

Teaching Presentation for Effective Communication

Ronald Mason

Setsunan University

Aiko Saito

Setsunan University

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Presentation skills are important in many real life situations. Students may have few chances at school to present or communicate the knowledge they possess. This article presents two approaches to teaching presentation classes. The first approach is teaching presentation skills in a non-EFL context. This approach describes a class taught in Japanese but with student output in English. The class covered ten steps or topics that contribute to effective communication when making a presentation. The second approach involves teaching presentation in an EFL context. This approach is for classes taught in English and presents a series of activities which can be used to enhance students' ability to communicate in English. The activities include short dramas or dialogues, poetry reading, and simulated news broadcasts. In the conclusion we discuss factors that can contribute to making the classes successful as part of a multiyear curriculum.

プレゼンテーション技能は実生活でも有用だが、現在の大学教育では学生たちが学んだ知識を聴衆の前で発表する機会が少ない。小論では、クラス単位でプレゼンテーションを学ぶ2つの実践例を示す。前者では、英語科目ではなく教養科目として、効果的な発表の準備方法や練習方法を日本語で学びながら英語の発表を行った。後者は英語のカリキュラムの一環としてのプレゼンテーションおよびドラマの科目である。英語の言語能力が高くなくてもコミュニケーションがとれるという自信を学生に持たせるような学習活動(対話、ニュース、詩を用いた音声表現)を紹介する。最後に、特定のプレゼンテーション科目の授業以外でも、学生がプレゼン技能をさらに活用するよう促す取り組みを提案する。

Recently Presentation/Public Speaking classes have become more common in English curricula in Japan. In this paper we present some ideas for expanding classroom activities and procedures beyond merely writing and reading speeches. The ideas are based on two different approaches used in classes taught at Setsunan University in the last two years. The first approach is teaching presentation in an elective class apart from an EFL context; the second is teaching presentation and drama as part of a unified curriculum in an EFL context.

The first approach is based on a class first offered in the 2003 academic year. This was an elective presentation class that was open to students from all faculties in Setsunan. The course was offered on a yearly basis and was the result of one teacher's effort, with support from all faculties, to introduce a presentation course to the curriculum at Setsunan.

Before 2003 many teachers at Setsunan University used speeches and plays in their EFL classes, but they were used at each teacher's discretion and were not a formal part of the curriculum. In the 2004 academic year, a new curriculum was introduced for the incoming freshman class in the Faculty of International Languages and Cultures at Setsunan University. After beginning in the 2004, the new curriculum

will be phased in one year at a time. One feature of the new curriculum was an expansion of the number and type of courses taught in English by both native and non-native speaker English teachers. Among the new classes were Drama, and English Presentation. The second approach is based on experience from these classes. The title of the first class was, “Drama,” but the content of the class was really English through drama. Eventually, two years of Drama and three years of Presentation\Public Speaking classes will be offered. Government approval for such major curriculum changes is usually given only in cases such as a faculty name change, which will happen at Setsunan in 2005, or the addition of new majors in existing faculties.

This paper offers a description of the two approaches to teaching presentation skills in the types of classes described above.

First approach: Teaching English Presentation in non-EFL context

This was an elective workshop in presentation skills in which participants gave weekly micro-presentations and final presentations in English (“English Workshop: Presentations / Special Lecture in General Education I – V, [Kyouyou Tokubetsu Kougi I-V EIGO DE PUREZEN!]). The workshop was open to 2nd, 3rd and 4th year students from all faculties in Setsunan University: Language, Law, Business, Engineering, and Pharmacy. There was no limit on enrollment, nor any requirement as to level of English ability. In both 2003 and 2004, over 100 students enrolled. 50-60 attended regularly and successfully completed the 13-week course. The credits counted as part of the general education requirements.

The aim of the course was to learn the basic procedures of presentation through activities. The instructor (a Japanese EFL teacher) used mostly Japanese for instruction, partly due to the mixed English level (TOEIC 100 – 500), but mainly to make students aware that it is possible for them to communicate effectively even though they may have a limited command of language. Thus, what was discussed in Japanese was “meta-presentation,” while what was uttered in English was “planned presentation” in the class. Grades were given based on students’ final performances as speakers, on their role in being a cooperative audience, and on a final report entitled, “What I learned about giving/listening to a presentation.”

The course covered the following topics:

- (1) Effective self introduction: What type of person do you feel like talking with again? Present the friendliest part of your personality in 15 seconds to create rapport with your future audience, your classmates.
- (2) Audience analysis: What kind of people are they, and what do they like? Interview your classmates to find out their interests and personalities.
- (3) Purpose of the presentation: Find the purpose(s) of common types of presentations that a person might give in life, such as: to inform, to entertain, to persuade or a combination of those. Set your own purpose(s) and make a 30-second TV advertisement aimed at your classmates.

- (4) Location and equipment: Draw two contrasting diagrams of rooms or facilities on campus. What equipment is available there? How would you arrange seating for an audience of 20? What can you do to create a comfortable atmosphere for giving a talk there? (e.g., rearranging seats, lightings, using microphones.)
- (5) Delivery and visual aids: Watch a video recording of your previous performances. Using the same words, how can you create a different impression by changing the way you speak? Would visual aids help to convey the information in detail?
- (6) Outline and logic: Put your ideas in logical order. Write a timed outline of a short talk, marking the highlight of the talk, and including “stage directions” for the speaker.
- (7) How to look reliable: How would your appearance make the audience believe you are reliable speakers on the subject? Think about the color and style of your clothes, facial expressions, eye contact, posture, and tone of voice.
- (8) What makes a good audience? What kind of audience do you feel comfortable talking to? What kind of behavior encourages you? What will discourage you? How can the audience respond verbally and physically to the speaker while listening to a presentation?
- (9) Practice and rehearsal: Verbal communication owes as much to delivery as to the words themselves. Practice is an essential part of successful presentations. Practice

in pairs and groups, with props and/or costumes. What can you improve by changing your delivery? Are you giving the right impression to the audience?

- (10) Final presentation, peer evaluation, and self reflection: Give your final presentation (60 seconds per person, can be given individually or in groups of up to 4) to inform/entertain/persuade your classmates. Be the ideal audience. Give some brief feedback for each presentation. Watch your presentation on video, and reflect on it. State what improvement you will make in the future presentations.

From week 1 to 10 (topics 1 to 8), each class consisted of three parts. First, the instructor introduced the topic of the day. Second, participants did the activities in pairs or in small groups (3-4 members) verbalizing and visualizing their ideas on the topic. Then they put their ideas into 15 to 30-second micro presentations in English. Last, they presented their performances to a larger group (15-20 members) or to the whole class, or recorded them on video. They exchanged feedback on their presentations, or watched the video recording for self evaluation. The instructor helped students verbalize their ideas and share them with the class. The micro presentation method used in this class was adopted from a training program for teachers, “the micro teaching method,” developed at Stanford University (Yamaguchi, 1986, pp.194-201).

During the course, students regularly used individual tape recordings in the language lab (80 tape recorders) and video recordings (one Hi8 video camcorder) to observe their performances. In the first year (2003), video was used only twice in the class, once in the middle and once at the end

for the final presentations. In the second year (2004), video was a regular part of class. Students took turns recording each other, learning how to operate the camera and giving cues to the speakers. When using the video, students immediately became aware of factors that made for better or poorer delivery and learned how they could assist speakers from behind the camera. This experience seemed to give them more confidence in front of the camera in 2004. The instructor left the video camera in the hands of participants during the final performance, while she assisted the speakers who were waiting their turn. The absence of the teacher didn't cause chaos. The audience of nearly 50 successfully ran their own class.

The weekly cycle of “planning a talk, trying it out, and reflecting” ran smoothly owing to the short time-unit of each presentation (15-30 seconds) and to the use of tape and video recording. It enabled on-site practice and a second recording within the same class, so students could see their improvement immediately. Assisting each other's performance was also an essential part of the class for the students. They quickly learned how to be a cooperative audience and how to learn from a not-yet-perfect performance given by themselves or others. Practicing with fellow students also seemed to foster mutual respect for other speakers.

The in-class performances and the final performances were aimed at their classmates rather than at the instructor. Participants spent several weeks learning about each other and gradually analyzing their target audience. The absence of the instructor behind the camera created an atmosphere in which participants could talk to their classmates. The

students' aim of making their presentations audience-friendly appeared in their choices of topics for their final performances. One group chose *kaomoji* as used in E-mail communication since it is familiar to university students. Simple black and white, magnified *kaomoji* samples were used as effective visual aids. Another group talked about palm reading. Both female and male students were interested in reading their talents and futures from their palms. The speakers used visual aids, but their strongest point was that all members of the audience had their own “handouts” on their own palms which they could look at during the talk. Another group dressed in white, like medical doctors, to talk about *shiatsu*.

All students who completed the course fill out the university's standard class evaluation form. The results averaged over 4.2 (on a 1-5 scale where 1= not satisfied, and 5= very satisfied) in both years. The mixed level of English among students, as measure by their TOEIC scores, was not a drawback in the course. Students with a limited vocabulary in English spent more time on planning better visual aids and gestures to support their words. Lively, simple performances were usually better received than ones involving the reading of elaborate written scripts. Studying with students from other faculties motivated many students to engage in real communication. The wide variety of linguistic levels was not a disadvantage in an introductory skill-focused course like this.

The two main limitations of a course like this were first, that there was no systematic link with each faculty's curriculum. Further practice in presentation depends on the efforts of other faculties. Presentation skills can transfer

between L1 and L2, so participants in the course may have the opportunity to continue developing their skills in their junior and senior year seminars in their own faculties, or other courses that require presentations in English and/or Japanese. Second, there was difficulty scheduling the class since the teacher and many of the students were from different faculties.

Second approach: Teaching English Presentation in an EFL context

The Faculty of International Languages and Cultures addressed the need for presentation skills when it introduced a new curriculum in the 2004 academic year. The new curriculum accompanies a name change, to the “Faculty of Foreign Language Studies,” that will take effect in 2005. In 2004 the faculty started two types of presentation-focused classes: Drama, and English Presentation.

The presentation and drama classes are offered as elective classes for students who chose English as their main foreign language. Out of 170 such students, 150 enrolled in one of the five sections of both drama and presentation that were offered. Most students chose to take both classes. The classes were streamed and each class had about thirty students. The classes consisted of two 13-week semesters with a different teacher for each semester.

In classes using this second approach in teaching Presentation, the aim is to improve the students’ skills in communication in EFL. One way to do this is to raise the students’ self-confidence in speaking aloud and showing them that even with limited language knowledge

they can speak effectively if they develop their skills in communication.

The most obvious way to practice presentation or public speaking is to give a speech. Most students will have had some experience at this in their native language education and most probably in the EFL classes as well. However, there are many other activities that can give students practice in public speaking besides traditional speeches. Since these presentation-type classes will be offered for three years it is important to develop a variety of classroom techniques to avoid repetition.

The activities presented here were used successfully in several of the Drama or Presentation classes at Setsunan. The first activity, an obvious one for a Drama class, is to have the students perform plays or dialogues. There are several advantages to this type of activity. Students may find it less intimidating or be less nervous when they are performing in a group rather than doing an individual presentation. This is especially true at the beginning of a course. Group activities may be more efficient in terms of class time. In larger classes, say 35-40 students, conventional, individual speeches can be very time consuming.

Having students perform plays is a common activity in EFL classes. Two other related, but slightly different, activities were developed for this course: short movie scenes and a comic dialogue.

The movie excerpts used in 2004 were very short scenes from the movies, *North by Northwest* and *Back to the Future*. Each scene had one male and one female role. Limiting the scenes to two characters makes the logistics

of performing simpler and makes it easier for the audience to follow the action and dialogue. Another advantage to a movie scene is that the teacher can show the scene on video to the students. This gives the students an idea of the actions and verbal expression they can put into their performance. It can also save the teacher time in explaining plot and action. The movie lines in the scenes used in the class also tend to be short. This allows students more opportunities to practice verbal expression than would be the case if they were reading longer lines.

A similar activity for two students is a comic dialogue. The material used in this activity was a highly edited version of a well known comic routine entitled, “Who’s on First” by Abbot and Costello, a famous American comic team from the 1930s and 40s. The dialogue was edited to a suitable length for students, a little less than two pages. The topic of the routine is baseball, which the students are familiar with. The duo format can be explained by comparing it to Japan’s popular *manzai* comic teams. A dialogue of this type enables the students to practice a wide variety of stress and intonation patterns as well as develop a feel for the timing of verbal exchanges and rhythm of language.

Another way to practice the expression in language is to read poetry aloud. Shorter poems that have a clear rhythm and rhyme scheme work best. Two good examples are *Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening*, by Robert Frost and *Loveliest of Trees*, by A. E. Housman. Both have four-line stanzas and clear rhyme schemes. When using the poems in class the following method was found to work well. The first step is a brief explanation of poems’ rhyme schemes and the stanza structure. Then the students arrange their seats to

sit in a circle. This way they can read facing each other but it is less formal than standing at the front of the classroom. Then the students take turns reading aloud. In their first turn, they read just one stanza; next they read two stanzas, and finally the whole poem. This type of exercise can be used to illustrate types of verbal expression that may help students learn to avoid the monotone that many fall into when they are reading formal speeches. An example is the use of pauses for dramatic emphasis. Many students tend to read through punctuation marks, including periods, without even a slight pause. Studying how the lines scan can also show the students how they can find clues to pronunciation and accents in written English.

Another group activity is for students to present a news broadcast. This can be done in groups of three with students presenting news, weather and sports topics. The students can write their own imaginary stories or adapt current stories in the news. This exercise can show the students different kinds of language use and expression than those found in the previous exercises which focus more on dramatic presentation. The students learn how to coordinate their stories and use transition phrases when shifting from one report to another.

These activities are described here in some detail because when the Drama and Presentation classes were introduced at Setsunan there was some concern among teachers about how to handle them. First, it was necessary to make clear to the teachers, and later some students, that the Drama classes were not the study of drama itself, but English through drama. It was also the first time that most of the teachers had taught courses based exclusively on Presentation or Drama.

Some teachers were concerned about finding appropriate teaching material or textbooks. The classes had prewritten common course objectives, but each teacher could choose their own textbooks or material. One advantage of the system of switching teachers after the first semester was that it relieved some of the pressure on the teachers to develop a whole year's worth of original teaching material. Activities or techniques that were successful could be repeated the following semester. At the end of each semester the teachers filled out a brief form telling what kind of material they had used in their classes. These forms will be circulated to the teachers who have 2nd year Drama and Presentation classes in 2005 so they will have an idea of what kinds of material their students have used previously.

While there was some hesitation about taking on these types of classes for the first time, after the first semester most teachers felt the classes had gone much better than they expected. They also agreed that the classes were a refreshing change from the usual conversation classes that most of them had been teaching.

Conclusion

Two approaches to presentation classes were presented in the previous section. The first approach was used in classes containing a mixture of students from different years and faculties, and with different language levels. This approach aimed at basic presentation skills that would be applicable in almost any context. The second approach was used in language faculty classes for first year students and was aimed more at improving presentation skills in English. Since this is a report on classes that are part of a curriculum

that is still in the process of development, we would like to consider a few factors that may help the classes be successful when they are part of a multiyear program.

Among the factors contributing to a successful program will be developing and coordinating class content that can be used over the course of three years without too much repetition. One concrete step is to keep written records, as mentioned above, of the material used in each class. Another step would be to hold open classes so that teachers have an understanding of what is happening in other classes, and can give feedback to fellow teachers in order to develop and improve the program. (Komiya, 2004, pp. 143-151) This open class procedure was instituted in 2004 in the Language Faculty at Setsunan University. A third step would be having the students do a final project that would be recorded or shown to a larger audience at a joint session with other presentation-type classes. A final step would be coordination with teachers of subjects outside the EFL area to show students how the skills acquired in presentation classes can be used in other courses, as well as in situations outside the university such as job interviews, practice teaching and in many fields of employment.

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