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Pecha Kucha: Transforming Student Presentations

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In this paper, 2 English language teachers explain why and how we used *pecha kucha* in our university English language classes, including the benefits and the challenges of conducting the task. Pecha kucha is a presentation style with strict guidelines that provides students with skills that go beyond the academic world. This task-based project not only touches on the 4 skills of reading, writing, listening, and speaking, it also engages critical thinking as students must consider carefully their choice of visuals and synthesize their information into 20-second segments. Teachers become facilitators as students take control of their learning. There is growing recognition among university educators about the need to provide students with opportunities to learn skills, such as ITC skills, that make them employable in a 21st-century workplace. A pecha kucha task is a means to develop students' language and technology skills simultaneously in a challenging yet productive way.

　本論では、英語教師2名の大学講義における『ぺちゃくちゃ』の使用理由とその方法を解説する。『ぺちゃくちゃ』とは、プレゼンテーションの形式であり、これを実践することにより、学生は読む、書く、聞く、話すの４技能を習得する他、映像を選択し、情報を20秒にまとめるという批判的な思考技術も体得することができる。この講義形式では、教師はあくまで進行役であり、学習は学生自身により管理される。近年、大学教育関係者の間では、21世紀の労働環境を踏まえ、就業に役立つ技能を学ぶ機会を学生に与えることの重要性が広く認識されてきている。コミュニケーション形式の進化に伴い、教師は学生と共に新しい媒体や技術を開拓していくべきであるが、『ぺちゃくちゃ』を用いたタスクは、言語と同時にＩＴ技術の効率的習得を可能とする。

P*echa kucha* as a teaching–learning activity is an example of task-based language learning, use of technology in the language classroom, and learning through multimodality. In this paper we describe the potential learning benefits of using pecha kucha at the university level. We discuss how we set up and managed pecha kucha presentations in university English language lessons. We then describe the task outcomes, assessment, and the challenges of pecha kucha as a language learning activity. Lastly, we suggest how we think pecha kucha could enhance language learning and directions for possible future areas of development.

Pecha kucha is a presentation style devised in 2003 by two architects, Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham, based in Tokyo, Japan (information about pecha kucha is available from www.pechakucha.org). The term pecha kucha is Japanese and translates into English as "chitchat." A pecha kucha presentation is defined by its clear rules: 20 slides X 20 seconds. In other words, the presenter speaks for 20 seconds per slide, not more and not less, while the PowerPoint slides advance automatically through the presentation. The origin of this presentation style came about for two reasons. First, the developers felt that when architects or any kind of creative person presented their work, the presentations were too long. Secondly, many people have ideas they wish to share, but no space to do so. As a result, pecha kucha nights were born and currently take place in over 900 cities around the globe. In an EFL context, a pecha kucha presentation provides a rich field for learning that extends beyond basic language communication. As students graduate into an increasingly competitive global marketplace, the skills gained through presenting in a pecha kucha format are transferable to real-world settings.

Benefits of Pecha Kucha in the University Classroom

In this section, we discuss the potential benefits of using pecha kucha for language teaching at the university level. We found, however, that the benefits of doing pecha kucha presentations were often tied to the challenges of the activity. The advantages can

be divided into three main categories relating to pedagogy, teacher–student roles, and technology. Each benefit is discussed in turn, although the categories are not clear-cut in the practical reality of the classroom.

Pedagogical Benefits

The central benefits are pedagogical. In addition to the language practice provided by pecha kucha presentations, as described above, the task provides a context for the students to recycle the textbook language in a natural manner. There are also opportunities for learning self-organization and time management or at least for students to become more time conscious. A pecha kucha project requires the students to become organized. The time spent on the project's separate elements needs to be carefully managed. The class time for the task needs to be deliberately organized by the students, depending on how the task is set up. For example, deciding the topic's focus, researching the information and visuals, composing the captions, writing and checking the presentation script, as well as doing the essential practice—all need careful planning to fit the time available. A successful pecha kucha presentation proves to be a beneficial exercise in self-organization.

The time management of pecha kucha can be beneficial to students as the time constraints illustrate the value of timed practice. Because of these strict time constraints, students need to be completely ready to present. There is literally not even a second to wing it. In a pecha kucha presentation, students organize and convey information in 20-second segments. The 20-second time limit adds pressure, as the consequences of being off time are clearly visible to the audience. Moreover, as the slides are meant to be visual with minimal text and remain on the screen for only 20 seconds, students must exercise discrimination in choosing the visuals and language. Although the necessity of being well prepared is not always apparent to students the first time around, the timings of pecha kucha provide a valuable lesson in the necessity of dedicated practice.

Teacher and Student Roles

The role of the teacher, and also that of the students, are expanded in a multimodal task like pecha kucha beyond the scope of more traditional classroom roles. Not only do these teacher–student roles lend variety to teaching and learning situations, but they also provide a welcome change of pace to teacher-fronted classroom activities. As English language practitioners, we introduced pecha kucha to our students as a learning task in conjunction with the set syllabus in university English language courses. In general, the teacher's role in task-based language teaching is nontraditional, especially in speaking or integrated skills classes. By nontraditional, we mean not teacher fronted. When using pecha kucha, a teacher can act as instigator, designer, classroom facilitator, and posttask assessor.

University teachers who are responsible for individual class syllabus design can use the freedom to introduce pecha kucha. In our case, there was no top-down imposition; using a pecha kucha instructional task in the classroom was a teacher-led initiative. Other aspects of the teacher's role are described further in the practical section below. This combination, task-based teaching, in parallel with more structured traditional teaching, is what Ellis (2015) calls a "hybrid approach."

To be implemented effectively, however, an enterprising teacher is insufficient. Effective instigation, performance, and posttask work are based on a certain teacher–student relationship. Teachers need to take into account the contextual appropriateness of a task-based approach and the learners' needs, interests, and potential difficulties. Learner training may be a necessary component to alert students about what is expected of them (Willis & Willis, 2007). Once the task is underway, teachers need to consider how their role can enhance the learning. The actions teachers take "motivating the language learners and supporting the learners' cognitive and interactional activity" (Van den Branden, 2006, p. 177) are important to the success of the task. For example, during the creative part of pecha kucha, teachers become facilitators, helping students to arrange and synthesize information, while challenging them to critically think about their choices and the best modes of communication. In other words, the teacher becomes a "linguistic advisor" (Willis & Willis, 2007). The focus shifts from the teaching to the learning as the nature of the task assumes a considerable degree of learner creativity and independent effort (Thomas & Reinders, 2015). Teachers may need to accommodate noise and seeming disarray, as control is handed over to students. This way of teaching rests on a trusting, practical, actively cooperative teacher–student relationship. Long (2015) advocated egalitarian teacher–student relationships in task-based language teaching because they "will not only improve classroom climate but also create advantageous psycholinguistic conditions for language learning" (p. 77).

If the pecha kucha presentation is conducted as a collaborative activity in which students group their individual slides into one group presentation, students need to work cooperatively at some point. The task can generate authentic opportunities for discussing their work in English. Communication in English at this stage may require modeling and encouragement from the teacher, but the language, especially the organizational language required like *slide, position, insert*, and so on is naturally a part of the discussion.

Posttask follow-up is also part of the teacher's role in a pecha kucha project, not only to capitalize on language learning, but also to ascertain students' perspectives on do-

ing task-based learning using technology. Conducting a task evaluation to allow future revisions is good practice. Moreover, asking students to explicitly comment on their own learning experiences makes them more individually accountable (Ellis, 2003). Posttask can be an appropriate time to focus on form, particularly on errors or areas of difficulty (Ellis, 2003; Willis & Willis, 2007). A pecha kucha task in a university context puts certain demands on both the teacher and learner. The varied roles can be challenging but ultimately, we think, exciting and rewarding.

Use of Technology

Finally, a further benefit of pecha kucha in the classroom is its use of technology. Technology is integral to our daily interactions and activities; all students need to become practiced in using technology, even in English. The Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) published in April 2011 *The Vision for ICT in Education—Towards the Creation of a Learning System and Schools Suitable for the 21st Century*. In this paper, MEXT laid out goals for the inclusion of information communication and technologies (ICTs) in Japanese education to be achieved by 2020: "It is highly necessary to cultivate fundamental abilities in Japanese children that will help them survive in the world of the 21st century" (MEXT, 2011, pp. 1-2).

As the use of technology continues to transform the workplace, there is greater pressure on universities to provide students with more than an academic education. Increasingly it is necessary for students to gain technological skills, which will enhance their prospects of employment. Employability skills include the following: the retrieval and handling of information, communication and presentation, planning and problem solving, and social interaction (Fallows & Steven, 2000). The way in which pecha kucha combines different modes of learning—including speaking, writing, reading, and listening—through technology enables teachers and students to repackage information into new learning formats (Walker & White, 2013). Such skills are transferable to a world beyond academia.

This new landscape requires that teachers and students go beyond traditional teaching methods in order to meet the needs of 21st century communication. "Assumptions about learners, language form and format, text types, and social discourses must all be reexamined" (Lotherington & Jenson, 2011, p. 227). Pecha kucha presentations offer a dynamic but relatively manageable way to develop students' use of ICT in the university setting.

Setting Up and Managing Pecha Kucha in the Language Classroom

We conducted the pecha kucha projects with university students in Japan. To date, between us, we have carried out pecha kucha-style presentations with about seven different classes, with students of various levels (Common European Framework of Reference for languages [CEFR] levels A2-B2) at three different universities. Each time we learn new techniques and find new rewards and challenges. In this section, we outline how we set up and conducted the projects. Our experiences are but one example of how to use pecha kucha in the language classroom; it should be noted that pecha kucha can readily be adapted to suit various teaching situations and language proficiencies. Although people who advocate using pecha kucha in its original format may not agree with variations, adaptation for pedagogical purposes seems justifiable to us. Adaptations in the EFL classroom are intended to facilitate language learning and make the pecha kucha format more readily accessible for students. Our pecha kucha tasks were spread over three 90-minute classes; how the time was divided is explained below.

Step 1: Setting Up

The first step was to introduce the format to the students. One satisfaction of doing the activity with Japanese students is that they all knew the term pecha kucha, but most were unfamiliar with the associated presentation style. To induct students, we gave them a text to read about what pecha kucha is, how it originated, and the particulars of this presentation method. Depending on time, we either showed them some video examples of a pecha kucha presentation, asked the students to watch a few examples of pecha kucha on the Internet as homework, or did both. YouTube provides many examples on numerous topics. One advantage of repeating the activity is that for second and subsequent courses it is possible to show new classes examples of previous student pecha kucha slide presentations.

The example student worksheet in Appendix A shows the outline and timing of one project; although the topics of our pecha kucha changed, the basic outline of the task did not. We followed a similar sequence in all cases. Students read through the steps of the project and write the dates on the worksheet themselves in order to understand clearly what is expected of them and when. Timing is one of the challenges of the pecha kucha activity and needs careful management.

Step 2: Planning

At the planning stage, the students can work individually, in pairs, or in groups, depending on how the task is set up. Even so, students need to produce their own slides and

the script to explain the contents of their slides. The presentation seemed to work best when the text on the slides was kept to a minimum: Simple key words are best so that the listeners listen rather than focus on reading an overly long text. Some students presented with no written text at all on their slides. Usually when we did the task, we were able to use the computer room. Therefore, each student could work individually on a computer. This meant that during the production stage the teachers were able to circulate and answer questions, ask about, encourage, or comment on progress, check scripts, and do whatever else was required to keep the students moving forward on the task. In one case, the students produced their slides for homework and then worked on their scripts and practiced in class. Flexibility is possible here depending on individual class needs.

Step 3: Presenting

The final stage was the pecha kucha presentation. We found this stage ran most smoothly if the teacher had all the slide presentations ready to go in one place at the start of the lesson. We recommend that the teacher collect all the slide presentations onto one USB to eliminate the time needed for students set up their pecha kucha from their own USB. The teacher can ask students to send their presentations in an email attachment to the teacher before the class. In our case, once the running order was decided, students needed to be prepared to speak when their turn came. The first presentation served as a helpful example for subsequent presentations; often in the first time around there was some muddle and laughter as students experienced the pressure of timed performance.

Pecha Kucha Themes

When we did the pecha kucha projects, the themes and the linguistic elements were based on the relevant textbook unit, for example, movies, cities, and current news items. Even though the theme was set, students had the freedom to choose their own particular topics. When the theme was movies, for example, the genre and actual movie chosen was each student's own decision. As a guide, we discussed what students could include on their slides: the movie title, actors, director, awards won, soundtrack, plot, and so on. Thereby the task provided the context to actually use the target language for meaningful communication. However, the theme of student pecha kucha presentations can be absolutely anything.

Outcomes and Assessment

One immensely satisfying part of the pecha kucha task not just for teachers, but also for students, is that there are concrete outcomes, both in terms of the slides, the script the students write, and most appealing of all, the performance of the pecha kucha presentation. All these aspects are suitable for assessment. Furthermore, to make the presentation a form of assessment for the listeners, active listening can be encouraged by having the audience record certain information. If the task is assessed for grading purposes, the students should be informed beforehand as to the criteria of the evaluation. An example can be seen on the student worksheet in Appendix A.

Self-Assessment

In the final part of our pecha kucha task the students were asked to write a feedback comment about their learning experience. The wording on the feedback form was "What did you learn from this project? Think about what you did well and what you could improve." Following are some of the student comments we received; they are reproduced exactly as they were written in order to show authentic student voices:

> I was first speaker, and didn't prepare enough, so I couldn't do well. (Student 1)

> You have to control the speed of speaking and speak as clearly as possible as you can. (Student 2)

> It was difficult to finish speaking in a 20 second. I think that I needed to speak 18 second and to leave 2 second till next slide because audience need to hear my speech to look at slides information. (Student 3)

> I think it is very good for students practicing English speaking and learning the basic skills of the PPT. It's good to keep on having the project class. (Student 4)

These comments were selected because they highlight different aspects of what students appreciated about pecha kucha presentations. Student 1 showed an awareness of the importance of preparation. Although at the performance stage there was a possibility of students feeling embarrassed by their lack of preparation, they were all in the same position, so it was a shared issue. All the students could sympathize with, and thus, appreciate their classmates' nervousness and feelings of pressure. Moreover, this embarrassment itself can be a valuable learning experience if it encourages students to be better prepared in the future. Students 2 and 3 learned that timing was crucial for an effective presentation, both in terms of the pace of delivery and the coordination of the speech and visuals. Student 4, on the other hand, was enthusiastic about learning to use presentation technology in his English class.

Challenges

As with any class project, no matter how well a teacher prepares, challenges arise. In the case of pecha kucha, this was also true. We identified five main challenges: slide design, script, presentation, timing, and student absences.

Slide Design

In preparing the pecha kucha, there is no set order in terms of which to do first, writing the script or designing the slides. However, we noted that when students began with the slide design, they often spent too much time playing with the images. Also, some of them failed to grasp the concept that text should be kept to a minimum. The results were that students either had not enough time to write their scripts or wrote most of their scripts on the slides. Therefore, during the lesson, the teacher should carefully monitor students' progress and warn them that too much time spent on images will lead to more time needed on homework to complete the first stage of the task.

Script

With regards to the script process, pecha kucha forces students to be concise and precise, to the extent they can, in the written language. Writing down enough information to fill 20 seconds and at the same time inform the audience is extremely challenging. The lines on the worksheet in Appendix B provided students with a template of how much information to write, as we found that filling all lines equaled approximately 20 seconds of speech. It is important, then, for teachers to check scripts and try to judge if students have written too much or too little information on the topic.

Timing

Although students spend time on the script and the slide design, given the tight period that we scheduled for this project, we stressed the importance of practicing for the presentation outside of class. However, it was clear that not all students had properly prepared. Moreover, for even those who had, many relied on their scripts, which led to reading and flat presentations. To combat this, the teacher can disallow the use of any script during the presentation. Conversely, teachers could use this task to practice reading aloud in a more expressive manner. If there is insufficient time to work with individual students, the teacher can demonstrate a flat, unanimated reading compared to a lively, expressive reading. Another presentation issue is related to voice: Some students spoke too softly for everyone in the audience to hear.

Timing is critical to a successful pecha kucha presentation. Given the constraints of our course syllabus, we were only able to allocate three lessons for this project. In our situations, we had small classes of fewer than 15 students, enabling us to keep to this tight deadline. With larger classes, the teacher could reduce the number of slides for each student to present. Moreover, until students present, they often do not understand the demands that the 20-second time limit exerts. During some presentations, it was easily visible to the audience that the students' timing was off because they had not prepared properly. In their self-reflections, several students noted that they should have prepared better. This underscores the importance of repeating this task in order to give students the opportunity to do better a second time.

Student Absences

Finally, absences can impact the success of this project. If pecha kucha is done as a group project, clearly the absence of one member puts more work on the remaining members and can affect group dynamics. If done individually, the issue can become one of suggesting how a student can catch up, given the remaining class time devoted to the project. Teachers should be aware of this issue and consider measures to deal with it that are consistent with the rules of their class.

Conclusion

In this paper we outlined how we went about setting up and conducting pecha kucha presentations and the benefits of doing such a task in university English language classes. However, it should be reiterated that the task is almost infinitely adaptable. Even large classes can do a pecha kucha task if the timing of the slides, or the number of slides, is reduced. (It has been done with three slides per student and another teacher reported she used a 15-second interval.) The task can be adapted to suit different teaching situations, topics, target language, and language proficiencies.

We would like to strengthen the likelihood of other teachers taking on pecha kucha projects with their language students. Although such projects seem to be supported by government policy with regards to the promotion of students using 21st century skills, there sometimes does not seem to be much institutional understanding of how to realize the policy by supporting this approach to language teaching. Perhaps this is because the rationale for and benefits of pecha kucha, or similar projects, are not yet well understood.

In order for task-based language teaching to develop in the future there needs to be more research on the relationships between pedagogic task-type and the various dimen-

sions of linguistic performance (Long, 2015). This is especially true when technology is used in the classroom as in the case of pecha kucha. A pecha kucha task in the language classroom certainly encourages students to retrieve, handle, present, and communicate information; it also makes students aware of the need for clarity and practice in the presentation of that information. The task supports language learning and is challenging. Additionally, it is motivating and enjoyable for both students and teachers.

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Bio Data

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Appendix A
Worksheet: Outline of the Pecha Kucha Task
Pecha Kucha Project

Project: Work together in a group, plan and produce a *pecha kucha* 20 x 20 presentation. Complete the task worksheet.
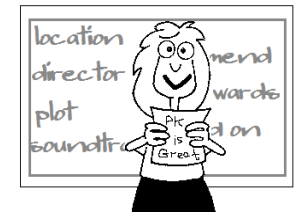
Project Schedule:

Date: ....

Class 1: Learn about *pecha kucha*. Watch some examples of *pecha kucha* presentations. Decide groups. Decide on the topic of your presentation. Start planning.

Date: ....

Class 2: Plan, produce and practice your group presentation.

Date: ....

Class 3: Present your *pecha kucha* presentation. Complete your task worksheet.

Homework:

- Watch some more examples of *pecha kucha* presentations. What did you watch?

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Timing for the *pecha kucha* slides:

- Divide the presentation <u>time</u> like this:

  6 minutes 40 seconds = 400 seconds ÷ 4 = 100 seconds
  = 1 minute 40 seconds for each student in the group.

- Divide the <u>slides</u> like this:

  20 slides ÷ 4 = 5 slides for each student
  = 1 student × 5 slides × 20 seconds for each slide

- Make a plan of your PowerPoint slides. What can you put on each slide?

Practice, practice, and practice!

Grade: All information   ◯   Good language,   ◯   Clear presentation,
(3 x 3 + 1)   included   vocabulary   accurate timing   ◯

Bonus! ◯

Comment:···

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Appendix B
Worksheet: Movie Review Pecha Kucha Project

Each group chooses a movie genre. Each student chooses <u>one</u> film from that genre. Each student prepares a 5-slide PowerPoint presentation to review their own movie. (See page 117 in AEF3 to give you some guidance.)

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