

Part 2: Inquiry into language learners

# Minimizing oral apprehension and stage fright: A report on developing the oral presentation skills of non-native speakers of English



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### ABOUT MARK

I have been teaching English in Japan for more than 10 years. My research interests include teacher and learner development, development of oral presentation skills among non-native speakers of English, and Computer Assisted Language Learning.

日本で10年以上英語を教えています。関心のある研究テーマは、教師と学生の能力開発、ノンネイティブ・スピーカーの英語でのプレゼンテーション技能の育成、コンピューターを利用した語学学習(CALL)です。

### ABOUT MIYUKI

I am a Special Assistant to the President at Joetsu University of Education, Niigata, Japan. I hold a Ph.D. from Edith Cowan University, Western Australia. Presently, I am in charge of a research project for post-graduate overseas study programs supported by Monbukagakushou (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology). I am also involved in international exchanges between Joetsu University of Education and overseas universities. My research interests include learner autonomy and learner beliefs in language education and teacher education in Japanese language teaching.

私は新潟県上越教育大学学長特別補佐です。ウェスタン・オーストラリア州のエディス・コーワン大学で博士号を取得しました。現在、文部科学省に助成されている、大学院レベルの海外研究プログラムを担当しています。また上越教育大学と海外の大学との交換留学にも携わっています。関心のある研究テーマは、学習者自律、語学教育における学習者のピリーフ、日本語の教員教育です。

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### ABSTRACT

*The aim of this paper is to report on the 2004 Oral Communication Course for postgraduate students at a national university in Niigata Prefecture, and to reflect on what we learned from teaching the course. As well as helping students to improve their oral presentation skills, the purpose of our project was to learn about the learners' needs, how they interacted with each other in the international environment, and how they developed their presentation skills. Through the students' perspectives, we have tried to improve the course structure and its content throughout the semester and throughout the 2005 academic year. In the class, we focused on developing speech ideas in groups, discussing effective methods for preparation and delivery of various presentations, and giving brief speeches. Students also learnt how to select, prepare, and present an academic paper in their own field of expertise in front of an audience, and take an active participation in the discussion and debate that followed.*

この論文は、新潟県の国立大学における、2004年度の大学院生向けのオーラル・コミュニケーションのコースについて報告し、私たちがその科目を教えて気づいたことについて考察することを目的とする。このプロジェクトの目標は、学生のオーラル・プレゼンテーション能力を高めるのみでなく、学習者のニーズ、国際的な環境でどう影響し合い、プレゼンテーションのスキルを向上させたかを探ることである。学期中、また2005年度中、学生の視点から授業計画と内容の改善を試みた。クラスでは効果的な準備、様々なプレゼンテーションでの話し方について、短いプレゼンテーションをすることによってスピーチのアイデアをグループ内で作り上げることに焦点を当てた。また、学生は自分の専門分野の学術論文を選択し、準備し、聴衆の前で発表し、発表後の討論と議論に参加する方法について学んだ。

## INTRODUCTION

If you have not done so yet, probably one day in the future you will need to speak in front of an audience of two or more people. By not speaking at all, your relationships with others, and even career prospects may be adversely affected. A sad truth is that speaking in front of an audience for many people can be a real problem. In fact, it has been well documented that when it comes to speaking or presenting in public, many people suffer from Communication Apprehension (CA).

Grice & Skinner (2001) defined CA as “perceived fear or anxiety associated with either real or anticipated communication with another person or persons” (p.44). Whalen (1995) goes further by saying that “the speech anxiety occurs when the speaking occasion has not happened yet, and the stage fright occurs when the speaker is in front of an audience and fear takes over.” (p.93)

Although what we have just said may sound scary to many of us, Whalen, Grice and Skinner claim that CA is normal and almost everyone experiences stage fright.

Therefore, let us not worry about something that is natural and many speakers experience. What we need to do, is to approach the topic in a pragmatic way supported by theory. Then, and only then, will our learners be able to minimize their CA and at the same time develop their presentation skills.

## BACKGROUND

Have you ever thought about what makes one an effective communicator, and why some people are better communicators than others? Have you ever thought why some people had so many excellent ideas, but nobody wanted to listen to them? Finally, have you ever thought that you too, if desired, could be an effective communicator as well?

There is plenty of literature to suggest that effective communication skills, including public speaking, although not easily, can be learned by almost anyone (Cole, 1993; Gaulke, 1997; Moss, 1994; Whalen, 1995; Williams, 1983).

However, there is not much literature on teaching those skills to non-native speakers of English. In fact this “mishap” is clearly indicated by Harington and Lebeau (1998) in *Speaking of Speech*, teacher’s book (p. i). Also, there is a kind of unconscious inclination by many authors to simply write about how to make or deliver speeches, rather than how to present to an audience. Harington and Lebeau have made a clear distinction between speech and presentation, by saying:

We define “speech” as a language intensive activity. The speaker may or may not use visuals. The primary medium of communication is the spoken word.... On the other hand a “presentation” is image intensive. The visuals are the central means of communication. After all, to “present” means to show.... In a sense, a speech maximizes the importance of the language. The speaker must be very competent in the language. Presentation, on the other hand, maximizes the importance of visuals and thereby reduces the importance of language competency. (p.80)

With this distinction in mind, we have decided to construct our own course specifically designed for our students. Simply speaking, we wanted to help our international learners to master basic presentation skills, without worrying too much about speech making, and their levels of English. Thus, at the end of the course, each student would be able to present their

own topic of interest within a certain time limit. As Williams (1983) puts it, “These days, audiences expect a speaker to be on his feet for about ten minutes, and during this period it is his job to hold the attention and the interest of his listeners.” (p.10)

Therefore, our challenge was enormous, as we had to prepare our learners to deliver a ten-minute presentation keeping as much of the audience’s attention as possible. Taking into consideration the fact that many the learners in this course came from different countries with different backgrounds, represented different departments and had different interests, scared us a lot. As a result of such circumstances, in addition to all the theory covered in the class, this course had to present our learners with opportunities to develop their practical skills. We thought that covering theory alone would be a failure unless students had opportunities to gain hands-on experience in presenting to an audience. How would we expect one to learn how to swim or to drive a car from reading only a book?

We also had to be careful, as Cole (1993) points out, that we should not try to talk at people, but talk *to* people or *with* people. Therefore, we needed to develop a message by considering others’ points of view. Questions such as why should the audience listen to us, what they will gain by listening and how both, the speaker and the listener can be satisfied, should be answered by each presenter. Then, only after considering these questions, the presenter would be able to communicate with the audience.

### **PURPOSE OF THE COURSE**

As there were many oral assignments planned ahead, such as oral reports on students’ research, or presenting at seminars and lectures, the main purpose of the course was to help students improve their oral presentation skills. Students were given a number of techniques and strategies to manage communication apprehension, think critically, research, prepare and deliver effective persuasive messages, understand cultural and gender differences, become effective listeners, and work effectively individually as well as in a group.

The second purpose of this course was for the teachers to learn how to teach better, how to interact with people better, and to gain more knowledge about the subject matter. We always asked our learners not to be selfish to think that they will only learn from us. The teachers are only facilitators of learning and they want to develop their skills as well, just like anybody else. In fact, if we wanted our students and ourselves to succeed, we believed that we should be able to learn from each other whenever we could. Learning should be continuous, not temporary, and not be limited to the class environment only. This is what we have tried to have our learners understand.

### **THE PARTICIPANTS OF THE COURSE**

The class consisted of 14 postgraduate students from five different countries (including Japan) of mixed technical majors. There were two students from Malaysia, two from China, three from Thailand, one from Venezuela, and six Japanese students. For this reason, the mode of communication amongst all of the class participants and instructors was the English language. Despite the fact that all of those students were non-native speakers of English, they were quite fluent in the language. This fact however, does not mean that they were perfect (native-like) speakers of English. Richards, John & Platt (1992) define language fluency as “a level of proficiency in communication, which includes: ... the ability to speak with a good but not necessarily perfect command of intonation, vocabulary, and grammar...” (p.141)

Moreover, the main reason why all these students enrolled in this elective course was to learn how to present their research findings at conferences, as this was one of their requirements to graduate. In addition, the learners had to pursue their normal studies and cope with other subjects as well.

When asked why they had decided to enrol in the Oral Presentation course all the students gave almost the same reasons:

1. Lack of confidence in English
2. Fear of speaking in front of an audience
3. Fear of not knowing what, how and when to say something, and finally
4. Fear of not being able to handle questions from an audience

From now on we will elaborate on the above points by integrating some practical examples of activities covered each week in the class. It is not our intention to explain all the theory covered in the class, but to select only a few examples of practices where the students' development can be clearly seen. For theoretical background on the topic, the reader should refer to the list of references at the end of this paper, or to any books on oral presentation or speech making.

### **THE CONTENT OF EACH LESSON**

The period of the course was one semester, and there were 15 180-minute lessons in total. To fulfil the main purpose of the course, a schedule of weekly activities was set by the instructors. Throughout the course, the theories behind the oral presentation skills improvement were introduced to the students. Based on these theories, various activities were put into practice. Therefore, the weekly programme was as follows:

#### **WEEK 1: SHORT INTERVIEWS IN ENGLISH**

The week started with short interviews in English. This was done in order to select only the students whose level of English was at least conversational. After the interview, study guides made by the instructors were distributed, and the course content, including its requirements, was explained in detail.

#### **WEEKS 2 AND 3: COMMUNICATION**

Learners were introduced to the "Communication Model" (Sadler & Tucker, 1987), with detailed analysis of it. They were told that the model is made of three components (source, channel, and destination) and that for communication to be successful, the recipient of the message had to provide the sender with appropriate feedback.

While describing the model, we were happy to see students' involvement by trying to understand what each part of the model was for. They asked us lots of questions; however, one thing that our learners could not agree with was the feedback. Most of them were under the impression that once the sender (source) sends the message to the recipient (destination) the job would be done.

Therefore, in order to stress the importance of the feedback in communication, we decided to use a very common activity called "Chinese whispers":

A message was given to one member of the class who had to whisper it to another person, who then had to whisper it to another. This had to continue until all the class members had

heard the message. Then, the last person who wrote the message on the board found out that it was completely different from the original message.

In addition, for those learners who still had any doubts about the importance of feedback, an example was given of a person asking another person to buy a tomato sandwich. The result was that the buyer brought him a ham sandwich.

#### **WEEK 4: COMMUNICATION APPREHENSION (CA)**

Students were told that fear, as previously described, is perfectly normal, and is part of the body's natural reaction to threat, and that most people experience fear or stage fright (Whalen, 1995, p.93). For those students who were nervous before or during the presentation, the message was not to try to eliminate nervousness, as nervousness is natural, and can even quite often benefit the speaker (Greece & Skinner, 2001). This is because, as the authors state, "nervousness is energy, and it shows that you care about performing well." (p. 45)

There was one activity asking learners to introduce themselves in front of the class. They had only five minutes to prepare the talk and another two to five minutes to present it. This part of the exercise was deliberately administered on our students, so they could experience speech anxiety and stage fright.

Students were also told of possible causes of CA and of possible solutions on how to manage them. In another activity, learners were required to state at least 10 causes of their own CA and how they think they should manage them. The reason for this activity was that, we believed that once students became aware of their own problems, it might be easier for them later to present in public.

#### **WEEK 5: NON-VERBAL COMMUNICATION**

Have you ever been in the situation where someone was saying something, but you had a feeling that he or she was not telling the truth, or there was something else odd in the presentation? Have you ever thought that the reason might have been in the lack of an appropriate match between his words and his non-verbal behaviour?

There is abundant material on non-verbal communication, and writers sometimes see the topic from different viewpoints (Harrington & Lebeau, Greece & Skinner, Sadler & Tucker). This is however not important. What is important is that we do not speak only with our lips; the way we move, the way we look at people, the way we dress up, everything counts. Simply speaking, we communicate with our bodies as well. According to Mahrebian (1968) 93% of a person's message comes from non-verbal communication, 55% come from facial expressions and body posture, and 38% come from voice qualities.

One of the activities of this course required students to indicate with their bodies the following feelings and emotional states: self-satisfaction, aggression, shame, superiority, tension, relaxation, etc.

The purpose of this exercise was to experience how reliably we can communicate our feelings through our posture.

#### **WEEK 6: SPEECH MAKING AND ORAL PRESENTATION SKILLS**

We explained what speeches were for (Sadler & Tucker, 1987) and how a typical speech should be structured. One of the activities of the lesson required students to implement some of the speech techniques learned in the lesson, and to prepare a three-minute speech on any topic of their choice.

### **WEEK 7: ORAL PRESENTATION**

This presentation was for three minutes and was videotaped. After the presentation, the videotape was played back and suggestions on how to improve in the future were made. The presenter was also asked to summarize the comments made by the audience, and to evaluate him/herself. For the teacher's record an Oral Presentation Rubric for each student was filled in and collected at the end of the lesson (see MAYA! website for Appendix 6A).

### **WEEK 8: TEAM WORK AND TEAM PRESENTATIONS**

Reasons for working in teams were explained while the advantages and disadvantages of teamwork were discussed. Students were told that a team or a group must have a leader, and therefore were told of Dwyer's (1993) leadership styles: Authoritarian, Democratic, and Group-centered. In one of the activities of the lesson, students were asked to state which leadership style was best and why? They were also asked to identify their own leadership style.

There was also an activity on how to handle hostile (including unnecessary) questions. For example, students in groups of four were given a list of questions (problems) to which they had to find solutions. Later they had to read their answers out loud and the best answer was chosen through a discussion and debate among all the members in the class.

Finally, there was an activity on how to get to know your classmates better. Students had to write down four things about themselves. Three things had to be true; one had to be false. The goal was to create a believable lie about oneself, something that another person, when meeting you, would believe to be true. The reason for this activity to be introduced in Week 8, and not earlier, was that we wanted our learners to clearly see that even after knowing their partners for two months, it was still impossible to make accurate assumptions about one another.

### **WEEK 9: ONLINE SEMINARS**

Based on their homework, students presented their Online Seminars. For an Online Seminar, the students had to search the Internet (for example, YAHOO search engine) on any topic of interest, and later report it to the class. The purpose of this assignment was to help students:

- Further develop their researching, note-taking, listening skills;
- Get new ideas on presentation techniques, and;
- Increase their overall general knowledge.

### **WEEK 10: LISTENING STRATEGIES**

Students were reminded that communication was a two-way process and involved active listening as well. As Sadler and Tucker (1987) stated, we may be hearing all the time, but only for some of that time are we actually listening, that is taking in the information, storing, analysing, or evaluating the content. First, students were asked in groups to list some of the factors that influence listening skills, and to list how speakers can improve our listening attention. After identifying listening strategies, the major part of the lesson was spent on the activity called "Listening to Personality Tapes" (Sadler & Tacker, 1987). It was important that the person on the tape was not identified by name, gender, or any other specific way. The purpose of this exercise was to encourage participants to listen attentively to the speech and the use of the voice of the speaker. What we hear when someone speaks, besides the information of ideas, was the key question. Then, questions were asked about the speaker's gender, age, physical features, job, character, etc.

### **WEEK 11: DISCUSSION AND DEBATE**

Students were told why debating was important in a democratic society and things to be careful about. For example, they were told to use clear language that could be understood by everyone involved, evidence to support what they had to say, be sure of facts, avoid emotionalism, and be sure not to attack the arguer, but the topic under consideration.

The activity was to conduct a debate in class, either formally or as an open discussion. Participants were divided into small groups and had to select a topic from a given list or a topic of their own.

### **WEEK 12: MESSAGE PACKAGING AND MESSAGE DELIVERY**

Quite often presenters seem to be all very wise after the presentation, instead of during the presentation, and be able to think of all sorts of things to say afterwards. Students were asked why those sorts of things happen to people and how to avoid them. Regarding the solution to the above problem, students were told of the importance of strategies to be used by an effective speaker such as; determining the purpose of his/her presentation; being aware of the audience's needs; and planning the presentation in three stages: opening, body, and conclusion.

### **WEEKS 13 AND 14: ORAL PRESENTATIONS**

Weeks 13 and 14 were devoted to students' oral presentations and were based on the students' field of expertise. For their presentations, students were given five to seven minutes. Twice as much time was spent on video viewing, discussion, and evaluation. We have adhered to the following steps:

- Student's oral presentation (5 to 7 min.)
- Questions and discussion (2 to 4 min.)
- Video viewing (max. 5min.)
- Student's self evaluation (1 to 2 min.)
- Written peers evaluation (1 to 2 min.)

Peer evaluations were based on the previously mentioned rubric that was developed by us, and has been slightly modified in order to accommodate all the students in the class.

In the rubric, the last column (total score divided by 4) means that the total mark was divided by FOUR evaluators: that is each student was evaluated by two lecturers and two different students selected at random. The instructors believed that this was the way to evaluate students fairly by shifting some authority to students as well.

### **WEEK 15: COURSE OVERVIEW AND COURSE EVALUATION**

This day was for completing unfinished tasks and the collection of students' assignments and feedback about the course. The feedback from the students is presented and discussed in the next section.

### **GETTING THE STUDENTS' FEEDBACK**

As was mentioned earlier, the secondary purpose of this project was to learn about the students' needs, feelings, problems, and how they interacted with each other in the international environment of the classroom. This was done for the purpose of improving our teaching



methods, and to gain more knowledge about the subject matter.

In order to elucidate the students' needs, feelings, problems, and the ways of their interactions, right from the beginning of the semester, we asked students to write their reflections about classroom learning. We recommended that the students write their reflections at home, on the same day, while their memories were fresh. Students did not need to worry about being critical, because they knew we were looking for constructive criticism from them, and that we wanted to learn as well. We believed that this kind of approach would make our students write their reflections honestly, as they could see us as partners in learning, rather than as teachers.

Below are the five questions that we asked our learners to reflect on each week:

1. What have you learnt today?
2. What did you like about the lesson?
3. What didn't you like about the lesson?
4. Comment on any difficulties you had today.
5. How would you evaluate your participation in class?

All responses were written in English by the students. Some examples of the students' responses are presented in Appendix 6B on the MAYA! website.

### **OUR LEARNING FROM THE STUDENTS' FEEDBACK**

Based on the students' comments it can be clearly seen that it took them two to three weeks to adjust to the course structure and level. This is evident in the comments such as "some students are too quiet in the class," or "the three-hour lesson is too long." However, from the fourth week, almost all the students came to enjoy the lessons to the extent that some students complained to us that the three-hour lesson was too short. Clearly they wanted to talk more and be more involved in the classroom activities.

Another finding concerns Question 3 (What didn't you like about the lesson?). Only some students answered this question. The majority of the students did not reply to this question, or just replied with "No difficulties," or "It was OK."

Question 4 (Comment on any difficulties you had today?) was also not answered by many students. Those students who answered this question complained mainly about their level of English. With time however, as we progressed with our schedule, students who had earlier problems with English, tended to relax and feel that making mistakes was part of their learning.

### **REFLECTIONS ON THE COURSE AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDIES**

It was quite interesting to see how a group of international students could overcome their English language barriers and work collectively throughout the course. Their eagerness to swap partners for different group activities, and work on their own, clearly showed the learners' independence from the teacher, and enthusiasm to learn on their own. In groups, students had time to discuss things on their own, were not afraid to make mistakes, could learn about each other more, were relaxed, and therefore could participate in the class even more actively.

Regarding the students' comments, as there were some students who hoped for frequent two-way communication with us, probably next time instead of waiting almost until the end of the course, we should collect their reflections at least on a fortnightly basis. This would provide us, the teachers, with valuable feedback on the course, and in case of a problem or inquiry, it would allow us to attend to it as soon as possible.

## CONCLUSION

This project was done for two main purposes. The first one was to report on the 2004 Oral Communication class for postgraduate students at a national university in Niigata Prefecture. And the other one was to reflect on what we, as instructors, could learn from teaching the course. In the course, we focused on developing speech ideas in groups, discussing effective methods for preparation and delivery of various presentations, and giving brief speeches.

From the students' reflections, we have tried to improve the course structure and its content throughout the semester and throughout the 2005 academic year. It was quite interesting to see how a group of international students with multicultural backgrounds could overcome their English language barriers and work collectively throughout the course. Their eagerness to swap partners for different group activities, as well as working on their own, clearly showed us their independence from the teacher, and enthusiasm to learn on their own.

## CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 1

## HIROMI ISHIKAWA

Some people say, “Just try to imagine that you see potatoes in front of you as an audience and not a single person listening to you.” Other people say, “Write a Chinese character meaning ‘a person’ three times on your palm and pretend to swallow those ‘people’ one at a time. Then you won’t get nervous.” OK. Let me try. However, as soon as I start my presentation, I find that their advice doesn’t work for me. I get frightened and my legs start to shake. My trembling voice makes me feel embarrassed. This happens even when I speak in Japanese, and in the case of English, the level of communication apprehension increases a hundredfold. No exaggeration! The chapter by Surma and Usuki made me look back on my own past experiences of stage fright. For this reason, as I read along their paper, I felt like being one of their students.

As a non-native speaker of English, I think that being incompetent in English is the main cause of communication apprehension no matter how much image intensiveness overcomes the language competency in the presentation. If I had been conducting this research myself, I might have wanted to include everything in class, that is, both content and skills. However, Surma and Usuki decided to focus mainly on developing the students’ presentation skills without worrying too much about speech making. Their decision of what to focus on surely made their teaching procedures step-by-step ones, guiding their students to what they should learn from class. Also I learnt that their careful analysis of their students’ circumstances was the base of their decision-making. In this way, their teaching procedures and the class content were carefully chosen and organized by adapting both theory and the students’ needs, which surely resulted in the students’ satisfaction of taking the course.

I liked the idea of “talking to people or with people” by Cole (1993) in their quote. When I finish making speeches or doing presentations, I just say to myself, “OK. I’m done!” without considering the audience’s feelings. However, thanks to the quote, I now realize that making speeches or doing presentations are part of bilateral communication. This means that it is essential to learn presentation skills to hold the audience’s interest and keep them listening to you.

I also think that it was good for the students to think about their possible causes of communication apprehension and manageable solutions themselves beforehand. I believe that they could be mentally prepared in advance. I thought about my own stage fright and its reasons while reading this chapter. The mixed feelings of my strong desire to be a “good” speaker and the anxieties of language incompetence and being less-experienced in public speech make me feel nervous while I prepare for my presentations or speeches. However, after all, I am energized by my nervousness to try to put myself on a higher pedestal. I’m glad to find Greece & Skinner’s quote in Surma and Usuki’s paper to support my analysis that reads “nervousness is energy.”

From my experience, I can say that experience can be also one of the solutions to avoid nervousness. The point is how teachers can make their students be independent enough to try in and outside the class. From this point of view, the students’ feedback shows that Surma and Usuki’s project successfully implemented the importance of being autonomous. This is a great example of a well-balanced success of teacher and student autonomy.

## CRITICAL READER RESPONSES 2

## NANCI GRAVES

This article provides a valuable reminder that, for a considerable number of people, public speaking ranks as a major phobia even when done in the native language. It was interesting to note that all of the reasons students gave for electing to take the course described in this study were negative ones, based on recognition of their lack of autonomy in the context of speaking in front of an audience in English. Such motivation suggests that they were admirably seeking a kind of ‘aversion therapy’ in order to confront their fears and build both their presentation skills and self-confidence, thus increasing their sense of autonomy to handle public speaking situations with greater courage. As a result, the writers’ focus not only on providing guided practice in effective presentation techniques but also on helping learners analyse their nervousness and establish a friendly relationship with their audience seems especially noteworthy. Although nothing can alter the fact that a presentation is always going to involve a test of an individual’s communication abilities, learning how to view oneself more objectively and re-visualize one’s image of an audience as supportive listeners rather than threatening adversaries can go a long way towards reducing the fear of being judged. This self-reflective approach could also be used more extensively in general English classes to encourage learner acceptance of the idea that while it is normal to find communicating in a foreign language a daunting undertaking, nonetheless there are ways to meet the challenge and work through one’s fears with success. The authors have therefore provided a useful model of how to scaffold learners’ development of both inner and outer autonomy in a very clear, systematic, and learner-sensitive way.

## STACEY VYE

This study prompted me to revisit the value of inviting the learner to experience the process of learning theory (in this case presentation skills), integrated with relevant practical weekly activities, which allows learners spaces in the decision-making. Equally interesting, at the onset of the paper, Mark and Miyuki suggest that speaking in front of an audience is a real problem, and many people suffer from Communication Apprehension (CA). Subsequently, the authors interacted with MAYA readers by posing questions about public speaking in the ‘Background’ section. As a consequence, that action helped me to reflect on my own dread of public speaking. In addition, I thought certainly even the seasoned researcher is concerned with problem solving in overcoming stage fright and tackling vague questions in their own language, so these issues would be major concerns for these students presenting in a foreign language as their comments suggest. For this reason, I was tantalized by the students’ feedback and wanted to know more about their comments. Perhaps it is significant during the beginning of the course some students claimed that three-hour sessions were too long, however after the fourth week some students complained that the sessions were too short. These comments most likely were made because Mark and Miyuki assisted the students through carefully thought out activities that encouraged learner reflection. This helped to naturally allow the students discover for themselves autonomously which presentations skills they would like to work on, leading them to want more session time to do so.