Students’ Preparation, Perception and Attitudes Toward an Oral Class Presentation

Yoon-Hee Soh
(Pochon CHA University)


This paper reports students’ account of how they prepare and organize their oral presentations and in what ways they perceive the presentations help them in learning English. In this exploratory study, a questionnaire and interviews were used in collecting and analyzing the data on 20 pre-medical students in Korea. The results of the study revealed that most students engaged in the similar processes of doing internet research in their native language first which would then lead them to relevant English sites, then organizing the information. Students found pronunciation and speaking in front of an audience difficult and felt the writing skill was a very important factor for an effective presentation. Students spent anywhere between two to ten hours for research and write-up for a ten-minute presentation, indicating the importance of writing skills for the successful outcome of the delivery. Although it was a hard task, students indicated that they gained self-confidence through the experience. Finally, some suggestions to improve the course are made based on student interviews.

I. INTRODUCTION

Since English is securing its place as the international language of communication, the use of the English language in academic and professional circles is increasing. This phenomenon often manifests itself in the need for many EFL professionals to write reports and give presentations in English in relation to their jobs, such as giving business briefings, delivering academic papers at conferences and attending professional workshops and seminars. Hwang (2002) reports that an increasing number of international conferences are organized globally and the trend is such that more and more university students in Korea demand that ESP (English for Specific Purposes) courses be taught so they can learn professional content-specific skills, such as international conference communication skills, to meet their projected needs.
Medical students comprise one such group with a clear professional goal as future doctors and they need to foster formal conference communication skills, such as the ability to give presentations. In Korea, a high level of proficiency in English is required of entrants to medical college in order to successfully complete their medical courses since most of their textbooks are in English, although the lectures are given in Korean in the classroom.\(^1\) The medical terminology used are all in English and when they become doctors, they write patient charts in English as well. Consequently, many doctors achieve a very high level of English reading comprehension and vocabulary skills but unfortunately their communication skills are not of a similar standard due to inadequate professional English language training in medical college.

During the first two years of pre-medical studies, students fulfill general education requirements, including English for general purposes.\(^2\) As students are promoted to medical studies, some colleges include an ESP course that consists of memorizing Latin-derived medical terminology (Chae, 1998). While the learning of medical terminology is essential in medical studies, this type of course focuses only on vocabulary, and fails to meet the future needs of doctors who will have to attend medical conferences and seminars, write medical papers and make presentations in the international setting to keep up with the latest medical information and technology. Rather than conducting such an ESP course geared specifically to acquiring one skill, vocabulary, a general English course at an advanced level which provides students with the opportunity to learn and practice the skills of writing formal academic papers and giving presentations would better prepare students for the English requirements of their profession. A similar view was voiced when Huckin and Olsen (1984) expressed the relevance of general English in carrying out the needs of English for professionals in the more complex world of professional work by proposing a generalized form of ESP instruction. A course dealing with a broader spectrum of language skills than the ESP course described above will provide the framework, and the content can be added after pre-medical students have acquired medical knowledge during their years of medical study. This way, when they become medical doctors they will be able to use English for professional purposes effectively. This is the rationale for developing a course in which oral presentations comprised part of an English course before students embarked on their major field of study.

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1. Applicants to medical colleges in Korea are high school graduates who score top 1-1.5 percent in their national Scholastic Ability Test that measures verbal (Korean), mathematical and English aptitude.
2. There are 41 medical colleges in Korea most of which have two years of pre-medical studies and four years of medical studies, comprising a 6-year curriculum. High school graduates apply directly to the 6-year medical college. Starting from March of 2005, some colleges are converting to American medical school system of four years of medical studies to which only college graduates can apply.
II. LITERATURE REVIEW

In a survey done at Cambridge University on the language difficulties of overseas students during their first term, Geoghegan (1983) reports that spoken language and oral expressions in seminars accounted for the most difficulty (42%), followed by writing (23%), taking notes and understanding lectures (20%) and reading (4%). There are studies that deal with oral discourse in classrooms and seminars in which patterns of initiation, response and follow-up are discussed (Basturkman, 2000) and turn taking and negotiation skills are analyzed (Basturkman, 2002), but seminars that require continuous interaction among the participants differ from presentations. A presentation is primarily a monologue delivered according to its own conventions in which the presenter is required to speak for an extended period of time without interruption by the audience who maintains silence until the end of the talk when a question-and-answer session is expected to follow.

Dudley-Evans and St. John (1998) identify the key features of a presentation as structuring, visuals, and delivery.

**FIGURE 1**

**Key Features of an Oral Presentation**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structure</th>
<th>Visuals</th>
<th>Delivery</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>OHP’s</td>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Middle</td>
<td>Charts</td>
<td>Intonation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>Drawings/Slides</td>
<td>Pausing &amp; phrasing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sign-posting</td>
<td>Body language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Adapted from Dudley-Evans & St. John (1998) and Comfort (1995))

Structuring of a presentation is similar to written work in that there should be a start, a middle and an end. The introduction should establish credentials, state the purpose and topic, and outline what is to come. The conclusion should summarize, make recommendations or call for action. As for the middle part, it will vary according to the type and purpose of the presentation but normally, rhetorical structures recommended in writing academic papers should be followed. In addition to structuring, incorporation of visuals can enhance the effectiveness of the presentation. They can hold audience’s interest and ease their comprehension of the talk. The visuals can come in the form of OHP’s, charts, drawings on the blackboard, and slides on the computer. Signposts or advance signaling help listeners follow the structure of the information and prepare them for what is coming next. But perhaps the most important is the delivery or the voice work,
which may include pronunciation, intonation, pausing and phrasing, as well as body language. The importance of body language, which includes proper posture, culturally appropriate gestures, and eye contact with the audience, in clearly and persuasively communicating the message cannot be overlooked (Comfort, 1995).

There are textbooks for teaching how to give formal speeches, short talks and presentations (Comfort, 1995; Dale & Wolf, 2000; Forman, Donoghue, Abbey, Cruden & Kidd, 1990) and some studies and reference books describe ways to teach effective presentation skills (Jordan, 1990, 1997). They reflect the importance of speaking skills for academic success. As it was cited earlier, difficulties in spoken language and oral expressions were commonly mentioned as the biggest problem for overseas students in the U. K. (Geoghegan, 1983). Similarly, surveys dealing with what ESL (English as a Second Language) students in American universities consider to be important for their academic studies have been conducted recently (Ferris, 1998; Ferris & Tagg, 1996a, 1996b). Many ESL students responded that they considered formal academic presentations and large and small group discussions important and that they also felt intimidated by them (Ferris & Tagg, 1996b). Also American university instructors in different disciplines were asked about the listening and speaking tasks they require of their foreign students and how they felt the students fared (Ferris & Tagg, 1996a). The required speaking activities varied according to class size and discipline, but some of the common activities included class participation, oral reports, pair or group projects, such as oral presentations on research and lab work, and presentations of case studies. Respondents expressed general concern with foreign students’ inability to interact with others in the classroom. This finding confirms an earlier study (Sato, 1982) that identified ESL students’ reticence, especially among Asian students, when it comes to class participation. Ferris and Tagg (1996b) further found that presentations were not as common a task for many foreign students who attend large lecture type classes unless they major in specific disciplines such as management and engineering. Nevertheless, taking the fact that a presentation requires both speaking and writing skills into consideration, an oral presentation is comprehensive as far as integrating the four language skills is concerned. Students also indicated the importance of formal speaking skill by ranking it high in the list of important academic skills (Ferris, 1998).

III. THE STUDY

The study here reports on second year pre-medical students’ account of what processes they go through when they prepare their oral presentation and how they perceive the presentation would help them in their future profession. A presentation requires more than the sum of its
separate skills, and as in the writing process, there must be an interweaving of skills when so many are employed in preparing a presentation. To better understand the processes involved in preparing and giving a presentation, the following questions are addressed in this exploratory study.

1) How do students go about preparing an oral presentation?
2) What skills are considered difficult when preparing and giving the presentation?
3) What skills are considered important when giving the presentation?
4) How has the presentation helped them in improving their English?

Students' self-reported information on the preparation, presentation, and their perception of the language experience can shed light on the strategies and processes involved in the acquisition of a second language through a particular task, and the findings can be applied to pedagogy.

1. Description of the Course

The course from which the present research data are taken was the third semester English course in which students studied reading and expository writing on various topics of social relevance. As with other English courses, the course was conducted in English. Group discussions and communicative activities were common methods of learning in class and as one of the course requirements, students did an oral presentation on a topic related to the themes of the class reading. The length of the presentation was around ten minutes of speaking followed by a question-and-answer session. An outline of what was to be expected in a presentation was given in the form of a handout (Appendix A) but no specific presentation skills were taught per se. By this time, students already had had two semesters of integrated language skills course in general English which covered four hours of weekly instruction in speaking, listening, writing and reading in groups of ten to twelve students and consequently they knew each other very well. This course differed from others in that reading passages were longer as well as structurally more complex and discussions called for expressing one’s opinions on topics of social concern. In addition, writing academic essays comprised another part of the course. Students prepared individual presentations related to the themes of the text in the second half of the course and the text used was *North Star: Focus on Reading and Writing* by English and English (1998).

2. Participants

Twenty sophomore students participated in the study, 13 males and 7 females. They comprised two sections of the course the researcher taught for one semester (16 weeks). Their
age ranged from 20 to 27. The scores on the national College Scholastic Ability Test (CSAT) of the entire sophomore class (40 students) ranged from 370 to 381, with an average score of 374.15 at the time of entrance to college. This was within the top 0.5% nationwide. The average score of the English section of the CSAT was 72.55 out of 80 points. None of them had studied abroad but one of the students was an older student who had completed his 24-month military service on an American base in Korea. Their institutional TOEFL (paper-based test) scores ranged from 487 to 593, with an average score of 555.1, and 17 out of 20 students said that it was their first time to give an oral presentation involving research in English.

3. Procedures

A questionnaire (Appendix B) was given on the last day of class and collected immediately upon students’ completion. The questionnaire consisted of 16 questions; 12 multiple choice and four open-ended, and was divided into four parts: 1) the general preparation phase; 2) the research and write-up phase; 3) the presentation itself; and 4) the retrospective phase where questions about self-fulfillment and satisfaction were asked. Finally, suggestions for improvement of the course were solicited. The questions were designed to find out about the actual processes students went through as well as their self-assessment and attitudes toward this type of task. There was a 100% return rate.

Individual interviews with four students who had given good presentations were then arranged to find out strategies of successful presenters. Interviews were semi-structured and took the form of elaborating on the information given in the questionnaire. The questionnaire itself was in English but students could respond either in English or Korean. For the interview, the native language of Korean was used. Each interview lasted around 20-25 minutes depending on the relevance of the interviewee’s responses to the research questions and the content was recorded, transcribed, and translated into English by the researcher for citation.

4. Analysis

Descriptive statistics are used in analyzing the results of the questionnaire. For the multiple-choice questions, frequency counts in percentage are given for each item response and when applicable, mean scores are calculated; for the open-ended questions, similar responses are grouped together and quoted. Results of the interviews are described according to categories.
IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

1. Phase One: General Overview on Preparation

Most students (60%) responded they started preparing two to three days before the presentation day. The next most common response was one week (20%). One student (5%) started as early as two weeks prior to the due date, whereas another student (5%) started as late as the night before the presentation day. Table 1 summarizes the results.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2-3 days prior</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 week prior</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Immediately</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The night before</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (5 days)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(2 weeks)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 shows that 80% of the students did internet research and then organized that information, such as making notes and outlines. Twenty percent got information from Korean sites, translated them into English, then made presentation slides. It is interesting to note one student’s comment that said “I decided on my point of view about the topic first.” Another student said he used his own ‘background knowledge’ and consulted no outside sources like books or the internet. “Using my own background knowledge, it was like writing an essay for an exam.” Depending on the topic, some students (15%) preferred using books rather than the internet to find appropriate pictures to accompany the presentation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internet research + organization</td>
<td>60</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet research (Korean) + organization + write-up + making slides</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Book search</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Background knowledge</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Next, some problematic areas were identified. Students found the use of appropriate vocabulary and translation quite difficult (30% and 30%, respectively) as indicated in Table 3.
below. When asked to elaborate, there were two aspects; receptive skills, i.e., recognizing meanings of English vocabulary on the internet and productive skills, i.e., using the English equivalent of the words found on the Korean internet in the write-up process. A student explained: "It was very difficult to translate legal vocabulary into English. Even when I went to the English site, I was unable to distinguish the meaning of special vocabulary in English."

Some students (15%) mentioned meeting the time limit was difficult. "Time was too short. So it was very difficult to write a long script." "Regulating the time of presentation was hard."

Vagueness and generality of the topic, not having been given a wide choice of topics and uncertainty of expectation of the project comprised other areas of difficulty (10%). Below are some comments:

"I didn't know what I had to do exactly, for example, what to do with the topic and what I was expected to do."

"If I could have selected a topic of my choice, I would have done better."

"Selecting a topic was most difficult."

Still other students (15%) indicated obtaining appropriate visual data for the presentation, getting the meaning across, and lack of speaking ability as difficult points.

| TABLE 3 |

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulties</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary use and selection</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Translation problem</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time constraint</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic selection, vagueness, and disinterest</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of speaking ability</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Getting meaning across</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of visual data</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

To sum up the general preparation phase, the common procedures were getting information from the internet, making of a draft, writing-up (sometimes involving translation) and making slides. From the analysis, it seems that students had similar problems—difficulty in productive skills of writing the report. Since almost all students consulted both English and Korean websites, a substantial part of the difficulty was translating information from Korean to English. Receptive skills of reading were not mentioned as a problem perhaps because many Korean data were consulted. It struck the researcher as somewhat odd that Korean data were consulted, since this was an English class. It was taken for granted that English data would be consulted. This
may be due to the fact that some students reported on the Korean case of some themes in the text, such as traditional and complementary medicine, media, alternative schools, etc. As a result, the written production skill, i.e., translation of information from Korean to English using appropriate vocabulary and expressions, was indicated as predominantly difficult. This point was pursued further at the interview.

2. Phase Two: Research and Writing

As mentioned in the general preparation phase above, almost all students did research on the internet. Fifty percent used only the internet; others (40%) used the internet together with magazines and newspapers, including newspapers on the internet; and 20% used the internet and books. Multiple entries were permitted, accounting for the figures in total in Table 4.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 4</th>
<th>Sources of Information (N=20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sources</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet only</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet + magazines + newspapers</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet + Books</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (interviews)</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On average, students spent three to four hours (40%) and more than five hours (50%) to do the research (Table 5). Adding the time for the actual writing of the report (Table 8), students spent anywhere from two to four hours (10–15%) to ten hours and more (35–50%) for doing research and writing the report. This is a considerable amount of time for a ten-minute presentation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TABLE 5</th>
<th>Time Required in Research (N=20)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time required to do research</td>
<td>Frequency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 hours</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3-4 hours</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 hours and over</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

When it comes to the difficulties in writing, writing ideas (35%), i.e., the content, topped the list, followed by grammar and vocabulary combined (55%), as indicated in Table 6. Again, multiple entries were allowed. Organization was the least problematic (15%).
TABLE 6

Difficulties in Writing (N=20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Difficulties</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Writing ideas</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary and expressions</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>105</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Although Question 7 "What was the easiest part about writing?" is the reverse of Question 6, the responses shown in Table 7 did not mirror the results of Table 6. Fifty-five percent of the students indicated organization was easy, which is consistent with the finding in Table 6. This was followed by writing ideas down in English (35%). Only five percent indicated that grammar was easy and another five percent found everything difficult. It is noteworthy that nobody checked 'vocabulary' as being easy, showing the importance of learning vocabulary. In general, it seems students are more reluctant to check something was 'easy', indicating that perhaps students are less confident when they have to identify non-problematic areas.

TABLE 7

Non-problematic Areas in Writing (N=20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-problematic areas</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Organization</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ideas</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In reference to how long it took students to write up the report, half (50%) of the students said it took them 3–4 hours and more, followed by more than 5 hours (35%) and 1–2 hours (15%). Table 8 summarizes. This was for a two-page, double-spaced report. It was revealed later at the interview that translation accounted for the long hours of toil.

TABLE 8

Time Needed in Writing (N=20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time needed</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3-4 hours</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 hours and over</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 hours</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When faced with difficulties, how do students overcome them? Do they consult somebody? As indicated in Table 9, 15% sought help from classmates or friends on grammar and editing, 10% sought help for computer skills, and another 5% received help on the content. By far, most students (70%) did not seek help.

**TABLE 9**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of help</th>
<th>Frequency</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grammar and editing</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer help</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (content)</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>20</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is not surprising that among the students who sought help, the most help was in grammar and editing, as they were indicated to be difficult in Table 6. One of the factors that may have contributed to the low rate of seeking help by students is, however, that all students lived on campus, in a rather isolated rural area. As a result, they did not have access to a wide circle of friends and relatives who would seem competent enough to give them help. Among those who got help, they specified the names of particular students who were ‘very good’ with grammar or computers. Additionally, they may have been reluctant to approach classmates for help since this was a competitive task.

3. Phase Three: Oral Presentation

For the actual presentation, two aspects were examined; one, what students found difficult, the other, what skills they considered important. Students were asked to respond to each statement using a five-point scale, 1 indicating ‘Most difficult’ to 5, ‘Enjoyable’. The responses were coded into three categories: responses 1 and 2 indicating difficulty; 3, neutrality; and 4 and 5, no difficulty. Sixty percent of the students felt ‘Pronunciation’ and ‘Speaking in front of others’ difficult. The mean scores for each category were also compared. Pronunciation (M=2.55), remembering the content (M=2.65) and speaking in front of others (M=2.75) were considered more difficult than coordinating slides and narration (M=3.05), or eye contact with the audience (M=3.05). Table 10 summarizes the results.
TABLE 10
Difficult Aspects in Giving Oral Presentation
(N=20) (1= most difficult to 5=enjoyable)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Diff. (%)</th>
<th>Neutral (%)</th>
<th>No diff. (%)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking in front of others</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Remembering the content</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eye contact with audience</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Meeting the time limit</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coordinating slides &amp; narration</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.05</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average Mean Score= 2.80

In terms of the skills considered important (Table 11), frequency counts indicate pronunciation and writing skills were considered more important than others (60%, 50%, respectively). The average mean score was 2.05, indicating overall importance of all skills.

TABLE 11
Important Skills in Giving Oral Presentation
(N=20) (1=Most important to 5=Not important)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skills</th>
<th>Important (%)</th>
<th>Neutral (%)</th>
<th>Not imp. (%)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pronunciation skill</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing skill</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Memorization skill</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organization skill</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other skills</td>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average Mean Score= 2.05

Sixty percent of the students rehearsed three times or more prior to the presentation (Table 12). Five percent of the students came to class without any rehearsal whatsoever.

TABLE 12
Number of Times Rehearsed (N=20)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Rehearsal</th>
<th>Percent (%)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More than 3 times</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 times</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 times</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 time</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0 times</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

It is interesting to note that pronunciation was considered both a difficult and important skill in
giving the presentation. A similar finding was cited (Ferris, 1998) in which university ESL students ranked the pronunciation skill highest in the relative importance of seven specific listening and speaking skills. However, content area instructors in U.S. universities felt ESL students’ pronunciation was not, by and large, a significant issue or problem, citing students’ struggle with in-class interaction as being more problematic (Ferris & Tagg, 1996a). Writing was considered difficult in preparing and important in giving the presentation, as the report itself forms the basis for the delivery of the presentation.

4. Phase Four: In Retrospect

The last section of the questionnaire asked students to reflect on their oral presentation in retrospect on a five-point scale. The attitudes toward oral presentations were more negative than positive with 80% checking 3 (Had to do it), 4 (Not much) or 5 (Hated it). Table 13 shows the results.

| TABLE 13 |
| Enjoyment Derived from the Experience (N=20) |
| 1=Very much; 2=Enjoyed; 3=Had to do it; 4=Not much; 5=Hated it |
| Comments | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 (\%) |
| Liked it | 0 | 20 | 40 | 30 | 10 |
| Mean Score= 3.3 |

Despite the negative attitudes, when asked about what students liked about doing the presentation (Question 13a), students commented as follows:

"It has improved my English ability."
"It’s interesting and I can gain new information and knowledge."
"It made me pay attention to the material"
"It’s something new."
"It will be good for the future."

Their dislike was expressed in detail in response to Question 13b. Some comments concerned the preparation stage, while others pertained to the actual oral presentation:

"Individual research was difficult."
"Making sentences and memorizing was difficult."
"Preparation was long and tedious."

"It has improved my English ability."
"It’s interesting and I can gain new information and knowledge."
"It made me pay attention to the material"
"It’s something new."
"It will be good for the future."

Their dislike was expressed in detail in response to Question 13b. Some comments concerned the preparation stage, while others pertained to the actual oral presentation:

"Individual research was difficult."
"Making sentences and memorizing was difficult."
"Preparation was long and tedious."
Below are about the presentation itself:

"It was awkward to speak in front of the audience."
"Cannot understand what other people say in the presentation."
"Difficulty handling the questions."

An overall negative comment and frustration were also expressed:

"[Disliked] All aspects."
"Wanted to do better but was not able to."

In terms of helpfulness, 80% indicated the presentation was somewhat helpful in providing an opportunity to practice English as well as develop interest on the topic chosen and improve language skills as shown in Table 14. The average mean score was 2.36 (2=somewhat helpful; 3=neutral). Perhaps students felt the presentation was worth their while in learning English despite the tedious and hard work involved.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Helpful</th>
<th>Neutral</th>
<th>Not helpful</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Practice English</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Improve language skills</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop interest in content</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gain new knowledge</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vocabulary learning</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average Mean Score=2.36

As for self-satisfaction, Table 15 indicates that as many as 60% felt challenged and that the presentation was a learning experience; however, 40% said that they felt relieved when it was over, indicating students' anxiety; 20% never wanted to do it again, showing a strong aversion. One of the comments was rather philosophical: "It's like taking an exam. You hate to do it but you have to do it."

It's a bit difficult to make definitive generalizations but on the positive side, in addition to considering the presentation a challenge, 40% of the students saw it as an occasion for self-development and their self-confidence was raised as can be seen by the responses in Table 15. Suggestions for improvement of the course were very scarce on the questionnaire but the interview proved to be more fruitful in getting the students voices.
TABLE 15
Self-Satisfaction from the Experience
(N=20) (1=agree strongly to 5=disagree strongly)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Agree (%)</th>
<th>Neutral (%)</th>
<th>Disagree (%)</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Challenging task</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.35</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning experience</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relieved that it’s over</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self development</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2.55</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sense of accomplishment</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>2.45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Increase self confidence</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>2.75</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Too difficult</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Don’t want to do it again, ever!</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Average Mean Score=2.69

5. Phase Five: Interviews

Interviews with four students who had given good presentations were conducted. Among them, two (JS and DI) had done an outstanding job—good content, clear diction and delivery, excellent handling of computers and capturing audience interest. The interview pursued further queries on: 1) whether Korean or/and English sources were consulted for research and why; 2) if translation was the main method of writing the report; 3) what they considered were keys to a successful presentation; and 4) suggestions for improvement of the course.

1) Korean or English Source

The interviews revealed that the choice of language for research depended on the topic itself. However, proficiency played a role as well. The more proficient students went directly to English web sites; the less proficient (self-claimed) avoided English web sites because of expected difficulties with the vocabulary. As a result, this led to more difficulties when writing the report.

“I know more research have been done in the U. S. on this topic [alternative medicine] so I went to different sites in English. I also used some lecture notes [in Korean] from a course I took in school.” (JS; TOEFL Score- 557)

“I went to Korean web sites first [reporting on medical service organizations] and they gave English web site addresses, so I proceeded from there. Then I added reports on the case in our university’s free clinic for foreign laborers.” (DI; TOEFL Score- 563)
“I have no background knowledge on the topic [new forms of art] so I imagined [English] vocabulary would be very difficult so I searched Korean web sites.” (JK; TOEFL Score- 580)

“I wanted to report on the notion of medical negligence and malpractice. The vocabulary on the English sites was so specialized and difficult and I looked them up in the dictionary but could not find the Korean equivalent. So I went to Korean web sites to find out about the topic in Korea and translated the findings. Translation of the Korean vocabulary into English was hard. I was not sure if I translated them correctly.” (HJ; TOEFL Score- 567)

2) Translation

There was partial (JS and DI) to complete translation for those who consulted only the Korean data (JK and HJ), resulting in extra burden for them.

“ I only translated lecture notes from Korean to English.” (JS)

“When I wrote the report, I tried not to copy exactly [from the English source] but modify [English] vocabulary to easier words so other students would understand. And I wrote about the free clinic in our university in English.” (DI)

“I could compose sentences [in English] but I wondered if there were awkward expressions and inappropriate vocabulary and how native speakers would use them.” (JK)

“Translation was so time-consuming and I found myself using only simple structures and easy vocabulary which made my report look bad.” (HJ)

3) Keys to a Successful Presentation

The importance of organization was duly noted by all interviewees for an effective presentation. JS’s strategies lay in making the audience get involved in his presentation by appealing to their interest. Obviously, he had a clear direction for the kind of presentation he had in mind.

“I asked myself how I should prepare my presentation. I did not want it to be just
informative. I wanted it to be interesting and fun. I tried to bring in lots of visual input. I did it as though I was writing a book, doing a project. I worked around slides and pictures.” (JS)

DI also had taken the audience level into account and he had controlled and adapted his pronunciation and writing to suit the audience. It was by far the best presentation in class.

“I began with an outline and was consistent with it. I noticed how other people, when they make presentations, talk too fast or use words that are beyond our understanding. So I tried to use words that others would understand and I spoke clearly and slowly. I did not copy or plagiarize.” (DI)

HJ was the one who was overwhelmed by translation, as well as difficulties in content and vocabulary.

“It’s good to begin with a frame and fill in the information on it. I wrote the outline in Korean and followed it.” (HJ)

JK was especially concerned with the writing skill because he also translated the information he got from research.

“I think good research skills and a good 'script' (written report) are keys to a good presentation.” (JK)

4) Suggestions for Improving the Course

Suggestions to improve the course included covering the skills of writing and pronunciation more and inducing students to speak in class as much as possible whether answering questions, reading homework and compositions, or reporting the results of small group discussions. The value of extensive reading was also mentioned.

“More studies in structure and composition practice are needed. Writing helps organize our thoughts and present what we have prepared effectively, so more writing practice should be provided.” (JK)

“Personally, I have pronunciation problems so I would like to receive pronunciation
lessons." (HJ)

"Practice facing others while speaking will reduce anxiety." (HJ)

"Read more on the [English] internet." (JK)

"Extensive reading really helped in my case [i.e., studying with English textbooks rather than using the translated version in science courses]. Training in extensive reading provided me to go ahead and read a large volume of data in English and understand the gist without really looking up every new vocabulary item." (DI)

A further comment by the same student is worth noting as it refers to grading.

"I am concerned about evaluation—I wonder if my effort was evaluated or just the output... for example, some students are good speakers and they can smooth things out without much content while others may not be smooth talkers but prepare a lot."

5) Gains

Students mentioned a boost in motivation for further study in English and self-confidence as the product of the presentation.

"I realized how inadequate I was and it motivated me to sign up for an English course at a language institute." (HJ)

"During the first semester [freshman year], speaking in front of others was difficult but now after all the English courses, I don't feel that nervous." (DI)

"Because of the audience response, I felt very rewarded and pleased and positive about my English. You get back what you put in." (JS)

"Learning about some topics which were not related to my major was interesting and I felt a sense of accomplishment." (JK)

"I have heard there will be many occasions to present [medical] reports and papers in English in the future. I attended a medical conference conducted in English last year
[hosted by the school] and now I feel that with some effort, I can do that, too." (JK)

The emergence of self-confidence as the outcome of the experience is an important gain since a general lack of confidence in ESL learners’ speaking skills and English pronunciation is attributed as an inhibiting factor for learners to engage in class participation and interactions with native-English-speaking classmates (Ferris, 1998). More practice begets self-confidence as implied by DI; JS finds the experience rewarding; and JK’s self-confidence is evident in his comments.

V. CONCLUSION

1. Summary of the Findings

This paper described the processes EFL students went through in preparing an oral presentation for their class and their attitudes toward this type of task. On average, students spent four to six hours in preparing for a ten-minute presentation although some spent more than ten hours on it. The internet was the most common form of research method and both Korean and English sources were consulted. The difficulties students encountered in the preparation were writing skills and vocabulary in terms of language skills, and confusion related to developing and focusing the topic. Pronunciation and looking at the audience were considered difficult aspects during the presentation itself and pronunciation and writing skills were considered important for an effective presentation. Students had mixed feelings about the presentation itself. While they complained about the difficulties, they admitted that it was a necessary process in the learning of the English language and said they gained self-confidence from the experience.

Another finding was that there was a great deal of memorization. In fact, students referred to the report as the ‘script’ and they were completely dependent on it. It contained every utterance the speaker was supposed to say in the presentation. Even for students who prepared a separate outline as a class handout, the report was the ‘script’. In a way, students considered the presentation a performance and they tried to memorize the ‘script’ word for word. Some students simply read the whole ‘script’ without much eye contact, especially those students who were unprepared or nervous. Others very cleverly read the ‘script’ during the slide presentation when the audience attention was captured by the slides. Perhaps they were not proficient and confident enough to ad lib and they were afraid that if they didn’t memorize, they would lose the whole ‘script’, and their presentation would result in a bad grade as well as ‘loss of face’ and ‘embarrassment’.
2. Pedagogical Implications

Although the presentation described is far from what students would need in its scope and content to meet their future needs, the findings from the study presents a number of pedagogical implications for the improvement of the course.

First, translation can be given a more positive light in teaching English composition. Even in classes conducted entirely in English, students consulted both Korean and English sources for research, in some cases consulting only the Korean source. The reality of students getting information from the native language source should make translation an integral part of the English course. The topic and language proficiency played decisive roles in the selection of the language of research in an EFL context, and the possibility of bilingual access to research should be recognized. Not everyone possesses native-like competence of thinking in English (L2) and writing directly in it; yet as world citizens, students would be asked to report on the Korean aspects of some issues related to their field of study in the future to the world audience as professionals. Translation skills will prove to be a valuable asset to meet this type of need. Unlike the ESL environment, English input is not abundant outside the classroom or workplaces and acquisition will not take place in the fashion of Krashen’s (1982) model of i+1 comprehensible input in an EFL context.

Related to the point above, a traditional deductive approach to teaching grammar and vocabulary can upgrade the quality of presentation. For some common errors found in English papers written by Koreans such as subject-verb agreement and verb tense (Lee, 2003), prescriptive grammar rules and repetitive drills and exercises will hopefully reduce the number of such errors. As for the vocabulary building, guessing the meaning in context is important but students should proceed to look up the exact meaning of new words in the dictionary and use them in sentences for accuracy.

Third, students should be encouraged to read in English as much as possible. As the interview revealed, the student who read extensively in English was at an advantage because he was proficient enough to go directly to the English source for research and it resulted in enhancing the productive skills as well.

Fourth, more practice in speaking in front of others needs to be worked into the course to reduce anxiety. Jordan’s (1990) method of what he calls ‘pyramid discussions’ in which students choose a given theme or subject, then form discussion groups, gradually increasing the size of the discussant from a partner, then two students, then four and so on until the whole class is involved, can be a useful way to build confidence and develop fluency.

Additionally, tutoring and training in pronunciation can help in reducing the fear of speaking in front of others. One student had mentioned that s/he could not understand what others say in
the presentation. The situation can be ameliorated when peer evaluation (Lynch, 1988) is introduced. When the particular speaker becomes aware that his/her pronunciation is serious enough to cause misunderstanding even to their classmates, fellow interlanguage users, then they may realize it warrants tutoring.

Finally, for students who have difficulties in narrowing the topic and organizing at the initial stage of preparation, Boyle’s (1996) recommendation of using a problem-solution pattern to build awareness in organizing information effectively can be adopted. Strategies of starting out with a clear goal and plan in mind and analyzing the audience are effective as shown by better presenters, DI and JS. DI adjusted his vocabulary and writing to make the presentation comprehensible to the audience and JS got audience attention and enthusiasm when he made the presentation ‘fun’ and ‘interesting’.

3. Limitations of the Study and Future Research

The present study has limitations in its scope of applicability due to the small number of subjects and the exploratory nature of the study in a unique setting of a residential medical college. However, the study gives a glimpse of students’ efforts and struggles when they deal with oral discourse in a foreign language, as well as their feelings of accomplishment at the completion of the task. Directions for future research lies in studying the relationship between oral presentations and language acquisition by assessing changes in performance and attitudes of students as they go through different stages in the process of preparing the presentation. This way, the role of oral presentations in language acquisition will become clearer.

As Ferris (1998) notes, “Instructors may not always be the best judges of the ways in which their students are struggling... Also, instructors may not be the best sources of information on the reasons their students are struggling (p. 307).” Since the present study offered an insiders’ version of the processes involved in giving a presentation and their frustrations, the results of the study can be reflected in revising the course to improve it to better meet the needs of the students. When revising the course, theories and practices applicable to ESL should be revisited, reconsidered and adapted to suit learners in an EFL learning context.

REFERENCES


APPENDIX A
General Guidelines for the Oral Presentation

I. Introduction
   Introduce yourself.
   State the topic of your presentation.
   Give the purpose for your presentation.
   Get the audience attention through questions and anecdotes.

II. Content
    The presentation must clearly tie in with the subject selected, i.e., music, health, art, etc. Apart from this simple requirement, feel free to use your creativity. The time requirement is around 10 minutes and students will submit a two-page written report of the presentation. In addition, providing visual input in the form of OHP’s, worksheets, photos and slides is strongly recommended.

III. Manner
    Use your notes but do not read from the report. Speak in a clear and loud voice. Hand or arm gestures can be effective but do not make distracting movements such as scratching your head, touching your hair, etc. Be confident and have a sense of humor.

IV. Question and answer session
    A short question and answer session will follow at the end of the presentation. Respond to questions and comments and finish the presentation by thanking the audience.

APPENDIX B
Questionnaire

PERSONAL INFORMATION
1. Gender: macho
2. Age: __________
3. Would you be willing to come in to talk about your experience with me?
   YES/NO
   If YES, would you give your name? Name: ______________________
4. How do you rate your English proficiency compared with that of other students in class?
   (Check one) __FAIR  ____GOOD  ___VERY GOOD
5. a) Have you ever given oral presentations in English before entering this university?
   Yes  __________  No
   b) If yes, how many presentations did you give? __________________________
   When? __________________________
   c) What was the nature of the presentation? __________________________
   d) How long were the presentations? __________________________

I. PREPARATION PHASE
1. How soon did you start preparing for your presentation?
   a) As soon as the topic was given to me
   b) 1 week before the presentation date
c) 2-3 days prior to the presentation date

d) The night before the presentation date

e) (Your own answer) __________________________________________

2. How did you prepare for the presentation? What did you do first and how did you organize your workload? __________________________________________

3. What were some of the difficulties as you prepared the presentation? __________________________________________

II. RESEARCH AND WRITE-UP PHASE

4. Where did you get the information needed for the content of the presentation?
   (Check as many as applicable.)
   a) Internet  b) Library books  c) Magazines and newspapers  d) Textbooks  e) Other ______

5. How long did it take you to do your research?
   a) Less than 1 hour  b) 1-2 hours  c) 3-4 hours  d) 5 hours or over

6. What was the most difficult part about writing?
   a) Organization & outline  
   b) Vocabulary & expressions
   c) Grammar & editing  
   d) Writing ideas down in English
   e) (Your own difficulties)

7. What was the easiest part about writing?
   a) Organization & outline  
   b) Vocabulary & expressions
   c) Grammar & editing  
   d) Writing ideas down in English
   e) (Your own answer) __________________________________________

8. How long did it take you to write up your research report?
   a) Less than 1 hour  b) 1-2 hours  c) 3-4 hours  d) 5 hours or over

9. Did you get any help from other people?
   YES  NO
   If yes, from whom did you get help? __________________________________________

III. ORAL PRESENTATION PHASE

10. How difficult were the following in giving the oral presentation?
    Circle the number: 1 = very difficult; 2 = somewhat difficult; 3 = so-so; 4 = not difficult; 5 = I enjoyed.

Speaking in front of other people
Looking at the audience
Remembering the content
Coordinating the slides and narration
Pronunciation
Meeting the time limit
Other: (your own difficulties)

11. Which skills do you think are important in carrying out the oral presentation?
    Circle the number: 1 = very important; 2 = important; 3 = so-so; 4 = not important; 5 = insignificant

Organizational skill
Vocabulary
Pronunciation skill
Memorization skill
Writing skill 1 2 3 4 5
Other skills you consider important

12. How many times have you practiced before giving the actual presentation?
   a) 1 time  b) 2 times  c) 3 times  d) more than 3 times  e) none

IV. IN RETROSPECT

13. Did you like doing the oral presentation?
   (1=very much; 2=I enjoyed; 3=I had to do it; 4=not much; 5=hated it)
   a) What did you like about doing your presentation? Include all aspects.
   b) What did you dislike about doing the presentation? Include all aspects.

14. How helpful was the presentation in the following area?
   (1=very helpful; 2=somewhat helpful; 3=neutral; 4=not helpful; 5=a total waste of time)
   Learning new vocabulary 1 2 3 4 5
   Developing interest in certain topics. 1 2 3 4 5
   Providing an opportunity to practice English 1 2 3 4 5
   Gaining new knowledge 1 2 3 4 5
   Improving language skills of reading & writing 1 2 3 4 5
   Speaking and listening 1 2 3 4 5
   Other

15. How satisfied were you (about your performance) after you gave your presentation?
   (1=very much; 2=somewhat, 3=neutral; 4=not much; 5=dissatisfied)
   It increased my self-confidence in English 1 2 3 4 5
   I felt a sense of accomplishment 1 2 3 4 5
   It was part of self-development 1 2 3 4 5
   It was a learning experience 1 2 3 4 5
   It was a challenging task 1 2 3 4 5
   I was relieved that it's over 1 2 3 4 5
   It was too difficult. A nightmare! 1 2 3 4 5
   I don't want to do it again, ever! 1 2 3 4 5
   Other

V. IMPROVEMENT

16. If you were to do it over again, how would you do it differently?
   Give suggestions for improving the presentation.

Applicable levels: tertiary, adult education
Key words: oral presentation, perception, attitudes, self-confidence
Yoon-Hee Soh
College of Medicine,
Pochon CHA University
198-1 Donggyo-ri, Pocheon-eup,
Pocheon-gun, Gyeonggi-do 487-801
Korea
Tel: (031) 543-2695
Fax: (031) 543-2818
Email: yhsoh@cha.ac.kr

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