In the Classroom

Incorporating Drama into EFL Oral Presentations

James Carpenter

Asia University

jamesc.carpenter35@gmail.com

Abstract

Oral presentations are common in many English as a foreign language (EFL) classes. Because oral presentations entail multiple steps, they are ideal for project-based learning courses. Yet, it can be challenging for students to meaningfully collaborate on oral presentation projects using English. The use of drama in oral presentations allows students to explore more complex topics without being overwhelmed. A short survey of the literature related to oral presentations and project-based learning in EFL is presented in this article. Then, the basic discourse for oral presentations in English is discussed, followed by an expanded discussion about how drama can simplify this discourse for students. Finally, two examples of student presentations are presented.

Oral presentations are widely used in English as a foreign language (EFL) classrooms. This is partly because the task of preparing for and performing an oral presentation integrates the four macro language skills (reading, writing, listening, and speaking) (Al-Issa & Al-Qubtan, 2010). In addition, creating an oral presentation in a second language aligns with Ellis' (2003) definition of language learning tasks as "activities that call for meaning-focused language use" (p.3). The use of such language-learning tasks arises from educational, linguistic, and philosophical traditions of experiential, communicative, and student-centered learning (Nunan, 2014). Therefore, the use of oral presentations in the EFL classrooms is both pedagogically supported by and appropriately situated in current best practices in language teaching.

Oral Presentations in Japan

In Japan, oral presentations of one form or another are common in primary, secondary, and higher education EFL classrooms. In many cases, such oral presentations take the form of inter-school, municipal or regional speech contests (Shannon, 2014). These contests evaluate a variety of

different language related outcomes, including pronunciation, delivery, and composition. It is reasonable to say that oral presentations have become an important part of EFL education in Japan.

Eikaiwa-zation of EFL Classes

Arguably, oral presentations are becoming equally common in Japanese university EFL classrooms. As EFL education in Japan has changed over time, there has been an implicit shift towards the same pedagogical approaches used in Japanese private conversation schools (called *Eikaiwa*) (Rivers, 2013). This "eikaiwa-zation" of university EFL classes is characterized by an emphasis on "authentic" interaction (most often with a so-called "native speaking" English teacher) where fun and the use of English as a pathway to student enjoyment are primary (Rivers, 2013). This is practically expressed by a lack of well-defined curricular objectives in Japanese university EFL programs that results in a high degree of teacher freedom. It is anecdotally apparent that having students prepare and present oral presentations is a popular way to focus an "eikaiwa-zised" university course.

Yet, an oral presentation is only pedagogically sound if the process for creating the presentation is linguistically and educationally rich. From an educational standpoint, the process of creating the oral presentation is as important as the final presentation itself. Tuan and Neomy (2007) conducted a small study investigating how student preparation time influenced the form and content of their final presentations in an EFL class at a university in Vietnam. While preliminary, their study suggested that student planning time did play a significant role in the quality of the final presentation. This reinforces the point that delivering the final oral presentation is not the student's only EFL task. Rather, the presentation is the culmination of a series of language learning tasks.

A series of language tasks culminating in a final project falls under the rubric of project-based learning (PBL) (Nunan, 2014). The creation of an oral presentation fits well as the content for PBL because oral presentations require an equal commitment to both language skills and content knowledge (Stoller, 2008).

Language Skills for Oral Presentations

Shannon (2013) provides examples of how language skills are assessed in municipal speech contests in Japan. These skills include "pronunciation," "delivery," and "composition." Based on the examples provided by Shannon (2013), the "language skills" in such oral presentations primarily evaluate how well students can use their English in the appropriate discourse of an oral presentation. This paper assumes the definition for discourse first proposed by Celce-Murcia and Olshtain (2000):

> A piece of discourse is an instance of spoken or written language with describable internal relationships of form and meaning (e.g. words, structures, cohesion) that relate coherently to an external communicative function or purpose and a given audience or interlocutor. (p. 4).

In the case of oral presentations, the external communicative function or purpose of the language to be used is the presentation itself. The internal relationships of form and meaning refer to the vocabulary associated with the presentation topic, and the grammar and textual organizational features necessary to present that topic in English. This paper proposes that short dramas can be used to simplify basic oral presentation discourse in order to make the process of creating oral presentation projects more accessible to EFL students.

The Discourse of Oral Presentations in English

There is an abundant literature outlining the discourse of oral presentations. While not the final authority on such discourse, the literature published by Toastmasters International provides a useful framework for organizing a presentation. Toastmasters International is an organization with the stated mission of "empower[ing] individuals to become more effective communicators and leaders" (Toastmasters, 2016). Toastmasters is a speech club that gives its members the opportunity to practice giving speeches on a variety of topics and in a variety of formats. *Competent Communication*, the introductory manual given to all new Toastmasters members provides a detailed speech outline presented in Table 1 below:

Table 1. Competent Communication Presentation Outline

Opening
Captures audience attention
Leads into speech topic
Body
<u>Main point</u>
Sub-point
Sub-point material
<u>Main point</u>
Sub-point
Sub-point material
<u>Main point</u>
Sub-point
Sub-point material
Conclusion
Review or summary
Call to action or memorable statement

Generally, this outline for a speech is similar to that of a five-paragraph essay. The introduction serves to draw the audience in and introduce the topic. The topic is then expanded upon through the explication of at least three main points. The presentation ends with a summary of these three main points and a final comment. For the purposes of this paper, the most important aspect of Figure 1 is in the explication of the three main points. Each of these three main points must first be defined clearly for the audience (via its attendant (i.) sub-points), and then each of these sub-points must be further explained through direct explication or with examples (via the attendant (ii.) sub-point material).

Use of L1 in Oral Presentation Preparation

The task for teachers and students in a PBL class using oral presentations is to divide this outline into a series of smaller language tasks that culminate in the final presentation. As Ford and Kluge (2015) have noted, the challenge of making the planning process for any PBL course into a meaningful opportunity to practice foreign language skills is an ongoing challenge for PBL teachers. Simply put, EFL students inevitably prefer to prepare for their foreign language projects using their first language. Yet, as noted by Tuan and Neomy (2007) above, such planning time is an essential part of preparing for oral presentations and has a direct impact on the quality of the final presentation itself. Therefore, helping students to meaningfully use English while preparing their project is critical.

There are many reasons why EFL students lapse into their first language during planning time in PBL classes. To begin with, PBL classes are by their very nature more open and flexible classes (Stoller, 2006) that potentially require students to marshal more of their own cognitive and creative resources than when completing scaffolded, highly controlled activities in typical EFL textbooks. In addition, as research into bilingualism has pointed out (e.g. Garcia & Wei, 2014), bilingual or multi-lingual people will naturally seek to make use of the most effective and efficient linguistic resources available to them at a given time. Therefore, when faced with the difficult challenge of creating an oral presentation from scratch, most students will naturally opt for the most efficient method of communication available to them in an EFL classroom: their first language. It is necessary, therefore, for teachers to provide a model for oral presentation discourse that allows students to express as much as they can at their current second language proficiency level without overloading them to the point that they inevitably switch to their first language.

Using drama can help simplify oral presentation discourse in this way. The body of the presentation is a natural place to incorporate drama into basic oral presentation discourse. One way of doing this is to present short dramas instead of examples when explaining the sub-points of a given topic.

Drama in Presentation Discourse

The creation of a drama is in and of itself a linguistically challenging task (Kawakami, 2012), yet collaborating on the best way to express an idea through a story can allow students to more easily make use of the foreign language resources available to them. This is in part because stories are easier for our brains to process than expository text (Kelly, 2011). Building off of the speech outline given in Table 1, Table 2 below provides an expanded presentation outline that includes drama as part of the discourse.

Table 2. Expanded Presentation Outline

Opening
Give the title of the presentation
Introduce the topic
List three reasons why the topic is important.
Present the main message of the presentation, and give the three main points that support this message.
Body

<u>Main Point</u>
Restate the first main point.
Define the first main point clearly for the audience.
Present a short drama with a clear beginning, middle, and end that exemplifies the first main point.
Explain the takeaway message of the drama to the audience.
<u>Main Point</u>
Restate the second main point.
Define the second main point clearly for the audience.
Present a short drama with a clear beginning, middle, and end that exemplifies the second main point.
Explain the takeaway message of the drama to the audience.
<u>Main Point</u>
Restate the third main point.
Define the third main point clearly for the audience.
Present a short drama with a clear beginning, middle, and end that exemplifies the third main point.
Explain the takeaway message of the drama to the audience.
Conclusion
Paraphrase main message.
Revise or summarize main points

As Table 2 indicates, rather than explain and give examples of the main points of the presentation through straight exposition, it can be more effective to have students provide a clear definition of their main point and then represent that main point through a short drama for their audience. Then, students can explain the meaning or significance of the drama as it relates to their presentation topic. Appendix 1 provides a detailed model of one way the outline presented in Table 2 can be applied in a PBL course using oral presentations.

Student Examples

Two examples of student work using the model in Appendix 1 are presented below. The first example (Example 1) is a series of excerpts taken from one group of students' oral presentation script with explanation and commentary. The second example (Example 2) is an entire script of a different group's oral presentation project, presented in Appendix 2. These examples came from student projects in a Freshman English course at a university in Japan. This Freshman English course is required for all students admitted to each of the university's five main academic units—Business, Law, Economics, International Relations, and Urban Innovation. The average language level of the students whose work is presented here is either A2 ("elementary") or B1 ("intermediate") on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages. Example 1 given below came from the Business department. (See Appendix 2 for a second example from the Economics department).

Example 1

The Opening from Example 1's oral presentation is presented in Table 3 below:

Table 3. Presentation Example 1 Introduction

Opening

Hello! Our presentation is called Love & Peace.
Our topic is terrorism.
We think this topic is important because:
    1. Today, terrorism is a major problem in the world.
    2. Terrorism could happen in Japan at any time.
    3. We don't know how to protect our country.
We believe we can be protected from terrorism through reinforcement.
We can do this through:
    1. Counter measures
    2. Learning about history
    3. Helping other countries

The topic of Example 1's presentation was international terrorism. In addition to explaining the title, topic, and some background on that topic, this introduction gives the main message ("We believe we can be protected from terrorism through reinforcement") and the three main points that expand upon this message ("counter measures," "learning about history," and "helping other countries"). In the presentation itself, these three main points will be primarily explained through drama and not through direct exposition.

As Table 1 and Table 2 above indicate, the "Body" of a presentation defines, explains, and gives examples of the main points of the presentation's message. Table 4 below presents the body portion of Example 1's presentation for the first main point listed in their introduction ("counter measures").

Table 4. Presentation Example 1 Main Point 1

Main Point 1
Counter measure means solutions. For example, we should not allow terrorists to enter our country, so we should do training because we should prepare for terrorism.
Narrator = N: This is Narita Airport. The man wants to enter Japan. Then two inspectors checked his baggage. *Inspectors = I:* Please show us your baggage. *Man = M:* I don't want to. *I:* If you don't show us your baggage, you can't enter Japan. *M:* Ok! *I:* Look! This is a gun! *N:* The police caught the man
The Olympics will be held in Japan, so terrorists may come here. So, we should check tourist's baggage more strictly, and we should prepare weapons and more. Finally, we can maintain safety in Japan.

This first section in the body of Example 1's presentation provides a simple example of how drama can make oral presentation discourse in English more accessible for EFL students. First, it should be noted that international terrorism is a challenging topic for A2 or B1 level EFL students. While it is certainly possible for this level of student to express a basic understanding about a topic like this, it is well beyond their ability to collaborate deeply about such a topic using expository prose. Therefore, in example one, we see the students first provide a clear definition for the term "counter measures ("solutions") and then give a short example of what such countermeasures might look like ("not allow terrorists into the country," "training to prepare for terrorism"). Then, the presentation shifts to a drama that depicts a simple example of countermeasures at the airport. Finally, a short explanation about why such countermeasures are important for Japan is presented.

Conclusion

The preparation for and final presentation of an oral presentation project is an opportunity for rich, meaningful collaboration using English. Yet, for such projects to be successful, it is necessary for teachers to make the preparation process as accessible as possible for students. Incorporating drama into oral presentation discourse can help students to collaborate meaningfully about a variety of topics, while making use of the language skills they have available to them.

References

Al-Issa, A. S., & Al-Qubtan, R. (2010). Taking the floor: Oral Presentations in EFL classrooms. *TESOL Journal 1*(2), *227-246*.

Celce-Murcia, M., & Olshtain, E. (2000). *Discourse and context in language teaching*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

Ellis, R. (2003). *Task-based language learning and teaching*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press.

Ford, A, & Kluge, D. (2015). Positive and negative aspects to project-based learning: Two projects. ACADEMIA, Nanzan University.

Garcia, O., & Wei, L. (2014). *Translanguaging: Language, bilingualism, and education*. New York, NY: Palgrave Macmillan.

Kawakami, A. (2012). Drama on the global stage: Cultural competence and the role of drama techniques in the EFL classroom. *Mask and Gavel, 1,* 16-21. Retrieved from https://sites.google.com/site/speechdramaanddebatepublicsite/home/mask-gavel-archives/mask--gavel-volume-1

Kelly, C. (2011). What discoveries in neuroscience teach us about language learning. *関西大学商学論集, 56(2*), *153-161*.

Nunan, D., (2014). Task-based teaching and learning. In M. Celce-Murcia, D. M. Brinton, & M.A. Snow (Eds.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language*. Boston, MA: Heinle Cengage Learning.

Rivers, D. (2013). Institutionalized native-speakerism: Voices of dissent and acts of resistance. In S. A. Houghton & D.J. Rivers (Eds.), *Native Speakerism in Japan: Intergroup Dynamics in Foreign Language Education*. Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Shannon, M. (2013). Towards a merit-based award system for speech contests. *Mask and Gavel, 3, 26-33.*

Stoller, F. L. (2006). Establishing a theoretical foundation for project-based learning in second and foreign language contexts. In G. H. Beckett & P. C. Miller (Eds.), *Project-based second and foreign language education: Past, present, and future*. Charlotte, NC: Information Age Publishing, Inc.

Stoller, F. L. (2008). Content-based instruction. In N. Van Deusen-Scholl & N. H. Hornberger (Eds.), *Encyclopedia of language and education* (2nd ed., pp. 59–70). New York, NY: Springer.

Toastmasters, (2016). Retrieved from: https://www.toastmasters.org

Tuan, T. A., & Neomy, S. (2007). Investigating group planning in preparing for oral presentations in an EFL class in Vietnam. *RELC Journal, 38*(1)*, 104-124.*

James Carpenter received his MA in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL), and his M. Ed. in Educational Technology from Northern Arizona University. His research interests include project-based learning, the decolonization of English education, and language policy and planning. He lives in Tokyo with his wife and son, and currently teaches at Asia University. Outside of work and family, James enjoys practicing Goju Ryu karate at a dojo in Taito-ku.

Appendices

Appendix 1 Oral Presentation Outline

   I.   **Opening**

       a. Hello. Our presentation is called_____ (Title).

       b. Our topic is_____ (Topic)

       c. We think this topic is important because:

             1._____

             2._____

             3._____

       d. Message:

           We believe that_____ (problem) can/can be _____(verb)_by_____ _____(solution).

           We can do this by:

             1. _____ (Main Point 1).

             2. _____ (Main Point 2).

             3. _____ (Main Point 3).

   II.   **Body 1**

       a. First, we will talk about _____ (Main Point 1)

       b. Clear definition of Main Point 1

           _____

           _____

           _____

           _____

           _____

           _____

           _____

       c. Example

           1. Beginning

    2. Middle

    3. End

  d. Explanation of the drama

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

III.   **Body 2**

  a. First, we will talk about _____ (Main Point 2)

  b. Clear definition of Main Point 2

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

  c. Example

    4. Beginning

5. Middle

6. End

d. Explanation of the drama

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

IV.   **Body 3**
    a. First, we will talk about _____ (Main Point 3)
    b. Clear definition of Main Point 3

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

    c. Example

7. Beginning

      8. Middle

      9. End

   d. Explanation of the drama

_____

V.   Conclusion

   a. Paraphrase message: _____

   b. Review main points

_____

   c. Final comment

_____

   Thank you!

Appendix 2 Example 2 Oral Presentation

1. **Opening**

   a. Hello. Our presentation is called Maternity Harassment.

   b. Our topic is maternity harassment.

   c. We think this topic is important because:

       1. Maternity discrimination is a bad thing.

       2. Childcare is important.

       3. The falling birthrate in Japan makes us worried.

   d. Message:

      We believe that maternity harassment can be solved by changes in social consciousness.

      We can do this by:

         1. Consulting many people.

         2. Promoting better understanding.

         3. Cracking down on lawbreakers.

2. **Body 1**

   a. Main Point 1: Consult many people.

   b. Consulting is important.

      For example, women who are experiencing maternity harassment should consult with their family, their husband, their best friend or an adviser. We like consulting because it can make pregnant women feel better.

    c. Drama

     1. Beginning

       Friend: Hello.

       Maternity: Hi.

       Friend: What are you doing? You look very worried.

       Maternity: I… I'm going to have a child. I'm going to have a baby.

       Friend: It is happy news! Why aren't you happy?

       Maternity: The reason is my boss. He says that, "Pregnant women must leave this company." I feel shocked and angry.

     2. Middle

       Friend: Go talk with an advisor.

       Adviser: Hello. How can I help you?

     3. End

       Friend: We have problem.

       Maternity: My boss makes me unhappy.

       Adviser: That is maternity harassment! Leave it to me! I can help you!

  d. Explanation

When women are pregnant, they are very happy.

But, they often have worries because of their careers.

They should talk to a reliable person.

So, they can reduce their worries.

3. Body 2

a. Main Point 2: Promote better understanding.

b. Understanding is important.

For example, if you have knowledge, you can help pregnant women.

We like understanding because without knowledge you cannot do anything.

c. Drama

  1. Beginning

Adviser: Excuse me?

Boss: What? Why have you come here?

Adviser: Our reason? We want to teach you about pregnant women's situation!

  Pregnant women must face many challenges.

  2. Middle

Friend: Pregnant women have backaches.

Maternity: Pregnant women can't eat their favorite food.

Adviser: Pregnant women have morning sickness.

  3. End

Friend: Later, pregnant women can hardly move.

Maternity: Then, pregnant women can also have "Maternity blues".

Maternity & Friend & Adviser: After the baby is born, new mothers must work all the time without a break.

d. Story

Pregnant women work hard, without a rest.

Then, pregnant women hope society will help support them.

But, mostly people don't help.

So, we should understand pregnant women's situation more and help.

4. Body 3

a. Main Point 3: Crack down on lawbreakers.

b. There are laws that protect pregnant women.

For example,

The equal employment act, child care and family care leave act and

the act on advancement of measures to support raising next-generation children.

We like these laws because they can have a strong influence on Japanese society.

c. Drama

   1. Beginning

      Boss: I understand.

      Friend: Really? So...

   2. Middle

      Boss: But! I won't change my thinking.

    Pregnancy is hard, so pregnant women should stay home.

    They should take care of their child.

    Please leave!

     Lawyer: You can't do this.

     Boss: Oh? Why can't I?

     Lawyer: I'm a lawyer. That is unlawful.

        The law says that you can't fire her because she is pregnant.

        If you do that, you will be arrested by the police.

   3. End

      Boss: That is a bad thing! OK. I will change my thinking and she can continue working.

d. Explanation

    Pregnant women need a lot of money, so they hope to continue working.

    But, companies often fire them.

    So, the laws in Japan should be strong to protect pregnant women.

    Then, life will become easier for pregnant women.

5. Conclusion

a. Some people say that firstly, all women have the right to work, even after their baby is born. Secondly, discrimination is not good. Finally, we also want to take care of the children in our society. Other people say that firstly, I don't want to pay a lot of labor costs. Secondly, it is difficult to change our society. Finally, men don't understand women.

But we think that maternity harassment is not good!   Pregnant women should be recognized.

Thank you!