

Teaching Presentation Skills for Communicative Purposes

コミュニケーションを目的としたプレゼンテーション技能の教授

Mark Hovane

本研究は、協力的な雰囲気があるクラスでの学生が、口頭発表および学生同士の相互評価活動を行った報告である。また本活動は、広義にジャンル (Genre) や構成主義を理論的枠組みとし、タスク中心の教授法 (Task-Based-Language-Teaching) のような教育教授法にどのようなあてはまるかを論じる。

Introduction

At Kansai University the English Communication 1 program has two primary objectives: the first is to actively develop students' ability to communicate in a socially appropriate manner. Secondly, there is a determined effort to build learners' confidence and to motivate them to assume personal responsibility for their further progress after completion of the course. Introducing students to the genre of oral presentations is an effective means of motivating them to communicate in the target language of English and teaches lifelong skills that can also extend beyond the educational setting and into a professional context after graduation. Theoretically, by situating the activity within the currently accepted EFL approach known as Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), realized methodologically by Task-Based-Language-Teaching (TBLT), the author will examine some of the widely recognized components such as: goals, input data and assessment procedures, while also contextualizing the classroom practice.

Background

This paper aims to locate the classroom activity of oral presentations within the broad framework of social-cultural theories of language acquisition which locate the individual learner within the larger communal or social context. Apple (2006) suggests that Social-cultural theo-

ries (SCT) arise largely from Vygotsky's assertion that learning cannot occur without social interaction. Vygotsky also wrote that "all learning takes place as a result of social interaction. Knowledge, therefore, is a construct to be pieced together through an active process of involvement and interaction with the environment" (Scholnik, Kol, & Arbarbanel, 2006, p.12).

That is to say, constructivism means the construction of knowledge which leads to an authentic sense of learner ownership and usage whereby the learner emerges empowered. In constructivist learning environments, discussion is considered vital for understanding. In fact it has been argued that learning is a "social, communicative and discursive practice inexorably grounded in talk" (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996, in Scholnik, Kol, & Abarbanel, 2006, p.17).

Teaching oral presentation skills for communicative purposes is also informed by theories of situated learning. According to Lave and Wenger (1991, in Artemeva, Logie, & St-Martin, 1999), "theories of Situated Learning focus on the relationship between learning and the social situations in which learning occurs; learning is seen as distributed among co-participants" (p.306). Essentially in this social process, learning occurs through observation followed by a graduated step by step process of co-participation. The design of oral presentation activities acknowledge the importance of these notions by providing a classroom setting where learners become engaged in collaborative learning, with students and teacher co-participating in the production of the oral presentation. The structure of the collaboration involves continuous peer review as well as feedback from the teacher.

Based on the constructivist theory of learning, and with the acceptance of the Communicative-Language-Teaching (CLT) approach in the early 1980's, the term Task-Based-Language-Teaching (TBLT) came into widespread use in the field of Second-Language-Acquisition (SLA), in terms of designing communicative tasks to promote learners' actual language usage. Jeon and Hahn (2005) summarize the current thinking in the field of TBLT:

Within the varying interpretations of TBLT related to classroom practice, recent studies exhibit three recurrent features; TBLT is compatible with a learner centered educational philosophy (Ellis, 2003; Nunan, 2005; Richards and Rodgers, 2001); it consists of particular components such as goal, procedure, specific outcome (Murphy, 2003; Nunan, 2004; Skehan, 1998); it advocates content-oriented meaningful activities rather than linguistic forms (Beglar & Hunt, 2002; Carless, 2002; Littlewood, 2004)(Jeon & Hahn, 2005, p.124)

Ramifications for the classroom have included the development of detailed practical frameworks in which learners are actively engaged in a process-oriented cycle of preparation (pre-task), performance (task), and feedback (post-task). TBLT continues to be re-examined from different perspectives including oral performance, and performance assessment (Jeon & Hahn, 2005)..

TBLT encompasses many techniques from a variety of methods. Teaching oral presentation skills is one of many options exemplifying a meaningful task-based activity. It should be clear that conceiving, preparing and performing presentations is a synthesis of different skills and knowledge areas, e.g. (vocabulary, discussion, research, notetaking, confidence building, fluency, and body language). This cycle of tasks requires much planning over several classes, engaging students in an extended process of learning.

Definition of Task

What is a task? Jeon & Hahn's (2005) survey of definitions reveals that tasks are:

1. goal-oriented
2. input-driven
3. procedure-guided
4. outcome-evaluated
5. classroom-setting
6. meaning-focused
7. related to the real world
8. involves learners in assuming a variety of roles
9. requires time for feedback

(Adapted from Jeon & Hahn, 2005, p. 125)

For the purposes of this paper, it can be said that the major components of a task-based framework are: goals, input data, classroom setting, and assessment. For the teacher using oral presentations as a classroom task, pedagogical objectives can be as broad as developing learners' communicative competence through to more specific ones such as developing a five minute interactive oral presentation to be evaluated by peers. Naturally, goals should take into

account learner needs and interests in order to stimulate motivation for using the target language. According to Jeon & Hahn (2005), verbal materials may be written or spoken language while non-verbal materials include various visual forms. In the context of oral presentations, verbal elements would include a written format for composing a simple speech and non-verbal material would be in the form of visual aids which learners organize into an A3 size poster. Again we can see that input data will directly reflect the learners' needs and interests and subsequently promote the use of the target language. In using oral presentations as a classroom activity, pair, small group and whole class modes are employed to encourage interactive language use. The final classroom setting on "Presentation Day", attempts to simulate the atmosphere of an interactive art gallery in which learners' posters are placed at regular intervals around the walls and individual audience members travel from poster to poster. The teacher is also free to move around the "gallery" while acting as facilitator of the activity. Thus it can be seen that a flexible arrangement of the classroom space will allow task participants and the teacher to experience different settings according to the particular learning situation. How to use tasks as assessments is also an important consideration in relation to the efficacy of using oral presentations in the classroom. According to Jeon and Hahn (2005), using tasks for assessment means trying to get a real picture of the learners' communicative competence. In order to maximize interactivity between learners, peer assessment can be effectively adopted during oral presentations. If peer evaluation criteria are designed carefully enough, they will help to develop learners' communicative skills with partners and groups, by providing support as well as encouragement for realizing potential.

In summarizing the popularity of TBLT as an educational methodology, we can say that it is congruent with the concept that language learning is a developmental process promoting and dependent upon communication and social interaction, rather than a product acquired by practicing language items; and that the target language is learned more effectively when learners are exposed to meaningful, task-based activities. Practically speaking, it improves learners' interaction skills, it encourages learners' intrinsic motivation, and also creates a classroom culture of cooperative learning. Informed by such a theoretical perspective, it can be seen that another step towards learner autonomy in the language classroom is the increased use of collaborative learning skills, starting with simple pairs and building up to small and large groups. As a byproduct, students can effectively teach each other along the way, becoming more capable of clarifying their own knowledge by verbally communicating and monitoring their language usage.

Task-Based-Language-Teaching in the Japanese University

How does TBLT methodology impact students in an EFL context such as in a Japanese university setting? Japanese university students do not have a lot of opportunities in daily life, to be surrounded by input from their second language of English. Oral communication classes, typically taught by native English speakers, usually meet once a week for a ninety minute period. Collaborative learning techniques, characteristic of TBLT, are designed to increase the amount of comprehensible input as well as to encourage self confidence and motivation when non-native speaker peers communicate with each other. Creating a greater sense of community within the language classroom setting helps motivate learners to become more invested in using the target language and only occurs through increased interaction between students. In order to function effectively, these communities need to “engage in joint activities and discussions, help each other and share information” (Wenger, 2006; in Apple, 2006,p.288).

Genre

Genre theories also inform the TBLT approach to oral presentations. According to Swales (1990), Genre “comprises a class of communicative events, the member of which share some set of communicative purposes...recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community” (p.58). So how do theories of genre work in the Japanese university English classroom setting with respect to the efficacy of using oral presentations as communicative activities? Even for native speakers, the delivery of an oral presentation can be a source of extreme anxiety. As King (2002) notes, particularly in the Japanese/Asian EFL context, oral presentations are usually a face-threatening activity. From the perspective of conventionally held views of second language acquisition, the need for establishing a non-threatening and safe learning environment has long been understood. The more relaxed the learner, the better language acquisition proceeds. Therefore it is the teacher’s responsibility to properly organize and guide the activity of oral presentations so that learners might be equipped with life-long skills that will be beneficial in a variety of contexts.

Webster (2002) points out that in order to create a safe classroom community of discourse, it is useful to offer learners explicit and systematic explanations of the way language functions in social contexts. In other words, learners should recognize that language use employs genre. Genre is like a series of linguistic structures that help to achieve an outcome.

Therefore learners need to be equipped with these structures in order to communicate effectively. Webster (2002) identifies four stages:

- Stage 1: Building knowledge of the field (learners discuss field, tenor and mode features of oral presentations)
- Stage 2: Modeling of the text (teacher gives model oral presentation to the class and learners then analyze staging)
- Stage 3: Joint construction of the text (learners work together on developing their presentations and peer review)
- Stage 4: Independent construction of the text (learners give presentation to class) (Webster, 2000, para. 3)

In an attempt to reduce learner anxiety, students are asked to share experiences of prior oral presentations, how they felt, what they talked about and so on. Specifically, attention needs to be drawn to the dangers of plagiarism and to the mode component of genre theory i.e. differences between spoken and written language. As King (2002) notes, the problem for most EFL presenters is rote memorization of text directly copied from written sources. This inevitably results in a stilted and non-communicative activity because presenters struggle with adapting their material to a spoken context.

Following Webster's adapted format, what may then be useful in introducing the genre of oral presentations, is for the teacher to model an oral presentation to the class. The staging of the presentation can then be analyzed in a number of ways. First, the basic scaffolding can be identified by providing some guidelines for a presentation format. (See Appendix 1). Then, in an attempt to increase learner responsibility, the teacher can elicit the factors that make for an effective presentation. Incorporating student input while establishing the criteria for effective oral presentations is an important factor when considering a learner centered approach in EFL classes. This can then lead to establishing evaluative criteria for an effective oral presentation. Otoshi and Heffernan (2008) make a strong case for students taking a more active role in their own learning through the use of peer assessment activities in oral presentations, arguing that it increases learner interaction.

However, in a traditional teacher centered classroom, the assessment criteria have already been established with learners' ideas not incorporated into those pre-existing rubrics. Therefore, learners tend to adopt a passive attitude towards the assessment of their oral performances because they are rated by only one person- their teacher. If learners are challenged to define and co-create the evaluation rubric together with their teacher, they will gain more responsibility for their learning as well as improve the reliability of the peer assessment activities themselves. Reliability is a factor due to the fact that using pre-existing rubrics might result in learners being unaware of the description detailing the evaluative criteria, thereby resulting in an incomplete or poor assessment of peers. This co-creation of evaluative criteria by teacher and learner is almost as important as the actual assessment itself. Therefore co-participants must be very sensitive in identifying these criteria. In a study by Otoshi and Heffernan (2008), learners identified the following as important when making oral presentations:

1. clarity of speech and voice quality
2. correctness of language
3. interaction with the audience

(Adapted from Otoshi & Heffernan,2008,p.65)

These factors may be useful during the “joint construction stage” proposed by Webster (2002) in the generic staging of oral presentations. Assessment rubrics may be co-created by the teacher and the learners and each factor may be identified in different stages of the oral presentation process. In summary, oral presentation evaluation criteria consist of multiple factors including; language use, content, delivery, and effectiveness of visual aids. In co-constructing the assessment rubric, it is necessary for teachers to clearly delineate these factors before undertaking any peer assessment activities in class. Included in this third stage of preparing the genre of oral presentations, “joint construction” also refers to the fact that learners can work on their oral presentations together in pairs and peer check each others' outlines. The teacher can also be a participant in this joint construction stage giving help and advice by editing drafts as needed. In the fourth stage of “individual construction”, presentations are given during class, timed and assessed by teacher and peers. During presentations, student audience members are asked to write a few comments and award a numerical score.

PRESENTATIONS

This paper will now describe the exact procedure of how to set up the multi-class activity of oral presentations.

Intended Learning Outcomes

1. Students will acquire the tools, experience and the confidence needed to present their own ideas, clearly and effectively.
2. Students will work in pairs or in groups to learn and practice presentation skills and strategies and will review and critique each other's work as they create presentations and evaluate each other's performances.
3. Students will develop their critical thinking skills by making decisions about content, organization and the needs of their audience. They will also identify strengths and weaknesses in their classmates' presentations.
4. Students will learn new communication skills including: physical and non-verbal skills such as: eye contact, gesture and posture. Together these skills promote effective speech delivery.
5. Students will also learn speech building strategies that help them to generate details, find, evaluate and organize information and develop and support ideas. Speech building strategies range from simple brainstorming to creating and using visual aids.
6. Students will synthesize these new skills through pair and group work and incorporate them into a presentation format.
7. Students will use presentation skills to "perform" and "communicate" in a cooperative and collaborative learning environment.

PROCEDURE

First Class

1. Students brainstorm in pairs anything they know about the designated topic.
2. Teacher elicits all ideas and lists on the board.
3. In pairs, students negotiate in pairs the best two presentation topic ideas or generate other original ideas.
4. Each student finalizes one best topic for their individual presentation research.
5. Teacher checks that each student has their own original topic for research.
6. Students are assigned as homework: two pages of internet/library research on their indi-

vidual topic from two different sources in ENGLISH.

Second Class

1. Student share with partner or with small group members (groups of three or four) their research findings. Focus questions are introduced:

a/ "Why did you choose this topic?"

b/ "What are two interesting points about this topic?"

2. Teacher introduces presentation format by demonstrating a "successful poster presentation" in class. Presentation format structure is modeled and then given afterwards on the board. It's important for the teacher to clearly delineate differences between spoken and written language so as to avoid plagiarization.

(Refer to Appendix 1).

3. Students are assigned as homework to write the first draft of their presentation speech using the "presentation format guidelines" and to be sure to include three comprehension questions designed to test their audience's listening.

It should be noted that students must understand that their first draft may not be plagiarized from source and must be written in their own intelligible English. .

Third Class

1/ Teacher collects and writes comments on the first drafts while students with new partners discuss again the questions:

a/ "Why did you choose this topic?"

b/ "What are two interesting points about this topic?"

2/ Teacher again models a "successful presentation" (highlighting "point-by-point" structure and question formation) and asks students to give feedback to their partner on the "strengths that they notice in the teacher's demonstration.

3/ Teacher elicits on the board the factors important in making effective presentations including: language, delivery etc... This forms the beginning of the co-construction of the evaluative assessment rubric in which both student and teacher ideas are incorporated into a

“presentation evaluation paper”.

4/ Students are assigned as homework to write the second drafts of their speeches.

Fourth Class

1/ With new partners, students peer edit their partner’s presentation speech using the “presentation format guidelines” as a checklist and give verbal feedback.

2/ Teacher once again collects all completed drafts and writes comments while students interview each other in small groups of three or four members on the same two questions:

a/ “Why did you choose this topic?”

b/ “What are two interesting points about this topic?”

3/ Teacher introduces the “speech building skill” of creating and using visual aids by bringing a collection of A3 size posters from previous years classes and placing a number of them on the board.

4/ Students compare in pairs examples of “strong” and “weak” posters.

5/ Teacher elicits factors that contribute to “good poster design”. Factors typically include: color, big font and lack of clutter.

6/ Students are given two pieces of A3 size poster paper and assigned as homework: to design a first draft of their poster.

Fifth Class

1/ With new partners, students swap posters and give feedback on the design.

2/ Teacher models examples of a “successful” and “unsuccessful” presentation by focusing on the communication skills highlighting physical and non-verbal skills.

3/ Students compare the demonstrated presentations in small groups focusing on the “strengths” and “weaknesses” of the physical communication skills introduced.

4/ Teacher elicits the factors of a strong physical message which include: eye contact, gestures, posture and clear voice.

5/ Teacher emphasizes that “good communication” is characterized by a combination of verbal and non-verbal factors so that students develop an awareness that many skills are required to reach an audience.

6/ Students are encouraged to practise all factors including: physical, visual and structural “messages” thereby ensuring that they will communicate “more effectively” with their presen-

tation partners in the following class.

7/ Students are reminded of the concept of “presentation evaluation criteria” and are invited in pairs and small groups to construct a ten point checklist of their own design and dialogue with the teacher on this topic. Students are only then given a checklist of these co-created criteria to study as an assigned homework.

Sixth Class

1/ While facing each other, students practise giving their presentations to their partner using all the skills they have studied. Partners give verbal feedback while referring to the co-created presentation evaluation criteria checklist .

2/ Students gather in small groups of 3 or 4 members to practise their presentations again. All members of the group are required to give verbal feedback to each presenter.

3/ Teacher explains the format and style of “Presentation Day” which is scheduled as the next class.

Seventh Class “PRESENTATION DAY”

1/ Teacher welcomes students and explains that “presentation day” is akin to visiting an “interactive art gallery” in which they each will have an opportunity to both give and receive a presentation, seeing, listening and talking to a number of presenters about various topics.

2/ Teacher randomly divides class into two groups: (A) and (B) and assigns a number to each student so that each student from (A) will be paired with a corresponding student from group (B).

3/ In “art gallery” style, all students in group (A) will attach their posters at uniformly spaced intervals around the available classroom wall space.

4/ Students from group (B) are responsible for positioning individual desks and chairs directly opposite each poster so that a “dialogue/communication space” is created by a group (A) presenter and a group (B) audience member.

5/ Group (A) presenters stand directly next to their posters as their group (B) audience member sits closely “face to face.”

6/ Teacher explains the overall procedure of “Presentation Day” i.e. there will be **three rounds** of presentation by group (A) members so that each presenter will have three chances to present for a new audience member. Each round will have a **(5 minute time limit)** in which the presenter must communicate his/her research to their audience member. Students are advised not to worry if they do not finish at the same time as their fellow presenters. Their

task is to keep communicating with their audience member for as long as possible by following the “presentation format guidelines” and if time permits, a more informal exchange of information through the use of follow up questions initiated by either presenter or audience.

7/ Teacher acts as “timekeeper” and “facilitator” walking around the “gallery” and listening in on various presentations.

8/ At the end of each five minute allotment, presenters stop speaking and while individual audience members complete written evaluation of the presenter, the teacher will verbally interview presenters on their own perceived individual strengths, encouraging each presenter to improve their communication in the “next round” to a new audience member.

9/ Before the second round begins, individual audience members will hand their completed evaluation paper (face-down) to their presenter and move in a clockwise direction to the next presenter.

10/Round Two follows the same format with the difference that after the presentation has been completed, the teacher will interview each presenter publicly about their own perceived communicative weakness and encourage once again their improvement. Evaluating audience members will once again submit a paper to their individual presenter.

11./Round Three follows as before with the teacher interviewing each presenter as to what were their perceived individual strengths and weaknesses.

12/The conclusion of Round Three signifies the halfway point of the class and all group (A) students will remove their posters and simply switch roles/positions with their Round Three group (B) counterparts, thereby becoming audience members for the new presenters.

13/Teacher again facilitates three “five minute rounds” of presentations, eliciting individual presenter strengths and weaknesses after each round.

14/At the conclusion of the second three rounds, all students return to their individual desks and complete a self-evaluation using the same presentation evaluation criteria.

15/After completing their own self-evaluation, students are asked to calculate an “average score” by combining audience evaluations with their own self-evaluation.

16/Teacher collects “average score” details as well as all evaluation papers from students and assigns the following feedback questions as a debriefing homework.

A/ “Did you enjoy giving this presentation? Why/Why not?”

B/ “What did you learn from the process of giving this presentation?”

Conclusion

The rationale for choosing oral presentations as an activity designed to improve learners' communicative competency includes: to make learners more aware of the importance of presentation skills in English in a variety of different present and future contexts; to get learners more invested in the evaluation process itself; to encourage learners to think about the criteria that form an effective presentation; to have learners involved in the formulation of the evaluation criteria; and have learners receive evaluation from their peers as well as reflect critically on this style of assessment and how it affects their own performances. This paper has described the rationale for and use of oral presentation as an activity that satisfies the communicative requirements of the main English language course taught by native speaker teachers at Kansai University's Institute of Foreign Language Education and Research. The major goal of the English One course is to develop communication skills in English. Situated within the broad framework of social-cultural theory, while referencing genre and situated learning, oral presentations can be seen to exemplify the major tenets of communicative language teaching, employing Task-Based-Language-Teaching as the primary educational methodology. Overall, the purpose of teaching presentation skills for communicative purposes is to empower students to investigate, articulate, and directly share their ideas with their teacher and peers.

References

- Apple, M. (2006). Language learning theories and cooperative learning techniques in the EFL classroom. *Doshisha Studies in Language and Culture*, 9(2), 277-301
- Artemeva, N., Logie, S., & St-Martin, J. (1999). From page to stage: how theories of genre and situated learning help introduce engineering students to discipline specific communication. *Technical Communication Quarterly*, 8(3), 301-316
- Jeon, In-Jae., & Hahn, Jung-won. (2005). Exploring EFL teachers' perceptions of task-based language teaching: A case study of Korean secondary school classroom practice, *Asian EFL Journal*, 8(1), 123-143
- King, J. (2002). Preparing EFL learners for oral presentations. *The internet test journal*, 8(3). Retrieved September 18, 2008 from <http://iteslj.org/Lessons/KingPublicSpeaking.htm>.
- Otoshi, J., & Heffernan, N. (2008). Factors predicting effective oral presentations in EFL classrooms, *Asian EFL Journal*, 10(1), 65-78.
- Schcolnik, M., Kol, S., & Abarbanel, J. (2006). Constructivism in theory and in practice. *English Teaching Forum* Number 4. 12-20.
- Swales, J.M. (1990) *Genre Analysis: English in academic and research settings*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Webster, F. (2002). A genre approach to oral presentations. *The internet test journal*, 7(7). Retrieved September 18, 2008 from <http://iteslj.org/Techniques/Webster-OralPresentations.html>.

APPENDIX 1:

PRESENTATION FORMAT GUIDELINES

Good morning/afternoon,

My name is.....

Today I'd like to introduce.....

I have four points to tell you.

First.....

Then.....

Next.....

Finally.....

I have three questions for you.

First.....

Second.....

Third.....

Do you have any questions?

(Presenter elicits two questions from the audience)

Thank you for listening to my presentation.

APPENDIX 2:

PRESENTATION EVALUATION FORM

Student Name:

Topic:

0 points= very poor

1 point= poor

2 points= OK

3 points= very good

Please score each category of the checklist:

1/ VOICE

2/ EYE CONTACT

3/ GESTURES

4/ SMOOTH DELIVERY

5/ EASY TO UNDERSTAND

6/ INTERESTING CONTENTS

7/ WELL DESIGNED POSTER

8/ GOOD QUESTIONS

9/ FRIENDLY ATTITUDE

10/ TIMING

COMMENTS:

STRONG POINTS:

WEAK POINTS: