

**LATIP 2021**  
**International Conference on Language and Technology in the Interdisciplinary Paradigm**

**DISCOURSE STRATEGIES IN PRESENTING A SPOKEN  
SUMMARY**

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**Abstract**

The purpose of this research is to discover some textual patterns across spoken summaries and to compare them with those of written summaries. Using the top-down approach, the study has analyzed the discourse strategies in one hundred spoken summaries spontaneously produced by native speakers of English in radio podcasts on human interest problems. The analysis has revealed five discourse strategies which speakers follow to provide a clear overview of the problem under discussion: a personal emotional evaluation supported by some evidence; sharing a common opinion on the problem and offering some personal supporting evidence; presenting the essence of a problem through a classification; contradicting a common opinion or finding a compromise between the common and the personal opinion; using an adage to summarize a situation in a laconic way. Each strategy is presented as a few moves marked by special lexical-syntactic constructions. Intonation and syntax do not play a considerable role in strategy differentiation, but they organize summaries according to the norms of spoken language. Spoken summaries also tend to differ from written ones in having more variety in their discourse structure, although the movement from main points to supporting evidence is common to both types. The research contributes to the description of the genres of spoken language. The study also has a pedagogical implication presenting summaries as useful material for developing speaking skills. Being aware of discourse strategies and move markers, learners can follow the summary models and improve their fluency in English as a foreign language.

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*Keywords:* Discourse strategy, intonation, move markers, spoken summary, syntax



## 1. Introduction

One of the popular directions in discourse analysis is textual which focuses on identifying certain patterns underlying a great number of texts belonging to a particular genre (Dementyev, 2016; Paltridge, 2012). In discovering such patterns researchers aim to go beyond the level of separate sentences and to represent the macro-structures, both conceptual and formal, to which speakers get used while perceiving and generating texts of a certain type. Genres are typically defined as samples of speech “associated with particular situations of language use and particular communicative purposes” as well as culturally determined patterns which show “how things get done” with the help of language (Biber et al., 2007, pp. 7–8). This piece of research makes an attempt to reveal some macro-structures in the genre of the spoken summary.

### 1.1. Summarising in written and spoken discourse

The variety of language which is of interest in this study is the summary viewed as a specific genre of written and spoken discourse realized in several registers, or domains such as scientific, publicistic, informational and educational. Thus, a summary may be an element of a research article, a book or film review, a news bulletin or a task for learners to demonstrate their comprehension of some reading or listening. The purpose of a summary is to express the most important ideas about something in a concise and clear-cut way. Summaries are often prepared in written form, reflect a certain amount of critical thinking over the source material, and their preparation is guided by some instructions and templates. Written summaries have attracted considerable attention from researchers and language teachers (Alhussain, 2017; Bailey, 2011; Johns & Paz, 1997). Moreover, there are on-line tools for automatic summary generation offering to convert an original written text into a summary. Some of them may be quite useful in the teaching process, for instance helping a teacher to quickly select literary stories for particular content areas on the basis of their summaries (Kazantseva & Szpakowicz, 2010).

In contrast to the written variety, the spoken summary, which is in the focus of this study, has been far less popular with discourse researchers. I am not familiar with any papers describing the discourse strategies of an oral summary. It may be partially accounted for by fewer communicative situations in which speakers are required to make an oral summary. However, such necessity can arise in an interview or a survey where the interviewee is asked to sum up the current economic or political situation, to evaluate a noteworthy cultural event or to share some professional expertise.

Language learners, especially foreign language learners, may find such tasks daunting if they have not been provided with appropriate summary samples and strategies to organize the material they know on the problem. The research questions that arise here are whether or not spoken summaries share common patterns amongst themselves and, if they do, whether these patterns are similar to those of a written summary. Taking into account the different psycholinguistic nature of written and spoken language (Brown & Yule, 1983; Dose, 2013), we hypothesize that differences will prevail over similarities and that a spoken summary may reveal some new grooves that human thought can find to generalize information when pressed for time.

It should be pointed out that this research concentrates on oral summaries spontaneously produced within a limited time. We will not take into account oral summaries which are represented as readings of written summaries, although they are referred to as a spoken variety by some authors (Ivanova, 2014), nor do we include oral summaries of the recorded texts listened to and summarized in tasks offered by some international English testing systems like TOEFL. Our observation material is limited to spontaneously generated spoken summaries presented as an immediate response to a question or a task.

### **1.2. Peculiarities of a spontaneously spoken summary**

The spoken and written varieties of summarising pursue a similar purpose – presenting the main points of a certain amount of information in a concise, logical and clear way. However, they demonstrate a few differences viewed in Table 01.

**Table 1.** Differences between written and spoken summaries

<b>Parameter</b>	<b>Written Summary</b>	<b>Spoken Summary</b>
Amount of information being summarised	Definite (a particular source text)	Vague (personal knowledge of the world, anything heard of or read by a speaker)
Mode of production	Thoroughly planned, written and edited	Spontaneously produced as a response to a question
Cognitive load	Understanding and paraphrasing what others have written or said	Searching for feelings and ideas associated with the question raised
Language means	Terms, complex lexical and syntactical units	Neutral, close to conversation
Strategies as a plan to achieve a goal	Identifying and stating the main arguments and supporting evidence according to a template	Trying to find something important to say about the phenomenon in question

As shown in Table 01, the peculiarities of a spontaneously spoken summary are determined by the communicative situation in which it is being generated and the psycholinguistic conditions of spontaneous speaking. The focus of this study is on the strategies of a spoken summary, on finding out possible paths that human thought takes while generalizing a person's knowledge of and attitudes to a particular subject area.

## **2. Problem Statement**

While we have a clear idea of what a written summary is, a spoken summary seems to remain something chaotic; it is a speech fragment which can contain any information deployed in any way chosen by the speaker. Such a perfunctory impression of a spoken summary may be debunked from the position of discourse analysis which aims to find patterns and macrostructures not only in written texts but also in spoken messages (Gee, 1999). We expect to discover some recurring patterns in oral summary presentations in terms of both strategic planning and language means realizing certain strategies.

### **2.1. Looking for strategies in a spoken summary**

Supposing a speaker relies on some strategy as a convenient path to cover the subject area, what could this strategy be like? Will it be a personal opinion with supporting arguments? Or is it likely to be a

more detached depersonalized analysis of the subject matter close to a written summary? We expect such patterns to be multiple but not unlimited. In understanding a discourse strategy we rely on its definition as “the idea of an agent about the best way to act in order to reach a goal” (Dijk & Kintch, 1983, pp. 64-65). Therefore, particular speakers may be expected to prefer different strategies.

## **2.2. Language means realizing discourse strategies**

Discourse strategies are bound to be realized through particular language units beginning with large, extended ones such as intonation and syntactic patterns and going down to separate lexemes. We expect each strategy to be marked by a few conspicuous parameters, although some overlapping between language means is not excluded, which creates the neutral base-line for spoken strategy realization. We are going to analyse the choice of intonation, syntactic and lexical items used in oral summarization.

## **3. Research Questions**

Taking the aforesaid into account, we are setting two major research questions, both falling into a few minor ones.

### **3.1. Do native speakers of English follow any discourse strategies producing a spoken summary spontaneously?**

If they do, some further questions arise, concerned with the number and types of such strategies as ways to achieve the communicative goal of the genre. A general comparison of the discourse strategies in written and spoken summaries can also be of interest here.

### **3.2. What language means contribute to the identification and differentiation of discourse strategies in a spoken summary?**

The specification of this major question will result in enquirers about the importance of language units of different levels, including intonation, syntax and lexicon. This question also encourages us to look at some set phrases serving as discourse frames similar to written summary frames.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

Discovering particular discourse strategies in presenting an oral summary will contribute to the theory and practice of discourse analysis, the description of various genres of spontaneous speech and the development of teaching techniques in the area of spoken language.

### **4.1. Investigating a spontaneously spoken summary**

The main purpose of the study is to explore the underlying discourse structure of a spoken summary in the shape of discourse strategies and the surface linguistic structure represented by lexicon, syntax and intonation.

#### **4.2. Using summary samples for teaching spoken English**

The set of recorded summaries collected for this research can also be applied in teaching practice for teaching spoken English comprehension and as models for imitation.

### **5. Research Methods**

The first step of the research implied selecting spontaneously spoken summaries from radio interviews and panel discussions. One hundred summaries satisfying the research material conditions were extracted from the BBC radio podcasts dating from 2010-2020. The interviewees who produced the summaries were requested to present a general overview of the problem under discussion at the beginning or at the end of the program. All of them were native speakers of English and experts in their fields who were able to express their ideas easily. The number of participants per one program varied from ten to three. Correspondingly, the largest number of summaries on one problem was ten and the smallest ran down to three. All in all, the summaries were related to nineteen questions.

How has the pandemic changed the role of science and scientists in society? (ten summaries)

Is evil the reason people do bad things? (eight summaries)

What is a good school? Do we know what makes a good school? (six summaries)

Do leaders make a difference? (five summaries)

Why is Julius Caesar so fascinating and important over two thousand years after his death? (three summaries)

The summaries were to be short, and the turn was quickly handed over to the following participant. The length of a summary varied from three sentences to a paragraph of seven sentences on average. The summaries were listened to and supplied with written scripts which carried intonation annotation based on auditory impressions. The intonation annotation we used included symbols for nuclear tones (falling \, rising /, falling-rising ∨, mid-level >), for stressed syllables ', for pauses inside sentences |. The summaries prepared in this way were subjected to top-down discourse analysis and linguistic structure analysis.

#### **5.1. Top-down discourse analysis**

A top-down approach was found to be an appropriate way of discourse analysis aiming at revealing the genre and functional characteristics of texts through moves and steps (Biber et al., 2007). A discourse strategy in a summary, therefore, can be represented as a set of moves enabling a speaker to carry out the communicative task – giving an overview of the subject area. To a certain extent, a researcher has to follow the speakers' moves in the realization of their communicative intention.

#### **5.2. Linguistic structure analysis**

Although discourse analysis claims to have risen above separate words and sentences, the latter remain the ultimate meaningful units in which discourse strategies are realized. Describing discourse strategies, we have to refer to some key words and phrases, syntactic constructions and intonation

patterns. Words express concepts, syntax and intonation arrange them into a meaningful succession providing various degrees of prominence for particular elements. Although intonation performs a great number of organizing and differentiating functions in speech (Mitrofanova, 2012), the most essential one for creating discourse coherence appears to be information structuring (Brazil, 1997; Couper-Kuhlen, 2015). As shown by the researchers, it is realized through the use of particular types of nuclear tones, as well as through pitch levels and tempo contrasts.

In describing discourse strategies according to these approaches, we are going to discover some correlations between certain functional moves and their language expression. For instance, stating something as an important argument, a speaker will refer to particular language units revealing this discourse function.

## 6. Findings

The top-down discourse analysis of the scripted summaries has allowed us to identify a few patterns in the structure of this genre of spontaneous speech. The language means were assessed according to their ability to mark and distinguish these macrostructures.

### 6.1. Five discourse strategies in presenting spontaneously spoken summaries

The top-down discourse analysis of the research material has revealed five recurring strategies in the spontaneous summarizing of a certain amount of knowledge:

- 1) a personal emotional evaluation supported by some evidence (discovered in 31 summaries);
- 2) sharing a common opinion, tendency or a stereotype on the problem and offering some personal evidence to support it (discovered in 28 summaries);
- 3) presenting the essence of a problem through a classification or categorization (discovered in 19 summaries);
- 4) contradicting a common opinion or finding a compromise between the common and the personal opinion (discovered in 15 summaries);
- 5) using a proverb, a quotation or an imperative sentence to summarize a situation in a laconic way (discovered in 7 summaries).

Now we are going to illustrate each strategy with examples.

The first type of summarizing strategy – a personal emotional assessment – was quite frequent in analysing, in particular, the impact of the pandemic on science and scientists. The speakers explained why the past year had been extraordinary in their lives. These examples reveal two discourse moves in an emotional summary – emotion plus explanation, as well as two most common ways to signal emotions – through emotionally coloured adjectives (crazy, amazing, fantastic, fascinating, tricky, difficult, uncomfortable, etc.) and emphatic auxiliary verbs (do, does, has), both marked by high falling tones. A rarer variation of this strategy runs down to changing the order of the moves: a speaker may prefer to begin with evidence and end up with an emotional generalization.

The second strategy reflects a more rational approach to summarizing when speakers try to name a common opinion, tendency or stereotype and substantiate it with personal evidence. There may be more

than one piece of evidence, which increases the number of moves. Following this strategy, speakers often demonstrate their cooperation with others in understanding the phenomenon being discussed. For instance, the speakers answering the question about what makes rich people want more confirm a connection between this chasing and their expanding ego. To signal the strategy of generalization speakers resort to a number of expressions which point out regularity and importance:

I can't speak for them specifically but you can generalize ....

One of the really important things that have happened is ...

I think it's a general tendency to ... (There is a certain strong tendency to ...)

It's not just compatible, it happens all the time .... What we still do is .....

There are key factors ... I think the main point is .... There are essential truths about ...

The third discourse strategy is chosen in a situation where a person has to touch upon a complex phenomenon and decides on presenting it gradually through its components or aspects. Numerals and parenthetical words appear to be strategy markers here. For instance, in her summary of the impact of the pandemic on science, a speaker states that the pandemic has taught scientists to differentiate between three kinds of scientific facts – those they know for sure, those they can guess on the basis of their expertise and some new facts about which they know nothing. Each element of the classification consists of two moves (generalization and specification), while the final move highlights the importance of the whole classification. Typically, we find the third strategy markers at the beginning of a summary. Here are some of them: ... We are not just talking about one homogeneous thing ... We have to divide .... into two parts really ... There are three characteristics of ... First, ..... then, ..... and finally, ...

The fourth strategy is revealed in the type of summary in which a speaker presents a widely spread opinion on the discussion subject but does not support it. Thus, generalizing the role of school in society, the authors of a few summaries argue with a popular opinion that the academic success of schoolchildren depends on their social background rather than on school teaching. Move markers of this strategy are usually located at a distance from each other, as shown in the examples:

I accept the argument that ... but ....

I think what we have seen is ... And the reality has been completely different...

There are truths about... You don't need any more research, as far as I'm concerned...

So when you say.....That's what we don't agree with ...

I think I share this view with almost every citizen in .... Where I depart from ..... is ...

Finally, the fifth discourse strategy is applied by those speakers who happen to recall some popular adage, metaphor or quotation revealing the essence of the problem under discussion. Preceded or followed by a personal commentary, this adage is a laconic way to summarize the subject matter at the beginning or at the end of a discussion. Thus, describing difficulties which arise in communication between different social classes and groups, a speaker says

“There is an 'old \adage | that di\versity | is in'viting us to a \party |but in\clusion | is 'asking us to \dance” (Grieg, 2020).

Another speaker participating in discussing the question of the existence of evil outside of people refers to A. Solzhenitsyn:

“I 'think 'evil e\exists | and can be 'found in \all of us. Ale'xander Solzhe\nitsyn | >said | that the \line dividing good and evil | 'cuts through the 'heart of 'every 'human \being. And I 'think 'that's 'very \true. And it 'seems to me what \matters | is 'how we re\spnd to evil | both in our/selves | and \others” (Buerk, 2015).

A variant of a laconic summary can take the shape of a motto, an imperative sentence. For instance, a speaker answering the question about how to encourage people to think better of others presents the following imperative: “I would say | Re'verse the \gaze! 'Just re'verse the \gaze! 'Look at your\self!” (Taylor, 2013).

Generalizing the five discourse strategies in oral summarizing, we may conclude that speakers can choose to sound more emotional or more rational, they can refer to something considered to be a common opinion confirming or refuting it with personal evidence, they can resort to classification and adage quotation to express a complex idea in a shorter way.

## **6.2. Language means realizing spoken discourse strategies**

Although we have already pointed out some bright language means helping to identify discourse strategies, now it is worthwhile taking a broader look at them. As our examples show, lexical-syntactical constructions take the lead in the differentiation of the strategies. In most cases special constructions are used to mark the beginning of a move. Inside a move they serve to indicate a personal opinion (I think..., in my case..., my argument is ...), attitudes (of course, obviously, unfortunately), importance (It's a very important point...; The important thing is ...; What matters is ...), enumeration and contrast (then, also, but), conclusion (I think that is why ...). We would like to highlight the importance of phrases rather than separate words in building spontaneous discourse. Many of them are ready-made expressions accompanied by a particular intonation contour (In \my opinion... The 'funny thing \is...), which makes spontaneous speech production easier. Such expressions are characterized as belonging to speakers' covert procedural knowledge (Widdowson, 2007).

As for intonation, it is not actively involved in strategy differentiation, although it can represent some discourse relations between neighbouring elements (Kleinhans et al., 2017). The main function of intonation in discourse is to organize words and constructions into meaningful utterances by marking their theme and rheme components (Brazil, 1997). In producing the summaries, as our annotations show, the speakers were quite consistent in their use of the falling-rising nuclear tone on the theme parts and the falling tone on the semantic center of the rheme. A few exceptions have been noticed in the emotional evaluation strategy where high falling tones occasionally appeared in the theme component instead of falling-rising ones. Generally speaking, the only strategy which was identified with the contribution of intonation was the emotional evaluation strategy. The emotional summaries sounded with a raised pitch level and an increase in the number of high falling tones. Without high falls, adjectives like 'interesting, tricky' would not be perceived as emotionally coloured. Nor would auxiliary verbs like 'do, does' become emphatic. We observe these words in their emotionally neutral use in the rest of the strategies.

In contrast to the raised pitch level, the lowered pitch register serves to relegate additional, subsidiary, parenthetical bits of information, in particular in clauses introduced by conjunctions like although, if, unless, and.

Another important aspect of the organizational function of intonation is highlighting stressed words against the background of unstressed ones. It is seen from the annotations that nuclear tones and sentence stress create bright semantic centres against the background of unstressed words, facilitating the perception of information.

The syntax of the spoken summaries bears some typical features of spoken language such as the prevalence of coordination, parallel and repeated constructions, parenthetical insertions (Brown & Yule, 1983; Dose, 2013).

So, comparing different language means, we can say that syntax and intonation contribute to the appropriate mode of the oral presentation of spoken summaries, whereas special words and phrases introducing strategy moves reflect a deeper level of discourse planning and the type of strategy chosen by the speaker. These correlations are presented in table 02.

**Table 2.** Discourse strategies and moves in a spoke summary

Discourse Strategies	Moves	Move Markers
personal emotional evaluation supported by some evidence	personal emotional evaluation + personal evidence	adjectives expressing emotions, emphatic auxiliary verbs, high falling nuclear tones, raised pitch of voice
sharing a common opinion, tendency or a stereotype on the problem and offering some personal evidence to support it	stating a common opinion or tendency + supporting evidence	expressions of generalization, regularity and importance; phrases of agreement and support
presenting the essence of a problem through a classification or categorization	naming categories + their specification (+ justification of categorisation)	numerals, parenthetical words; expressions of specification
contradicting a common opinion or finding a compromise between the common and the personal opinion	stating a common opinion + contradicting evidence (+ rejection /compromise)	phrases of partial agreement or reluctance to agree with a common opinion; phrases of comparison and contrast
using a proverb, a quotation or an imperative sentence to summarize a situation in a laconic way	stating an adage (+ personal commentary)	expressions introducing an adage or a quotation

Table 02 demonstrates that every strategy rests on at least two moves; optional moves absent in some summaries are shown in brackets. Words and, more often, phrases are the main means marking these moves. Our examples of summaries have presented expressions falling under these categories, although their list can be continued.

## 7. Conclusion

The study has confirmed the hypothesis that a spontaneous oral summary is characterised by certain discourse strategies helping speakers to effectively present some essential information within a limited time. Five strategies were resorted to by native speakers of English who were trying to give a quick overview of the suggested problem. The number of summaries belonging to this or that strategy seems to be of secondary importance because it may vary under the influence of the type of question being discussed and its emotional appeal to speakers.

### 7.1. Lexical and syntactical constructions as the main means revealing discourse strategies

The summaries contained a number of set phrases which served to signal the discourse functions of different parts of a summary, thus helping the speaker to plan and the listener to understand the text beyond separate utterances. The intonation and syntactical patterns of utterances were involved in providing comfortable conditions for the perception of oral speech but did not play a considerable role in marking and distinguishing discourse strategies.

### 7.2. Oral summaries as samples of spoken language

The spoken summaries we have analysed have all the characteristics of spoken language; therefore they do not present any difficulty for listeners' perception, unlike listening to written summaries with densely compressed information. However, there seems to be one common feature between spoken and written summaries – the movement of thought from the main, general points to supporting, particular evidence.

Spoken summaries can be a useful teaching material illustrating the peculiarities of spoken language. Language learners are certain to benefit from analysing and imitating them. They encourage learners to rely not only on the surface linguistic structure but also on some deeper roots of this structure.

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