occasions:
- *Now, at the start, I distinguished two claims people might have in mind [...] The first possibility was [...]*
  - *And I've just explained why at least the most familiar argument for that claim, I think, doesn't work.*
  - (continuing the first instance) *The second possible interpretation was this.*

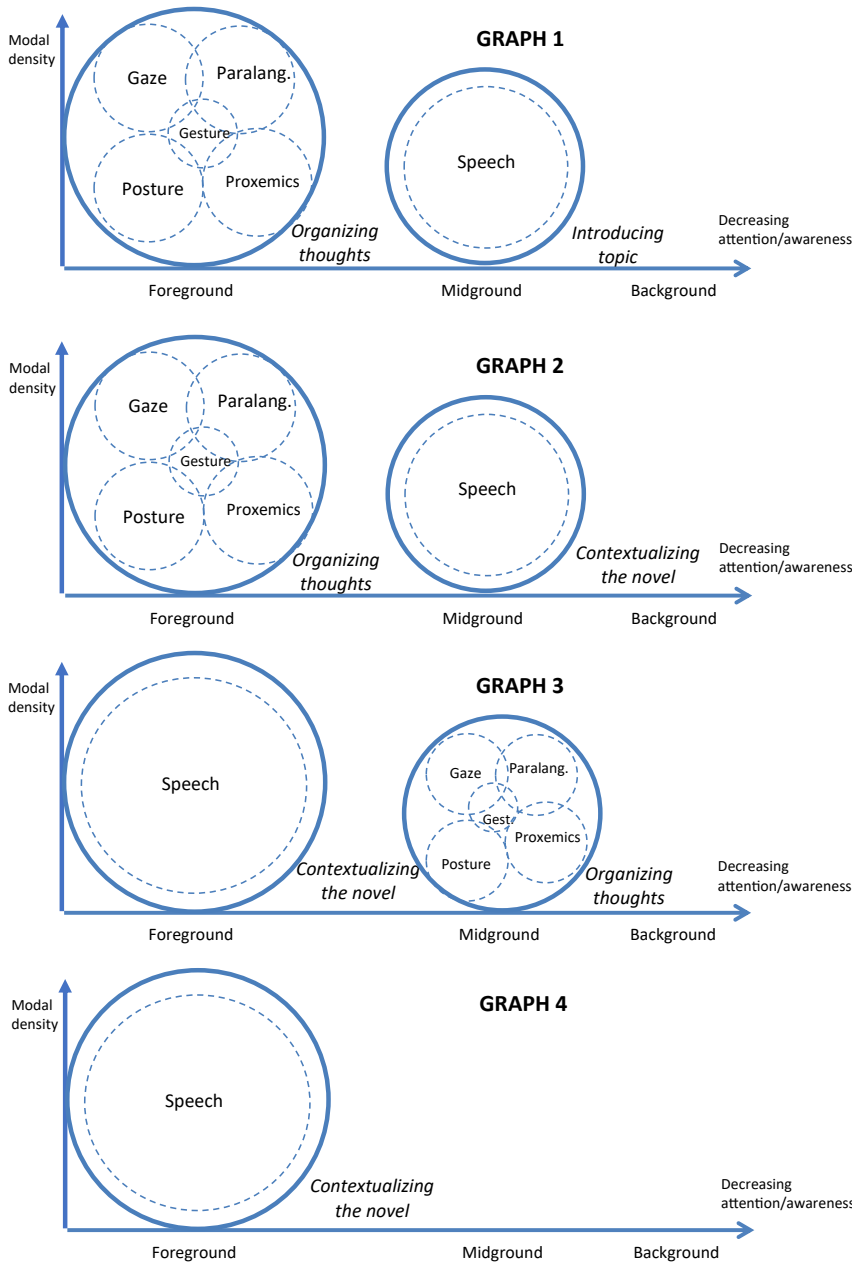
The Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis shows that all these metadiscursive instances occur as part of the verbal mode in the higher-level action of *organizing speech*. Furthermore, as Figure 3 reveals, *organizing speech* is performed as a foregrounded action during all the time. Thus, metadiscourse becomes highly relevant in this fragment. It is used to recapitulate thoughts in a lecture in which few connections are established and is fully directed to the students, as the multimodal behavior of the lecturer demonstrates. In addition, the structuring segment here analyzed serves as a connection between two longer explanatory discussions: the discussion on “*the first question*” that has just been concluded, and the discussion on “*the second question*” that is about to start. In this sense, the use of *reviewing* metadiscourse sets the path for the lecturer to provide a short summary of the concluded discussion, and then connect the summary with the introduction of the new topic. Metadiscourse seems to be employed in order to soften the transition and guide the students throughout the contents of the lecture, coinciding with the purposes established in most traditional definitions of metadiscourse. All in all, and in line with the results in Bernad-Mechó and Fortanet-Gómez (2019), metadiscourse plays an active role in this fragment as it contributes to the active organization of speech while engaging the audience in the lecture.



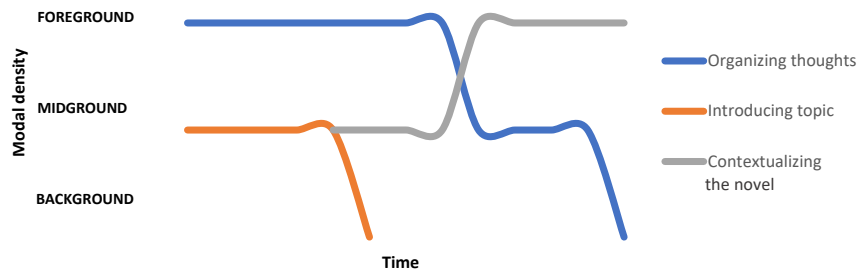
**Figure 3:** Succession of higher-level actions across the foreground-background continuum.

### 3.2 Passive role of metadiscourse

Example 2 shows a fragment in which metadiscourse is employed with a passive role in a similar way as described by Bernad-Mechó (in press) and Bernad-Mechó and Ruiz-Garrido (2022). The following excerpt includes an *introducing topic* instance and is extracted from lecture C4\_13. In this example, the lecturer uses the metadiscursive expression merely as a verbal filler while she performs the foregrounded action of *organizing thoughts*. The fragment takes place right at the beginning of the lecture as the lecturer prepares herself. The transcript below displays the verbal mode in this fragment and Figure 4 explores the changes in modal density in the sequence of higher-level actions performed.



**Figure 4:** Succession of higher-level actions in a structuring segment in C4\_L13



**Figure 5:** Succession of higher-level actions across the foreground-background continuum

## Transcript

00:01:10 So today, erm. we will talk about *The Bluest Eye*. (4.5)

00:08:20 This novel has a lot to do with the questions that John Barth was thinking about, in a very different register, in *Lost in the Funhouse*. (1)



The lecture begins with the lecturer performing the higher-level action of *organizing thoughts*. This action is realized through the process of checking the notes on the table. This can be seen in the modal configuration of the action through her posture towards the notes; the use of proxemics when she moves towards the table; her gaze, which is focused on the notes; and a pause in which she appears to be thinking (Image 1). During the performance of this action, the lecturer verbally introduces the main topic of the lecture: “*So, today we will talk about The Bluest Eye*”. This verbal introduction is performed within a midgrounded higher-level action – *introducing topic* – that is realized only through the mode of speech (Graph 1).

In 00:07:20, the lecturer turns her gaze and posture towards the audience in preparation for the next action – *contextualizing the novel* – in which she will connect the novel with previous contents. At the same time, the lecturer is still performing the higher-level action of *organizing thoughts*. At this point, the higher-level action of *introducing topic* has already faded away and two actions are given attention: *organizing thoughts* in the foreground and *contextualizing the novel* in the midground (Graph 2). Next, in 00:08:22, the lecturer begins lecturing on the context of the novel (Image 2). In other words, the higher-level action of *contextualizing the novel* gains importance and is foregrounded. However, the lecturer is still performing the action of *organizing thoughts* as indicated by the hesitation in the paralanguage as she utters “*This novel has a lot to do with the questions that John Barth was thinking about*”, the gaze directed to the horizon and a holding position of the lecturer’s arms which is present since the end of *introducing topic* (Graph 3). Finally, in 00:10:26, the lecturer lowers her arms and offers a steadier speech (“*in a very different register, in Lost in the Funhouse*”). Moreover, her gaze is now directed to the audience (Image 3). At this point, the transition between higher-level actions is completed and *contextualizing the novel* is the only action performed by the lecturer (Graph 4). A visual description of the transitions here described is provided in Figure 5.

In relation to the metadiscursive instance (*So, today we will talk about The Bluest Eye*), the higher-level actions encompassing the introduction of a topic have been analyzed. This instance is employed right at the beginning of the lecture and is encompassed within the higher-level action of *introducing topic*. The action, however, is receiving medium attention by the lecturer and occurs in the midground, as the multimodal analysis suggests (see Graph 1 in Figure 4). The main focus of the lecturer is the organization of her speech, which occurs through the higher-level action of *organizing thoughts*. This example is characterized by a midgrounded use of metadiscourse.

In the fragment, organizational metadiscourse seems to be used as a resource to fill the silence of the higher-level action of *organizing thoughts* (where no verbal mode is used). This type of action, in turn, is realized through high modal complexity by the modes of gaze, posture and proxemics and, as a foregrounded cognitive process, it requires the concentration of the lecturer. Thus, although from a verbal perspective metadiscourse seems to be used as a guide to indicate the direction of the lecture, the multimodal analysis demonstrates that this is not the main intention of the lecturer and metadiscourse seems to just “fill” the verbal mode in the multimodal ensemble. In short, metadiscourse plays a passive role in this excerpt.

All in all, the use of Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis has provided a peek into the ways in which metadiscourse is integrated within higher-level actions, revealing two main types of uses. In the case of active uses, metadiscourse is integrated into dense modal configurations aimed at connecting with the students. This seems to suggest that metadiscourse and metadiscursive functions need complex multimodal ensembles to be used successfully, and, consequently, such functions might be carried out not only with words, but also through non-verbal language. In the case of passive uses, on the other hand, the pragmatic metadiscursive functions expected from the use of metadiscourse are carried out at a very low intensity, which might imply little engagement potential and effectiveness. As argued by Carrió-Pastor (2022), teaching metadiscourse as a multimodal tool is essential for academic contexts. In this sense, fostering teacher training courses that reflect on the multimodality of the teaching practice is necessary to form lecturers who are multimodally literate and can successfully engage and guide students.

## 4 Conclusions

This article has analyzed the use of organizational metadiscourse as a tool to foster comprehension and guide students in academic lectures. By using a Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis approach, the higher-level actions containing this type of metadiscourse were fully examined in a set of six lectures. The Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis methodology has proven fruitful to identify the levels of modal density and attention/awareness attached to each of these actions, which, in turn, has suggested two main types of roles when using organizational metadiscourse: an active and a passive one. In particular, when lecturers devote high degrees of attention/awareness to the actions within which metadiscourse is encompassed, lecturers seem to exploit this linguistic resource to the fullest, fostering engagement and facilitating comprehension. On the other hand, when the degree of attention/awareness is low, metadiscourse appears to be used as a filler within the verbal mode and does not seem to fully achieve the functions of engaging, guiding or facilitating. These uses of organizational metadiscourse might explain previous results, for instance, showing discrepancies in the use of metadiscourse in L1 and English as a Means of Instruction contexts (Bernad-Mechó and Ruiz-Garrido 2022), as lecturers seem to pay more attention to language when the students are not native speakers of English.

Like all empirical research, this study has several limitations. The most important one is the limited size of the corpus. Multimodal analyses are usually conducted on small samples of discourse, and carrying out big data studies is a burdensome task due to time constraints (Bernad-Mechó 2021). Thus, further Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis explorations of metadiscourse are needed to validate the results shown in this paper. Furthermore, only one specific type of lecture has been analyzed here (L1 monological lectures in Humanities). In this sense, exploring other types of lectures, such as interactive lectures, and contexts, such as English as a Means of Instruction, is necessary to complete this study. Finally, more research is necessary into how pragmatic functions of metadiscourse are realized multimodally. In fact, as shown in the results section, the complexity of the modal ensembles including organizational metadiscourse seems to suggest that metadiscursive functions could be carried out beyond language, especially in the active use of metadiscourse, an idea already pointed out by De Groot et al. (2016).

These conclusions have pedagogical applications. In teaching contexts in which multimodal literacy is necessary more than ever (Crawford Camiciottoli and Campoy-Cubillo 2018; Taylor and Leung 2020) it is of paramount importance to train lecturers to be able to identify and use multimodal genres exploiting their affordances to the fullest. In this sense, although steps are being taken to raise awareness on multimodal literacy among lecturers (Morell 2020), further research is still necessary to offer fine-grained descriptions of lectures as a

genre that build up the materials for training courses. To do so, Multimodal (Inter)action Analysis becomes one more valid tool to comprehend the multimodal nature of communication in academic language.

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