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# Using a Corpus-Informed Pedagogical Intervention to Develop Language Awareness toward Appropriate Lexicogrammatical Choices

JULIETA FERNANDEZ

*Northern Arizona University*

*E-mail: [Julieta.Fernandez@nau.edu](mailto:Julieta.Fernandez@nau.edu)*

AZIZ YULDASHEV

*Northern Arizona University*

*E-mail: [Aziz.Yuldashev@nau.edu](mailto:Aziz.Yuldashev@nau.edu)*

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The corpus-informed pedagogical intervention described in this article was developed for an advanced English as a Second Language (ESL) course designed for prospective International Teaching Assistants (ITAs) and implemented over the course of two class periods. Its primary goal was to offer students opportunities to gain language awareness of “smallwords” (Hasselgren, 2002b), with the broader goal of developing their ability to make pragmatically-appropriate lexicogrammatical choices and to enhance their communication as ITAs. The article situates this pedagogical unit vis-à-vis the goals of the class in which this unit was implemented, describes the progression of activities, and provides an appraisal of the unit.

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## INTRODUCTION

Among the opportunities available to international students who would like to pursue their graduate studies in American universities are teaching assistantships. A teaching assistantship typically involves a qualified graduate student doing educational work for the department and receiving financial compensation in return, often in the form of a tuition waiver and stipend. Teaching assistantship requirements are not uniform, but evidence of advanced English ability (established by standardized test scores and/or results of locally developed forms of assessment) is typically required of nonnative English speakers.

Although the name implies that a teaching assistant (TA) is someone who assists a teacher with instructional responsibilities, their actual duties vary across institutions. Some TAs are the sole instructors of a course while others are mainly responsible for grading students' work. In any event, a TA's role frequently involves regular interactions with undergraduate and/or graduate students—an intimidating prospect for those who find themselves in a new culture, facing high expectations.

Many of these graduate students are new to the U.S. higher education context, facing challenges that go beyond their command of the English language. Accordingly, many universities offer courses for prospective international teaching assistants (ITAs) to assist

them in improving their communicative and pedagogical skills. Developing prospective ITAs into effective communicators and successful second language users offers numerous immediate and long-term benefits for individuals directly involved in ITA education and the university community at large.

Although ITA education has been the focus of much research, which has illuminated many facets of ITAs' identities, struggles, and needs, this research has not for the most part translated into a desirable diversity of research-based educational materials for ITA educators (with a few notable exceptions, such as Reinhardt, 2007; Thorne, Reinhardt, & Golombek, 2008). In general, language teaching material developers have not kept up with the increasing need for ITA educational materials, resulting in a dearth of readily available resources for ITA trainers (Ross & Dunphy, 2007). In fact, many of the existing materials for ITA education remain rooted in discussions of relevant topics (the what, why and when) and often fail to provide pedagogical interventions, teaching ideas, or lesson plans (the how). To address this lack, the pedagogical intervention described in this paper translates corpus linguistic methods and tools into pedagogical materials and resources for ITA educators. Through the use of spoken academic corpora, this lesson illustrates how materials can be based on authentic TA/ITA speech and practices.

Based on the authors' experience teaching this course and relevant experiences found in the literature (e.g., Thorne et al., 2008), recurrent concerns voiced by ITAs often include insufficient knowledge of the university culture in the U.S. and student expectations, lack of necessary pedagogical skills such as maintaining rapport with students, and difficulties in sustaining effective communication with students. The limited number of manuals, textbooks, and teaching materials available (both in print and on the internet) mostly address general teaching skills TA/ITAs require (e.g., how to give better presentations) without paying sufficient attention to the language constructions that constitute essential resources for language-in-use and that are indispensable to supporting ITAs' teaching efforts in a U.S. university setting. When a discussion of language constructions and their use is framed and explained in terms of a relevant contextual environment (e.g., analyzing collocations for problem solution in a transcript of an office hour interaction), it can be usefully extended to cultural issues, teaching skills, and pedagogical concerns. Given a broadly held agreement in the applied linguistics literature that formulaic language is key to language acquisition (e.g., Ellis & Cadierno, 2009) and language use (e.g., Erman & Warren, 2000), it follows that effective ITAs need to have acquired common fixed and semi-fixed chunks of language that will allow them to strategically deploy their available resources and to convey ideas in a coherent, fluent, and comprehensible way in academic contexts.

The lesson described below applies a corpus-informed language awareness approach (Reinhardt, 2007) to the teaching of *smallwords*, defined as "small words and phrases, occurring with high frequency in the spoken language, that help to keep our speech flowing, yet do not contribute essentially to the message itself" (Hasselgren, 2002b, p. 103). The overarching goal is to raise ITAs' awareness of language resources that can improve their oral fluency in the spoken academic genres of lectures and office hour consultations.

## BACKGROUND

The interactional stakes for being considered fluent are especially high for ITAs. A recurrent concern expressed by the sixteen ITAs described below in their self-assessments and peer evaluations of their in-class presentations was a perceived lack of oral fluency, which the

ITAs themselves foresaw as one of the major stumbling blocks in establishing effective communication with their future students. For most of these ITAs, their perceived oral fluency in English depended heavily on the judgment of their listeners, who were generally U.S. native, English-speaking undergraduates. When translated to the ITA context, perceived disfluency could weaken an ITA's authority in the class. As noted in Thorne et al. (2008), U.S. undergraduates cite "extralinguistic factors such as delivery and non-verbals...as limitations to ITA effectiveness" (p. 258). For ITAs, oral fluency can be considered essential to maintaining students' attention (Rossiter, 2009, p. 396) and positioning themselves appropriately in their communication with students. Among the linguistic factors that are vital for fluency are smallwords. For example, in her study of smallword use by native and non-native speakers of English and its effect on perceived fluency, Hasselgren (2002a) found that higher levels of perceived fluency are frequently associated with more diverse use of smallwords, (e.g., *all right, okay, and you know*, among others).

From a pedagogical viewpoint, in the process of gaining the fluency necessary to interact with undergraduate students in the context of classroom lectures or office hour interactions, common fluency descriptors such as placement of pauses, speech rate, and automatic processing are of insufficient help to the average ITA, "who probably already realizes that his speech should be smoother, faster and clearer" (Hasselgren, 2002a, p. 147). In addition, an academic semester is generally not long enough for significant improvement in these areas to be noticeable.

ITAs can, however, benefit from contextualized exposure to more concrete language forms in corpus-derived fixed and semi-fixed chunks, such as smallwords, covered in the pedagogical unit to be described. In fact, a growing body of work indicates that fluency has more to do with a language user's command of formulaic language than with temporal variables (Prodromou, 2008). Formulaic language is so pervasive in native speaker language production that it comprises around sixty percent of general language use (Wray, 2002) and twenty percent of the words used in academic prose (Biber, Johansson, Leech, Conrad, & Finegan, 1999).

As O'Keeffe, McCarthy, and Carter (2007) note, formulaic sequences have "phonological unity," which means that they are usually pronounced quickly or in one intonation unit (one stressed syllable and the rest reduced) (p. 76). Thus, smallwords may be especially difficult for ITAs to grasp in naturally occurring, real time expert-speaker speech. Perceiving them might be even more difficult during academic lectures and office hours, when ITAs are presumably focusing on getting the main points. Since perception is key for raising awareness and consequent incorporation of these features in one's interactional repertoires, a pedagogical focus on their use for various pragmatic purposes in academic spoken discourse is likely to create opportunities for ITAs to develop their fluency and communicative ability in academic contexts. The pedagogical unit described below was designed with this hypothesis in mind.

## THE CORPUS-INFORMED PEDAGOGICAL UNIT

### Setting

A two-day unit was designed for international graduate students enrolled in the high-advanced ITA preparation course (in a series of three) offered at a large university. International graduate students in this ITA program typically come from a wide range of

ethnic and language backgrounds and major in a variety of subjects (although the hard sciences are most prevalent). The sixteen students in this course came from the fields of Economics, Engineering, Biology, Biochemistry and Molecular Biology, Astronomy and Astrophysics, Food Science, Kinesiology, and Math. In terms of their cultural background, nine came from China, two from Turkey, and the rest from South Korea, Thailand, and Ukraine.

The instructor was also an ITA, with extensive experience in teaching reading, writing, listening, and speaking to advanced and intermediate ESL learners. The class met for fifty minutes, three times a week, in a classroom where each student had access to a computer.

This unit on smallwords was taught as a continuation of a unit on “Office Hours and Directives,” originally designed by Jonathon Reinhardt (Reinhardt, 2007). The lesson was designed following Reinhardt’s model as much as possible, in order to maximize pedagogical coherence. Although the unit may need to be modified for a different group of ITA students, we believe it is usable at other institutions, and it introduces an important concept about interaction and self-representation in academic settings in a pedagogically friendly and empirically sound manner.

## Course Goals

The curriculum for the course had a number of set goals. Excerpt 1 lists the goals from this particular section. We have listed only those that are relevant to this particular unit (especially point number six).

### Excerpt 1

#### *Course Goals*

Through various discourse-based activities, you will:

1. learn to “notice” how instructors use English;
2. become more *aware* of how you use English, especially in academic roles;
3. learn how to explain concepts and go over problems, questions, and/or homework interactively with students individually and in groups, while maintaining rapport and authority;
4. become aware of the concept of “genre” and differences between academic genres;
5. learn how to negotiate miscommunication with students;
6. learn how an instructor can make grammar and word choices to affect communication (e.g., modals, pronouns, discourse markers).

By the end of the course, students were expected to be able to successfully carry out the teaching responsibilities required of ITAs. Upon completion of coursework students were required to take and pass an in-house developed Interactive Performance Test (IPT) administered by two independent raters. Passing the IPT allowed the ITAs to assume teaching responsibilities in their respective departments.

## Goals and Rationale of the Unit

The goal of this pedagogical unit was to help ITAs improve their oral fluency (as well as their effectiveness as teachers) by incorporating smallwords into their own language use and eventually strategically use them in academic contexts. Given the goal of this pedagogical intervention, we decided to focus solely on the smallwords that have been found to be most recurrent in spoken corpora. In particular, we relied on McCarthy's (2004) analysis of the most frequent four-word chunks in a spoken English corpus (the Cambridge International Corpus). In his analysis, McCarthy demonstrates the pervasiveness of certain formulaic single and multi-word sequences, "I don't know if" being the most frequent (McCarthy, 2004). More importantly, some of these expressions (and/or similar expressions with the same pragmatic purposes) were found to be prevalent in academic spoken and written registers (Biber & Barbieri, 2007). For example, research has investigated the use of the vague formulaic sequences *(or) something like that* and *(and) things/stuff like that* in academic talk, and found that they are not only frequent but also serve essential functions in micro-classroom contexts, such as establishing a context and engaging cooperative listenership (Walsh, McCarthy, & O'Keeffe, 2008).

The relatively high frequency of these single and multi-word units in academic spoken English was corroborated using the Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English (MICASE; Simpson, Briggs, Ovens, & Swales, 2002). This was carried out both by using the online search option and by creating a mini-corpus of 22 random transcripts from lectures and office hours and obtaining a frequency count of two-, three- and four- word sequences using the concordancing program AntConc (Anthony, 2007). Finally, two single words in these corpora were also selected – *right* and *okay* – given their high frequency in the corpora and their key contribution to dialogic teaching.

Frequency, however, was not the only guiding principle behind our choice of target smallwords. Among the most recurrent two-, three- and four-word chunks and single smallwords which were recurrent in the corpora mentioned above, we selected the ones that had pragmatic integrity (McCarthy, 2004) and which had clearly identifiable functions which we deemed relevant to ITA discourse. Thus, the smallwords selected for this lesson were: *I don't know (if); I mean; I think; I/we know; kind of; okay; right; (or) something like that; (and) things/stuff like that; and you know.*

The goal of the first lesson in this two-day unit was to raise ITAs' awareness of the existence of smallwords, and the frequency with which they are used in academic discourse. Through a number of in-class and homework assignments the students were expected to notice their use and become aware of their pragmatic functions in the context of academic lectures and office hours.

Using MICASE, we selected an academic lecture where eight of these ten smallwords were used and from a discipline none of the students in this section were majoring in – Oceanography. The transcript was presented to students with smallwords printed in boldface to facilitate noticing (Appendix 1).

The second, most extensive part of the unit was intended to highlight and explore three of the most common pragmatic uses of these smallwords in the classroom. In her study, Hasselgren (2002a) uses a fairly complex categorization to account for the uses of smallwords in verbal communication based on Sperber and Wilson's (1995) Relevance Theory. We considered these categories beyond the needs of ITAs in this course. Instead,

we placed the ten selected smallwords into three simplified pragmatic categories. Following McCarthy's (2004) functional categories for the most recurrent chunks in conversation, smallwords were presented as being used to perform one or more of the following actions: to build a sense of community with one's audience, to help one's audience by reformulating, to be polite, and to hedge.<sup>1</sup> These categories were presented as performing specific actions in academic discourse so that students would find them easier to analyze (e.g., by responding to the question "what do I want to do at this point?" instead of simply memorizing a list of single and multiword sequences).

## Description

The following section describes the activities carried out during the two class periods (for a description of activities, including the transcript, directions, and exercises given to the students, see Appendix 1).

### *First Class Period*

After briefly reviewing the content from the previous class period, the instructor transitioned to the topic of smallwords. He explained the relevance of smallwords for ITAs, noting that a definition, examples, and specific functions would be discussed after some class work based on the analysis of a transcript. He stressed that smallwords are important because all expert and successful language users utilize them very frequently.

The students were then instructed to read an excerpt from the MICASE transcript, made available to students on individual paper copies (in class) and electronically (emailed by the instructor ten minutes before the beginning of class). The instructor also projected the transcript for the entire class via the projector on a large white screen in order to facilitate making references to specific parts of the transcript during the subsequent discussion as a class.

After the students read the transcript in pairs, the instructor initiated a brief discussion based on the two questions at the beginning of the handout:

1. Would you consider this a dialogic lecture? Why?
2. Look at the bold words and phrases. In your opinion, why is the teacher using them?

The first question was mainly motivated by the topics in the syllabus that preceded the class on smallwords, and the second question set the instructor to segue into the definition of smallwords.

After a review of student responses as a class and a brief explanation of what smallwords are, the instructor initiated a class discussion based on individual instantiations bolded in the transcript. As a class, students examined smallwords one by one and shared their experiences with each smallword as reportedly used by their professors, fellow students, and friends. Then, the entire class went over the transcript together in order to develop an understanding of how all smallwords, used together, contribute to interactional language use.

Students were then asked to voice their opinions regarding the functions each smallword was performing in a particular context. As each student voiced his/her opinion, the instructor wrote it down on the transcript visible to the class on the white screen (through the projector). This activity took quite some time because many students had different ideas about what each smallword was doing in a particular context. The class finished with the discussion of every smallword in the transcript.

With the help of their instructor, students worked individually using MICASE to find instances of these smallwords. They were asked to link each smallword to a function or a set of functions compiled as a result of earlier brainstorming, or identify a new function if the ones discussed previously appeared unsuitable. Finally, a cautionary word was included at the end of the handout, bringing students' attention to the interactional dangers of using smallwords too frequently or not using them for the intended action (see last page of Appendix 1).

### *Second Class Period*

After reviewing the smallwords discussion from the first class, the instructor turned to the discussion of the different functions of smallwords as summarized by the researchers (see Appendix 1). The functions were extensively explained. The instructor then answered students' questions and pointed out functions based on examples of smallwords. Finally, it was students' turn to use MICASE<sup>2</sup> to explore smallwords and their uses in context. With the instructor's support, this activity continued until the end of the class.

Toward the end of the class, the instructor handed out and explained the homework assignment (see Appendix 2). The students were instructed to collect several examples of smallwords and explore if and how they fit into the functions discussed in class. This homework was given to them before the assignment that required them to prepare office hour role-plays, so students understood that the homework had a direct relationship to both the past classes and the future activity where smallwords would have an integral role.

## **APPRAISAL OF THE LESSON**

The anonymous feedback questionnaire (Appendix 3) revealed that student perceptions were generally positive, with all students evenly divided in finding learning about smallwords either "very useful" or "useful," as well as the lesson either "very clearly" or "clearly" presented. Six students found MICASE "very easy to use," and ten found it "easy to use." Three stated that they would most certainly use MICASE in the future, while the rest stated that they might do so. Some students suggested combining the use of a corpus, such as MICASE, with audio recordings of other TAs and their own mini-lessons.<sup>3</sup>

In the future, if a focus on making lexicogrammatical choices to affect communication acquires a more salient role in this ITA preparation syllabus, ITAs might benefit from more activities that increase students' awareness of functional chunks, such as the smallwords introduced in this lesson. This can be achieved through the use of corpora, followed by noticing and analytic audio/video activities that focus on the use and functions of recurrent formulas attested in teaching assistants' discourse and in students' own performance. It is desirable that these awareness-raising activities lead to the production of these chunks in ITA speech. However, it is also true that full extension of covering functionally salient

concepts typically requires a type of time commitment that graduate students in the ITA preparation course often cannot or are not willing to make (Ross & Dunphy, 2007).

A number of challenges, including the substantial emphasis on language functions and interactional meaning, along with lack of experience using a corpus like MICASE, may have made these two sessions slightly demanding. Fortunately, most students found MICASE fairly easy to use and a useful reference tool. Students suggested that this tool be introduced earlier in the semester “for analyzing the use of other subjects in addition to smallwords.” This suggests that the approach taken in these two sessions would have the potential to work if applied to similar functionally oriented topics across the semester.

Recently, with an increase in corpus-informed studies of attested utterances, there has been a growing body of teaching materials with a spoken grammar focus (for example, Carter & McCarthy, 2006, or Biber, Conrad, & Leech, 2002). In our experience teaching with such materials, however, some of the usage-based conventions emergent from the analysis of large bodies of data still remain somewhat counterintuitive for many language learners. In the questionnaire, one of the students noticed that among the things she liked best about this lesson was that she could “see in which situations the small words can be used. For instance, it seems to me that people used ‘I don’t know if’ to build a sense of the listener involvedness.” It follows that ITAs would benefit from an increased awareness of spoken grammar conventions and recurrent chunks that are “essential in the verbal handling of everyday life” (House, 1996, p. 228).

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## APPENDIX 1: STUDENT HANDOUTS

### First Class Period

#### A. Transcript of a lecture

*Read the transcript and answer the questions.*

1. Would you consider this a dialogic lecture? Why?
2. Look at the bold words and phrases. In your opinion, why is the teacher using them?

#### MICASE excerpt #1: Intro Oceanography Lecture

**T:** i, i wanna talk a little bit about the movie before we start on the other thing. and uh

**S7:** it needs a better plot.

**T:** pardon?

**S7:** it needs a better plot. it needs a better plot.

**T:** it needs a better plot yeah. well it's too it was too, this way and that, **right**? well they were that's, one of the reasons i wanna go over it. is there were a couple of key points, made that i wanna emphasize. uh for instance. now we it focused primarily\_ it told you there was a lot of geochemistry going on. but it really didn't, go into great detail there. they just said it's it's cool stuff. and it's building these big, polymetallic sulfide chimneys, that are... if it was cheap to get 'em, <LAUGH> and get 'em back they might even be economically important. but it's not. so, if you go by the\_ just say, **okay** geochemistry is interesting it's building these big chimneys, there are sulfide deposits, fine. now the, geology and geophysics part, the w- guy that uh Ken McDonald, the chief scientist's husband, his his main point, was what? do you remember what he, he said about, exploring the deep and, **all that sort of stuff**? he showed that little model of what the area looked like. what [S6: miles ] was his main point? what?

**S7:** if you can do fifty miles you can do the rest of it, pretty much.

**T:** you what?

**S7:** if you did a fifty mile, stretch you can do the rest of the four thousand.

**T:** well he he said that was a very special area. that he could predict, that this was gonna be an active area just by, how it looked. **you know** it was, it was slowing up, it was uh higher than stuff around it. and there weren't any real central valleys in it it was just one big, warp, in the ridge. and so he predicted that this was gonna be an active area. so. this is\_ being able to predict in science is a, is, one of the great things. being able\_ that means you semi understand it. and, understanding is the ultimate goal. now from the biology point of view, they said several times in there, the fact that this same this whole community, first of all it was completely decimated, by this eruption of lava. they didn't know that that had happened but when they got there, the first time, it was decimated. wi- i **i don't think** they used this phrase but it was called the, the tube worm barbecue. **i mean** everything was <SOUND EFFECT> and then, what seemed to really, surprise them, was that within two and a bit

years, everything was back. complete community the s- tube worms the, dandelions the crabs the fish de da de da de da. this whole community living off of bacteria, had completely reestablished itself. ninety percent. but what he didn't go into, was why was this surprising?

**SU-m:** where did it come from also?

**T:** that's why it's surprising. where the hell did it come from? **i mean** these things are, except for the fish, which are following the, the uh, tube worms the tube worms don't, **sorta** hike up and march off **you know**. they're stuck there they're they're what we call benthic, organisms. they're screwed into the bottom. they're attached, to the rock. so how, the surprising thing, is how, did they get there? **i mean... i mean** this\_ we're leaping way ahead in the course here because, oceanography's all tied up and it's hard to teach anything in a sequential order without jumping back and forth occasionally. and here we've leapt into the biology part of the course. but, it's a primary question. yes.

**S8:** could it happen (in a series disaster don't they\_ the) only thing i can think of is kinda, maybe how plants have seeds but i don't know if

**T:** that's not a bad idea. she's talking about seeds well, **i mean** we talk about the dan-dandelion for instance **right? i mean** we knew how the dandelion reproduces. affects our lawn and even they've got it, what they call an analogy in the, in the film. dandelion puts out seeds that, are picked up by, the wind, and blow to your neighbor's lawn. that's how it works. and so, your suggestion i take it is that the, these organisms must do something similar. the logical\_ anything it i- i- unlike dandelions, where, they reproduce by, putting out these, seed floaters, uh but if you've ever, done the battle with dandelions you know that it's also, uh they have roots that will just, if you don't get 'em out will just, regenerate, no matter what.

### **B. What are small words?**

“Small words” are words and phrases that occur very frequently in spoken English and which help keep our speech flowing naturally. They also add various meanings to the message and attitudes in interaction.

Small words help make your speech more *coherent* by 1) connecting and organizing your utterances and 2) organizing speech turns, signaling which ideas are being put across and which acts the speakers are performing.

They also project a sense of *fluency* in the language by making speech understandable without unnecessary effort.

### **Questions for consideration**

1. Return to MICASE excerpt #1 and focus on the bolded words, i.e. *right, okay, all that sort of stuff, sort of (sorta), you know, and I mean*.
2. What do you think about their frequency in this short excerpt? From your own experience as a student and/or teacher, how often are these expressions used?

3. What are some of the functions you think these words and phrases are being used for in this lecture? Work with a classmate.

## Second Class Period

### A. Some of the most frequent small words in informal conversation and academic oral lectures and presentations are:

you know  
 I think  
 I mean  
 kind of  
 I/we know  
 I don't know if  
 (or) something like that  
 (and) things/stuff like that  
 right  
 okay

Here are some of the main *actions* you can do with these words:

1. Build a sense of community with your audience

When speakers use these phrases they imply that they believe (or give the impression of believing) the listener “knows” or can complete the meaning of what they are talking about or referring to. As such, during academic lectures and presentations you can use them to include and engage your audience.

2. Help your audience by reformulation

Speakers use small words and phrases to explain terms and concepts. They come in handy when there is a need to paraphrase a formal definition that might be a bit too difficult to understand. It may also be useful to say something differently.

3. Be polite and/or hedge

Speakers use indirect forms to perform speech acts such as directives (e.g., commands, requests, suggestions, etc.) to protect the face of their addressees (that is, not make them uncomfortable). Being indirect is also important when being polite. Common expressions include *Do you think*, *I don't know if*, *what do you think*, and *why don't you*.

Some of the most frequent expressions have a hedging function; i.e., they modify propositions to make them less assertive and less open to refutation.

**Questions for consideration**

1. Return to MICASE excerpt #1 and the functions or purposes you identified for these expressions in the first exercise.
2. Do the functions you identified for the bolded words (and others that you might have found being used with similar purposes) fall in one of the categories listed above (i.e., building a sense of community, reformulating, being polite and/or hedging)?
3. Can you find any similar expressions that are used for similar purposes in the transcript?

**B. A proposed classification for these small words is the following**

- Building a sense of community with your audience: You know, I know (most commonly “we know”), or something like that, and things/stuff like that, right, okay
- Helping your audience by reformulation (explaining terms and concepts; clarifying what you just said): I mean
- Being polite and/or hedging: I think, kind of, I don’t know if, or something like that, and things like that.

**Questions for consideration**

1. Do you agree with this classification? Why? Why not? Provide examples.
2. The small word “okay” can be used with multiple functions. For example, it can be used to check comprehension at the end of an utterance. It can also be used to signal that you are about to wrap up or summarize what you were saying (sometimes combined with “so”). Can you think of other examples where the same small word is used for different functions in an oral presentation?
3. Vague expressions and approximators (i.e., expressions such as *around*, *about*, or *so*) are commonly identified with “poor” language skills. What do you think about their being used so often and having a function?
4. Are these small words being used in combination with other expressions or dialogic strategies that you have learned in this class? What is the overall effect?

**C. MICASE TIME!**

## APPENDIX 2: HOMEWORK ASSIGNMENT

### Exercise: Functions of *small words*

In this lesson, we learned three of the main actions you can do with *small words*: build a sense of community with your audience; help your audience by reformulating your previous statement; be polite and/or hedge your statements.

In class, we explored these functions in the lecture that you read in the handout. Now, you are going to look for more examples of these words in MICASE and try to place them in one of the three functional categories we learned in class. You are asked to provide a reason why you think a particular *small word* fits in the category you chose.

If you feel that the uses of some of the *small words* you find don't match the functions we learned in class, please identify or create a function that most closely fits the use of a *small word* in the context you found.

### Directions:

1. Choose two of the *small words* we learned in class (you know; I think; I mean; kind of; I/we know; I don't know if; [or] something like that; [and] things/stuff like that; right; okay)
2. Go to MICASE  
(<http://quod.lib.umich.edu/cgi/c/corpus/corpus?c=micase;page=simple>)
3. Choose the settings. In this exercise, you don't need to choose any particular "Speaker Attributes" – simply choose "All." Under "Transcript Attributes," go to "Speech event type" and choose "Office Hours."
4. Search for the three *small words* you have chosen. Find 2 examples of each of the 2 small words you chose. This means in total you will have 4 examples.

For example: A search for the *small word* “I think” in office hours yields the following:

**MICASE** Michigan Corpus of Academic Spoken English

Home Search Browse Help

Utterance Type: U1

Speaker ID: S6  
Native speaker status: Native speaker, American English  
Speaker role:  
Speaker sex: Female  
Speaker age: 17-23 years old

Transcript ID: [QFC115SU060](#) (click to view)

... s very interesting, um and then just with bad experiences mm the one thing my cousin said that, um there was one patient who, um, just didn't like, Indian occupational therapists just because I, well, she said that it wasn't because she had a bad experience but mostly cuz she was, like had a psychological problem **i think** she was schizophrenic but, that she was convinced that, she was this other therapist who, talked down to her or something like that huh and, she's like that's the only bad experience i've had and i don't think that has anything to do with, um, her not liking Indian people or ...

Please contact the [English Language Institute](#) with questions or comments.

If you need more context  
Click on the transcript

The word you've searched for  
will be bolded

You could write something like: In this example, “I think” fits in the being polite/ hedging function because the speaker is referring to a serious psychological condition (being schizophrenic) of the person being talked about.

- Copy and paste the examples you found and discuss their use in context. How do they fit in one of the three functional categories we learned in class? Simply provide the functional category that fits, and give a reason why you think a particular functional category is appropriate.

Note: if you feel that the uses of some of the *small words* you find don't match the functions we learned in class, please identify or create a function that most closely fits the use of the *small word* in the context you found.

- Submit your homework **by the end of Tuesday, November XX**. We will briefly discuss the results at the beginning of the Wednesday class.

### APPENDIX 3: STUDENT FEEDBACK FORM

Since the topic of *small words* is new to the syllabus for this course, I was wondering if you found this topic and lesson useful. For this purpose, I would appreciate it if you could take a few minutes to fill out the following feedback form. Many thanks in advance!

Feedback Form

Directions: Complete these statements by highlighting ONE of the options below.

1. **Learning about small words was:**
  - a. Very useful
  - b. Useful
  - c. Not very useful
  - d. Not useful at all
  - e. No opinion
  
2. **The way the lesson was presented was**
  - a. Very clear
  - b. Clear
  - c. Not very clear
  - d. Confusing
  - e. No opinion
  
3. **MICASE was**
  - a. Very easy to use
  - b. Easy to use
  - c. Not very easy to use
  - d. Too complicated
  - e. No opinion
  
4. **In the future, when I am not sure about the use of an expression, I think I will**
  - a. Most certainly use MICASE
  - b. Might use MICASE
  - c. Will not use MICASE
  - d. Do not know

Open-Ended Questions:

Directions: Please answer these two questions. Two or three sentences would be enough.

1. What did you find most/ least interesting about this lesson?

2. What could be improved to make the lesson more useful?

Thank you!