# *PowerPoint* and freeware *Impress*: Accessible and user-friendly technology for the language class

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This ninety minute workshop first demonstrated various ways in which *PowerPoint* could be used in the language classroom as a teaching tool, while providing resources that can be easily referenced on the Internet. Resources included *PowerPoint* tips and tutorials, websites featuring games and game templates, language lessons elaborated in *PowerPoint*, as well as sites allowing the download of copyright free material to enhance presentations. In Japan, however, *PowerPoint* is not always included in the Microsoft Office Suite. Alternatively, language teachers may want students to use a software in their second or foreign language. In such cases, freeware such as *Impress* by OpenOffice.org, which mirrors *PowerPoint*, can be used instead. We thus introduce *Impress*, demonstrate its operation and its use by Japanese students to create virtual presentations, and point out teacher concerns in these respects.

このワークショップでは、PowerPointに代表されるプレゼンテーション・ソフトが外国語の授業における教授ツールとして様々な使い道があることを参加者に理解してもらうと同時に、インターネット上で入手できる活用ツールを紹介する。紹介する活用ツールには、PowerPointを使う時に役に立つヒント、チュートリアル、ゲーム、テンプレート等を提供しているウェブサイトと、機能強化用のフリーのダウンロード・ソフトが含まれる。また、PowerPointが用意されていない場合、OpenOffice.orgが配付しているPowerPoint互換のフリーのプレゼンテーション・ソフト、Impressを使うことができる。このワークショップでは、Impressの紹介を行い、その操作方法および利用方法を説明する。

**P**owerPoint (PPT), an internationally known Microsoft (MS) product, allows users to create and design slide presentations using colored text, images, simple animation, sound and video. PPT presentations are often used to support speakers while they address an audience, in addition to being a tool for sharing information, because presentations can, for example, be printed, sent by email, or put online. As language teachers, we have likely seen many student presentations supported by PPT. We may not however always take advantage of PPT as an inexpensive, accessible, user-friendly tool for preparing engaging language lessons that can be shared, adapted and re-used. In this article, we briefly describe some of the ways in which this can be done, while listing and illustrating Internet resources that allow for further exploration of the software.

PPT is often freely available on computers equipped with the MS Office suite. However, this is not always the case in Japan, where PPT is not always included in MS Office, and computers do not always make use of MS Office. In such cases, *Impress* can be a useful tool, because it is compatible with PPT and shares many of its functions. For educational purposes, it is freely accessible via the open-source office suite, OpenOffice.org.

PPT and OpenOffice allow the language teacher to easily introduce technology in the classroom, whether for teacher or student-led presentations, without the need for expensive material or sophisticated knowledge of multimedia. Material can be produced quite simply on a personal computer and used several times within the same course or in different courses. Furthermore, such software can be used as a tool for language learning in and of itself because students can use the software in L2 (second or foreign language) to design their own virtual presentations.

### PowerPoint

PPT presentations can be used in many different ways in language teaching. PPT can be used to teach new ideas and concepts, for practice and drill, and for review and testing (Fisher, 2003). Creating PPT material does require consideration of potential areas of difficulty for the student, and can be quite time consuming from a design point of view. Once the material is created, however, it can be adapted and used over again. In addition to anticipating possible student misunderstandings, paying attention to the essentials of efficient PPT presentations goes a long way. In the case of language lessons, presentations should be clear, uncluttered, visually appealing, illustrated, and use simple animation. Embedding sound and short video clips is often a plus. Furthermore, each lesson segment benefits from being relatively short and self-contained. Simply put, we aim for concise content, legible design that complements the content, and an engaging delivery (Finkelstein, 2005). Later in this section, we provide reference material that further describes how to produce effective presentations.

We have used PPT to teach sections of lessons, but we have also successfully used it for entire lessons or modules, both in class and from a distance. In the case of a lesson for example, PPT can first be used to list the outline of the day's class, as well as homework and upcoming tests. This can be shown at the end of the class as well, to wrap-up. The teacher can then move on to the content of the lesson, with students

following a monitored presentation. During the workshop, we demonstrated how PPT could be used to teach new vocabulary, pronunciation, grammar, the four skills, and for review. We also showed concise grammar modules made in PPT that are available online to students enrolled in the courses we teach. We then showed how games could engage students, and how to create them from templates. A large part of our demonstration material is not publicly available, but we can nevertheless briefly illustrate some of these points in the following sections while commenting on useful websites in relation to PPT. Before doing so, we list several Internet URLs which we have found useful in the course of our work. These URLs lead to some or all of the following resources: language lessons and games, PPT tips and tutorials, add-ons and additional links.

## Useful Internet URL's

The URL's listed in the table below were last checked in June 2007, at which time they were all functional. They represent a selection of what is available online. Some of the websites are extensive in the breadth of information they provide - often going beyond PPT, and are updated regularly. For this reason, the information they contain, in addition to whether access and downloads are free or not, is subject to change. Furthermore, information available on the sites is not always necessarily presented in PPT form. For example, tips and tutorials might be available in text form rather than in PPT. The same can be said for certain games and activities. The sites are presented in order of topics as described in this article, but are not necessarily ranked in any particular order of importance, as different people will value some sites over others according to their needs.

## Available lessons designed in PPT

Various lessons designed in PPT can be found by browsing the Internet. Two examples that are short, concise, easy to follow, and pleasantly illustrated are: Jerald&Mary's *How to write a story* (<worldofteaching.com>), and *Action Verbs* (<classroom.jc-schools.net/la/activities/pptresources.html>). The latter has some basic animation embedded within it, which students, in our experience, enjoy.

By basic animation we mean the use of illustrations, sounds, and icons that link to other slides, websites, or short video clips, for example. Lessons that can be downloaded from the Internet may not necessarily correspond to a teacher's need, be designed for use in the language classroom, nor be considered effective. In addition, hyperlinks featured in downloaded presentations aren't always functional. Discretion is consequently necessary. This being said, interesting material is certainly available online, and a teacher with time to browse may come across relevant material, use it as found or adapt it, rather than create a presentation from scratch.

Websites featuring lesson excerpts that can be freely downloaded can be found in the Internet resource table on the next page.

## Games in PPT

Our favorite website for games is called the *Parade of Games in PowerPoint* website, which we used for demonstrations purposes in our workshop: <facstaff.uww.edu/jonesd/games>. The site was specifically designed to provide educators and trainers "with easy-to- assemble

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| URL | Free | Lessons | Games | Tips & Tutorials | Add-ons | Other Links |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| www.worldofteaching.com | O | O | | | | O |
| Classroom.jc-schools.net/la/activities/pptresources.html | O | O | | | | O |
| iteslj.org/t/ppt | O | O | | | | |
| oswego.org/ocsd-web/teaching/resources/resources-x.cfm?Type=P | O | O | | | | |
| facstaff.uww.edu/jonesd/games | O | | O | | | O |
| www.ppt4teachers.com/testcreation.html#game (doesn't seem to include lessons) | O-X | | O | O | O | O |
| teach.fcps.net/trt10/PowerPoint.htm | O | | O | O | Game templates | O |
| www.vickiblackwell.com | O-X | | O | O | O Templates in "The Classroom" | O |
| pptfaq.com/index.html | O-X | | | O | O | O |
| office.microsoft.com/en-us/training/default.aspx | O | | | O | | |
| www.davis.k12.ut.us/district/etc/paul/powerpoint.html | O | | | O | | |
| www.ellenfinkelstein.com/powerpoint_tip.html#pp2flash | O | | | O | | O |
| www.bitbetter.com/powertips.htm | O | | | O | | O |
| www.actden.com/pp/ | O | | | O | | |
| www.webplaces.com/html/sounds.htm | O-X | | | | O Sounds Animations | |
| www.sitesforteachers.com/index.html (PPT and beyond) | O-X | Provided within the listed sites and links | | | | O |
| www.tesol.net/teslmat.html (PPT and beyond) | O-X | Provided within the listed sites and links | | | | O |
| pptfaq.com/FAQ00085.htm (links to PPT resource sites) | O-X | Provided within the listed sites and links (Doesn't seem to include games) | | | | O |
| www.onppt.com/ppt/ppt_destinations_links.htm (a collection of various sites, several commercial) | O-X | Provided within the listed sites and links | | | | O |

educational games in a technology- enhanced environment to support key learning points. It demonstrates the creative use of popular game shows and other familiar games to reinforce learning." (Jones, Mungai, & Wong, n.d.) A menu of games is provided, and under each game option, one can find a demonstration of the game, a template with instructions to easily create one's own version of the game, as well as game rules. The site is user-friendly, and the templates are invaluable for teachers wishing to quickly create technologically engaging games; this holds for teachers with a limited knowledge of PPT, as the templates allow users to fill in blanks with their own content, while the technological aspects are already set. Concise instructions on how to proceed to do so are also provided. Though the games are not necessarily designed for language learning purposes, most can be adapted in this regard. The site also provides links to other game sites, while featuring an article on the benefits of using games with students.

For a list of websites of games and templates available in PPT, one may wish to consult: <www.ppt4teachers.com/testcreation.html#game>.

### PPT tips and tutorials—effective presentations

For those wishing to become more familiar with all that PPT has to offer, there are a variety of comprehensive websites offering technical tips and tutorials about PPT. We have found that <pptfaq.com/index.html> provides extensive information and links on all aspects of how to use and work with PPT, whether in Office or in Mac, with information clearly indexed for easy access.

<www.ppt4teachers.com>also provides a wealth of information in the *Design Tips* section, listing useful books in addition to various links to examples of use, add-ons, games, articles, presentation software reviews, etc. It is also possible to join a mailing list. The MS PPT site (<office.microsoft.com/en-us/training/default.aspx>) is replete with valuable information and tutorials, for use in conjunction with PPT 2003 and 2007.

Handouts about downloadable versions of PPT are available on the Davis School District website. Ellen Finklestein, author of several "How to" books on the topic, freely lists various tips on her personal website. Those working with a '98 version of PP can access to tutorials at <www.actden.com/pp>.

For instructions and tips specifically focusing on using PPT effectively in education, one may wish to consult Marcovitz's (2004) work, *Powerful PowerPoint for Educators*, which we have found useful in conjunction with the companion website. Atkinson (2005) has also written an informative work on using PPT for presentation purposes. Although it is mostly geared towards business presentations, educators may find some of the information easily adapted to suit their purposes. Dryden and Dryden (2006) have recently written an informative article about various aspects of presentation design in relation to PPT, and JALT members can further consult Barker and Heigham's (2006) article on the sins of conference presentations for ideas of what not to do. Finally, a Google search on the topic of effective *PowerPoint* presentations will provide much in view of the topic.

### Templates, add-ons, sound and other material:

Various materials are already available within PPT to enhance the design of presentations, for example clip-art, sound files, and pre-designed templates. More of these can be downloaded from the Internet. Sites where this is possible include

- <www.ppt4teachers.com> (listed in game section)
- <www.vickiblackwell.com/ppttemplates.html>
- <www.webplaces.com/html/sounds.htm> (free sounds)

Additionally, <www.onppt.com/ppt/ppt_destinations_links.htm>, lists links to other sites about templates and add-ons, some free, some commercial. It also features more PPT-related links. *The Animation Factory* (<www.animationfactory.com/en>) has a great deal of royalty-free available material at a reasonable cost, should teachers find they are making use of these on a regular basis.

### Concluding remarks on PPT

Many teachers are already skilled in using PPT. For those who are not, knowledge of the software is fairly easy to acquire provided the teacher has some computer knowledge—the ability to use MS Word and the Internet, for example. There are some very good tutorials available online, and the PPT *Help* function can go a long way. In this way, it can also be fairly straightforward to learn more about how to use the software to make full use of the technical options, giving the presentation greater potential of gaining student attention. In our experience, using PPT in the classroom has certainly contributed to engaging students.

As Pinker (in Parker, 2001), the author of *The Language Instinct*, states, *PowerPoint* can give visual shape to an argument. "Language is a linear medium: one (…) word after another … But ideas are multidimensional...When properly employed, *PowerPoint* makes the logical structure of an argument more transparent. Two channels sending the same information are better than one" (p. 5).

In closing, PPT involves minimal or no expenditure, and while bearing in mind the fundamentals of effective presentations, language teachers can prepare lessons with impact that do not require sophisticated technology and that can be easily created from a personal computer. The presentations can also be easily adapted, used over again, shared, and made available online. Should PPT not be available to teachers and students, then software such as *Impress*, from OpenOffice, can be downloaded at no cost provided it is for use in an educational context.

### *Impress*

In the next part of the workshop, we introduced *Impress*, freeware similar to PPT. Nicolas Gromik has been teaching university courses to Japanese students of English that focus on creating effective presentations, and wanted students to learn to work in the confines of an English only environment. PPT in Japanese only being what was available to students in his institution, he chose to use *Impress* in English as the prescribed course tool.

We briefly describe the features of *Impress* and show how it is similar to PPT. We previously brushed on the importance of effective presentation skills while discussing

PPT. Here, we briefly illustrate some of the key points at play by drawing on excerpts of student work. In the process, we cover aspects of using technology from the student perspective. Finally, we close with a short discussion of potential problems when integrating *Impress* into a curriculum.

## Brief description

OpenOffice.org aims to provide a comprehensive open source office suite that can be used across Macintosh, Windows, or Linux platforms. *Impress* is its electronic presentation software. *Impress* can be used much like PPT. Given the many similarities between these two software titles, students who are already familiar with PPT quickly understand how to work with *Impress*. Two years of classroom experience has confirmed this over and again. Just as in PPT, students can easily embed audio and video clips, enhance their presentations with various forms of animation, in addition to creating and saving templates. *Impress* can open and allow the editing of presentations initially created with PPT. Files made in *Impress* can be saved in pdf, html, and also ppt formats. This being said, a file made with *Impress* and saved in ppt is not without problems— animations and automatic transitions will be lost, which nevertheless does not affect the general structure and content of the presentation. The problem can be resolved by copying and pasting the animation features into *Impress*.

## Towards effective presentations

Virtual presentation design requires some technical skills, which in the case of PPT and *Impress,* do not need to be highly sophisticated, a definite advantage of these software titles. Presentation design also requires awareness of what makes them effective. The following two slides illustrate student progress in view of acquiring such skills. The first comes from Project 1, the second from Project 2 of a speaking course in which students are required to work on two presentations during the term. Gromik's premise is that students learn from their own work and that of their peers, so he initially keeps guidelines to a minimum. The following is an example of a typical Project 1 slide:
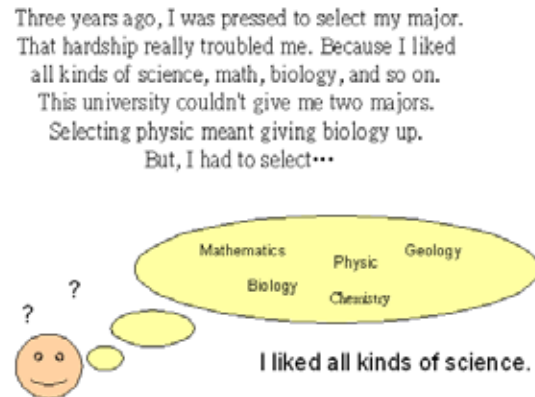


**Figure 1: Project 1 slide**

This slide illustrates how students often tend to make intensive use of text supported by some visuals, though these are often absent in Project 1 presentations. Notably absent, as in this slide, is the use of template, background color, or pictures. Animation is also often lacking, but this is also related to the fact that students working with L2 software require time to master the commands. There is usually insufficient time before Project 1 is due, so students will not yet have mastered commands to the extent of using animation. Furthermore, while presenting, students generally refer to a prepared script, or simply read from their slides. As they are asked to critically view peer presentations, they not only become aware of the aforementioned points, they also notice effective aspects of the presentations they view. These are discussed, and students are asked to integrate what they have learned into Project 2. Their second presentations not only gain in visual appeal, the amount of text is shortened and is generally included in point form. Moreover, students begin expressing creativity while experimenting with animation features such as text effects or slide transitions, among others. The following is an example of a Project 2 slide, which, in comparison with the Project 1 slide, shows improvement in terms of effective communication. This slide also featured text entrances and animation.

Over the course of Project 2, Gromik has also witnessed how, overall, students noticeably begin enjoying the work, both from the design perspective and that of delivery, which for an educator is especially motivating. Nevertheless, words of caution to teachers considering using *Impress* in their curriculum are necessary—some students will resort to various strategies to minimize the workload. The three
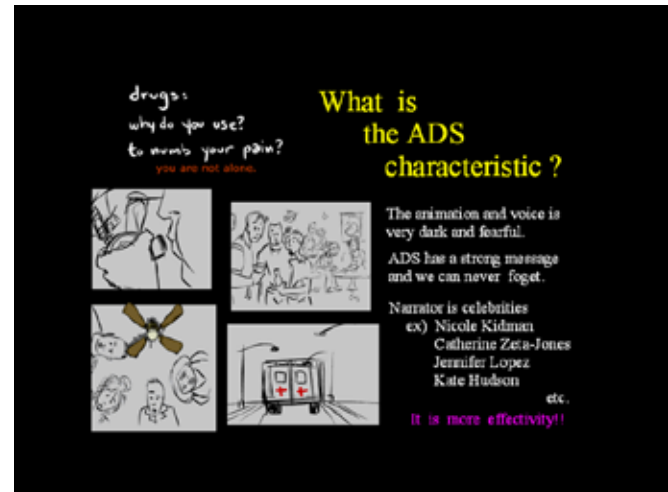


**Figure 2: Project 2 slide**

that are most often encountered are outlined in the following section.

## Potential problems: Students cutting corners

The first problem is common to all language teachers: plagiarism. Some students will not hesitate to "borrow" from textbooks or from the Internet. Such occurrences do however create the opportunity for the teacher to discuss plagiarism with students, namely in terms of its possible consequences, both within the course, in real-life circumstances, and in terms of cultural differences. Teachers can be alerted to the possibility of plagiarism when students make use of language that seems above their level of mastery. This can

be confirmed by asking students precise questions in view of the sentence, for example intended message, re-wording, or re-structuring. Advanced searches on the Internet can also bring up original source texts, with which students can be confronted.

The second problem is the fact that *Impress* is also available in Japanese. Some students visit the OpenOffice.org website and download the Japanese version. They are consequently reminded that an important pre-requisite is to use the software in English. To ensure that they do so, they are also reminded that there will be a test in English directly concerned with the software and, to pass the test, they will need to be able to reproduce verbatim some of the English found in *Impress*.

The third and most important problem is software manipulation. Students that know PPT are sometimes tempted to use PPT in Japanese to design their projects, and finalize it under *Impress*. Despite the animation and text entrance incompatibilities between PPT and *Impress*, a student can easily solve problems by copying and pasting lost commands, as mentioned above. Consequently, when a Project 1 presentation is designed using a variety of technical features, it is likely that the student has reverted to software manipulation, the reason being that even if *Impress* is similar to PPT, experience has shown that students need time to master the freeware simply because the commands are not in their native language. That is to say, even students proficient at PPT are stalled by the various English commands in *Impress* when working on Project 1, which usually results in little use of animation and text features for lack of time to become familiar with the software. Therefore, one way to verify if students have reverted to software manipulation is to ask them to show step-by-step how they designed certain slides using *Impress*. Students who have not been working with *Impress* will not be able to do this. A reminder of the final test using *Impress* is again given.

### Internet references:

OpenOffice.org is an organization which attempts to provide resources for teachers. Teachers may find the following resources useful:

- <www.tutorialsforopenoffice.org> is a site specifically created for teachers to share their ideas and tutorials about using the openoffice.org office suite.

- <www.learnopenoffice.org/tutorials.htm> provides basic online flash video tutorials. Sophomore students will first need to be acquainted with the structure design of an electronic presentation to appreciate the information provided in these audio-visual tutorials.

- <www.digitaldistribution.com/about/lessons> is another site which provides video tutorials. The videos are ESL-student friendly and encourage them to experience with autonomous learning using online resources.

- Students are encouraged to investigate the creation of templates to stimulate their creativity. A good source of templates created with *Impress* can be found at <technology.chtsai.org/impress>. The site includes templates designed to include film elements, and comes with easy-to-follow design explanations.

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## Concluding remarks

While bearing in mind the essentials of effective presentations, PPT and Impress can support language teaching by enabling teachers to easily create technologically-enhanced presentations with the potential of engaging students and that can be shared and used over again. Minimal investment is required, especially when PPT is included at no extra cost in MS Office, which is used on many personal computers. When this is not the case, or when a teacher wants students to use presentation software in their second or foreign language to prepare their presentations, *Impress* is a feasible alternative. It is freely available and presents many commonalities with PPT, which implies little additional learning for students.

We hope that the various resources given in this workshop will be of help to teachers seeking to add user-friendly, accessible technological zest to language courses, both from the perspective of teacher and student presentations, as well as encourage experimentation with combining text with visuals. Such a combination, in our experience, enhances the possibility for communication with impact.

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