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LI-BEL case: a Spoken Corpus of Academic Discourse

The Limerick-Belfast Corpus of Spoken Academic English (LI-BEL case) is a one million-word corpus of academic discourse, 50 per cent of which was compiled at Mary Immaculate College and University of Limerick in the Republic of Ireland and 50 per cent at Queen's University Belfast, Northern Ireland, United Kingdom. The broad aim of the corpus is to describe contemporary academic discourse that is representative of two university settings on the island of Ireland under different administrations (one Irish and one British). The corpus will also be used in both institutions for pedagogical purposes. Data from the LI-BEL corpus is collected from a variety of pedagogic and research contexts across disciplines. These include the following speech events: lectures, tutorials, one-to-one consultations, laboratory sessions as well as conferences and symposia. This paper will detail the design and application of the LI-BEL corpus, and will also explore some preliminary findings that have arisen to date from the corpus. Focusing on similarity and variation across disciplines, speech events and academic environments, as well as geopolitical considerations, we will look, in particular, at idioms in academic speech in these data. Methodological challenges of planning and compiling a 'comparable' spoken academic corpus across two educational jurisdictions will also be addressed.