Title: *Investigating student-centred academic discourse (problem based learning sessions in medical genetics)*

Theme(s) addressed: *Nature of disciplinary specific, student-centred learning ; discourse analysis*

In preparing students to enter their post-graduate programmes, we spend a considerably amount of time on academic writing. This work is informed by the significant research into the area over the last forty years. Research into spoken academic discourse has not, however, proceeded at the same pace or on the same scale, despite the important contributions from studies of the MICASE and BASE corpora and additional work on lectures: there is still relatively known about student-centred, disciplinary specific, learning events. Yet student discussions are acknowledged to be the site of much construction of knowledge and socialisation within the academy (e.g. Mauranen, 2001).

On the last block of our pre-sessional we group students into broadly disciplinary specific groups. One of the core modes of learning for many students entering medicine and life sciences is via problem-based learning (PBL) sessions, now widely used as a means of delivering clinical skills and knowledge.   The two key features of the PBL session are its focus on interaction as a means to develop learning and investigatory skills, and the discussion of the propositional content. While there is a significant body of research investigating its merits, comparing it to more traditional forms of education, there has been less investigation into its linguistic aspects (indeed true for any disciplinary specific student-centred interactions).

In order to investigate this genre and inform our materials and task design, a corpus of 10 problem-based learning sessions (five complete cycles) words was compiled. This talk will present findings from preliminary exploratory case studies into the nature of the interactions. Taking a genre-based, qualitative approach the main phases that can be identified in each stage of the PBL cycle are presented, including the very extended nature of the exchanges. A corpus-based approach using Wordsmith Tools is used to present significant linguistic features.

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Reference:
Mauranen, A. 2001. Reflexive Academic Talk: Observations from MICASE. *Corpus Linguistics in North America: Selections from the 1999 Symposium*. Eds. Simpson, R. & J. Swales. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. 165-178