

Part 2: Inquiry into language learners

# **Developed autonomy through self- and peer-assessment and reflection: Awareness and success in students' presentation skills**



**Yoko Wakui**

Keisen University,  
Aoyama Junior College  
[ywakui@bu.iij4u.or.jp](mailto:ywakui@bu.iij4u.or.jp)

## **ABOUT YOKO**

I graduated with my Master's degree in TESOL from Columbia University Teachers College in 2003. Having taught at Risho University from 2003 through 2005, I have been teaching at Keisen University since 2004 and Aoyama Junior College since 2005. My research interests include autonomy, motivation, psychology, and strategies for all four skills.

2003年、コロンビア大学大学院ティーチャーズカレッジ修士号取得。2003年から2005年まで立正大学にて教鞭を取り、2004年より恵泉女学園大学、2005年より青山学院女子短期大学にて講師を務める。オートノミー、モチベーション、心理学、全四技能の習得方法を中心に研究を行っている。

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many thanks go out to all of the Learner Development Special Interest Group officers who worked hard to publish this book. Special thanks also go to Eric Skier and Miki Kohyama for their dedication to this project, to our collaborating researchers, Mark Surma and Jodie Stephenson, and to everyone else who has given me insights into this project from various points of view. Thank you!

## ABSTRACT

*My goal in this paper is to investigate three questions. My first question is whether students' awareness of learning processes was raised, and whether they realized the importance of autonomy for their own learning, using self- and peer-assessment. Another question is how self- and peer-assessment influenced students' presentation skills. The last question is how students responded to those assessments. Twenty-eight students in a required course in a university made two presentations in one semester. They discussed and decided on the criteria for evaluating presentation skills a week before their presentation and assessed themselves and peers based on those criteria on the day of the presentation. Students used this self-assessment list to set goals for developing their presentation skills. At first they were hesitant about evaluating their peers' presentations or giving comments on them but would later on end up taking much more active roles in the process. The results may suggest some implications for future alternative assessment method and curriculum design.*

本章で私は3つの疑問について着目し、論証する。第一に、学生達が自己及び仲間評価によって学習プロセスに対する意識を高め、オートノミーの重要性を認識するのだろうか。また、この評価方式が学生の発表能力にどのような影響を与えるのだろうか。そして、果たして学生がその評価方式に対してどのような反応を示すのだろうか。女子大学の必修科目の28人の学生が1学期中に2回発表を行う。発表の1週間前に発表能力の評価基準を議論のうえ作成し、次の週にその基準に基づき、自己及び仲間の発表の評価を行う。学生達は自分の発表能力を磨くために、自己評価のリストを目標として利用する。学生達は最初仲間の発表を評価したりコメントを述べたりすることを躊躇するが、後に積極的になる。この結果は、今後の評価方法やカリキュラムに何らかの影響を与えることになるかもしれない。

Twenty-eight female students majoring in International Studies in a university in Tokyo participated in this study. I chose low-intermediate-level students as participants, because low-level students cannot find their own strategies, whereas high-level students do not need much support, because they already know how to improve their ability autonomously. The students were interested in social issues, but it does not necessarily mean that they were comfortable with speaking English. The six-month course, Current Affairs, was a required course, but students could choose their preferred teacher out of three. They had a chance to sit in different classes for about two weeks and then make their decisions. We met twice a week, so it was possible to observe as many as four lessons before they finally decided on which course to choose. A large number of students, 28, signed up for my course, whereas around 20 enrolled in the other teachers' courses. Perhaps this was because I allowed them to have a voice in the selection of the textbook and which topics we would be discussing. Some students were motivated to work hard, they said, because they had such freedom.

Autonomy in language learning is desirable (Cotterall, 1995). She claims as below;

The practical argument for promoting learner autonomy is quite simply that a teacher may not always be available to assist. Learners need to be able to learn on their own because they do not always have access to the kind or amount of individual instruction they need in order to become proficient in the language.

I explored the students' autonomy through the implementation of self- and peer-assessments and their reflections. I also investigated whether self- and peer-assessments would be beneficial to students in improving their presentation skills. In addition, I examined how students would respond to the measurement of self- and peer-assessments, which seemed to be a new form of assessment to them. Students said that they had not had much experience with such assessments, so I encouraged them to reflect on the assessment system as a whole.

Before I started the project, I had heard many stories from numerous teachers working at various places such as schools and companies that students in Japan were very shy and just read their manuscripts without looking at the audience, and that they did not understand what making a presentation truly meant. In fact, I agreed with them that students are usually shy and I had encountered the same situation in the past. The students I taught did not seem to realize what the purpose of giving a presentation was, or what they should do to make their presentation successful. It would not be an exaggeration to say that most students I have taught in the past are passive learners. It is said to be a part of Japanese culture that people are not encouraged to stand out in a crowd. It may be considered as "general shyness among Japanese students to take risks" (Hayashi & Cherry, 2004, p.8). Perhaps for that reason, when they stand in front of others, they tend to read their manuscript in the same way as others do.

What can I do, then, to help my students improve my students to develop their skills for making better presentations? I believe that one of the best ways to overcome this difficulty is for students themselves to become aware of the fact that they are the ones who are responsible for their own learning. Otherwise students may stay too dependent on teachers and not think critically on their own, try to solve their own problems, or find their way autonomously. Students have the capacity to take control of their own learning (Benson, 2001; Holec, 1981), so teachers could "open up their hidden possibility" (O'Keefe, 1999, p.23).

I have recently conducted a research project using a self-assessment sheet to improve my students' speaking ability and had positive results (Yada, Wakui, & Yui, 2004). So, with that success in mind, I thought that it might work again with the development of students' presentation skills, although I was not confident about having students conduct peer-assessment on their colleague's presentations. My lack of confidence in this situation was because I had not read many reports related to peer-assessment, especially on its effect on speaking activities in ESL/EFL settings. I also feared that I might have to face unexpected results. I will never forget my first time to give and receive peer-assessment in one of my graduate courses, *Facilitating Autonomy in Language Learning*. The experience was incredibly astonishing and terrifying at the beginning, but later on I found it to be extremely useful.

I encouraged my students to reflect upon what they did, because I believe that self-awareness is one of the most important things in the field of ESL/EFL. Kohonen (1992) claims "Only experience that is reflected upon seriously will yield its full measure of learning" (p.17). Benson (2001) and Leki (1991) also argue that having students experience reflecting on their language learning encourages them to take more responsibility for their own learning. Cotterall (2000) emphasizes that it would be impossible for learners to assess their past learning or plan for their future behavior without reflection (p.116). I thought that teaching techniques on how to improve presentation skills would not be enough, because it could compel students to be passive and they might not fully grasp the intention of what their teacher was saying. If they themselves were to think aloud, they may think critically and come to realize what is necessary for them to first do. Students would be able to even plan what they should do next. If learners gain control over planning their studies, it can produce positive results in terms of both autonomy and language learning (Benson, 2001, p.152).

To sum up, I believe that it would be possible to improve presentation skills simply by using self- and peer-assessments, if they are conducted properly, and if students become aware of their responsibility for their own learning. As such, the students in this class planned, organized, and evaluated their own learning as well as that of their peers. They reflected on what they and their peers did. In short, they acted autonomously to learn effectively. I will explain in the following section how I incorporated the idea of autonomy to help students to develop their presentation skills in a student-centered learning environment.

### **CURRICULUM-BASED APPROACH AND COOPERATIVE LEARNING**

On the first day of the course, I had students choose their favorite textbook from the books I presented to them and also had them decide on the topics they wanted to discuss choosing from the table of contents. In addition, I had students choose their teammates to work with for their presentations. Throughout the course, whenever I found an opportunity for students to make decisions I made every effort. This is because I believe that “learners have the right to make choices with regard to their learning” (Cotterall, 1995, p.219). In addition, “students acquire knowledge best when it is related to their own sets of abilities and interests” (Gardner, 1993), and also “when they take initiative” (Williams, 2001). Benson (2001) emphasizes that “Curriculum-based approaches to autonomy,” in which it is expected that learners develop the capability to take control over their learning by exercising autonomously at a number of levels, “are judged effective” (pp.163-170). Some degree of autonomy is vital for learners to become an effective language user (Nunan, 1997, p.202).

Students teamed up with their friends, conducted research on their favorite subjects, and made two presentations during the course. Students were engaged in social interaction through their research and cooperation for their presentations, discussions and mini-presentations on how to be a good presenter before each presentation, and through the filling out of self- and peer-assessment sheets after watching their performances on video to see how they actually performed and meeting with their assessors after each presentation. Students were encouraged to constructively discuss their peer performance to help each other in order to make their second presentations better. Our intelligence is developed through social interaction with others (Andrade & Moll, 1993; Armanet & Obese-jecty, 1981; O’Keefe, 1999). “Co-operative learning environments will incite learners to articulate their thoughts, connecting them to what already has been discussed in the group---it can therefore have an activating effect” (Schelfhout, Dochy, & Janssens 2004, p.184). When students are stimulated by their peers and develop the urge to gain new knowledge and reflect on it, they are more willing to take more responsibility in their own learning, which perhaps results in “better learning” (Leki, 1991, p.210). Students could learn much more with reflection than they would otherwise.

### **SELF-ASSESSMENTS**

One week before their first presentations, students discussed in class what they should do to make their presentations successful and what peer-assessment meant to them. The students were then informed that they were going to assess their own performance in the presentation. By presentation day, I had prepared the assessment sheets, which incorporated the students’ ideas. After watching their performances on video on the day of the presentation, the students assessed their own presentations using the sheet based on their discussions. The students repeated the same procedure for the second presentations to see if there was any improvement or not.



“Assessing themselves facilitates learning, raises students’ awareness and enhances goal-orientation” (Oscarson, 1989). It is necessary for students to assess their language performance to take control of their learning (Cotterall, 1995, p.224). As they considered the items on the self-assessment list, students became aware of what their weak points were and what they should do to overcome their weaknesses (Yada et al, 2005, p.6). “Students need to know what their abilities are, how much progress they are making, and what they can (or cannot yet) do with the skills they have acquired” (Blanche & Merino, 1989, p.313). Moreover, assessing themselves is also “very useful to check the syllabus and activities to provide more practical lessons for the students” (Yada et al, 2005, p.5).

### PEER-ASSESSMENTS

Both one class before their presentations and on the day of their presentations, students discussed what peer-assessment meant to them and what it should consist of. We had a discussion twice on the peer-assessments over two classes, because I feared that some students may have been absent the first time I introduced it. I also feared that the peer-assessment, they might misunderstand the idea of assessing one another by bringing in conventional attitudes toward peer-assessment, such as when students are expected to give others nothing but praise. Finishing all of their presentations, students checked items on the self-assessment sheet, but not for themselves this time, but for their peers.

I assigned each student one presenter to assess, because there was a possibility that one student might get many assessors and another might get none to give them feedback. In addition, students had different assessors for each presentation, since they had formed different groups based on the topic of each presentation. After assessors finished assessing their assigned presenters, I had them meet their presenters to talk about their presenter’s performance to give advice or suggestions. By doing so, every presenter would understand what one of her peers thought of her presentation and students could also discuss in detail what the presenters’ weak points or strong points were, and give constructive feedback, if they had any. Rollinson (2005) states that “peer feedback, with its potentially high level of response and interaction...can encourage a collaborative dialogue in which two-way feedback is established, and meaning is negotiated between the two parties” (p.25).

I wished to know in more detail how students would reflect on doing peer-assessment because it seemed totally new to my students as I described in the first section of this paper. In the next section, I am going to report on students’ reflection more in detail.

### STUDENTS’ REFLECTIONS ON PEER-ASSESSMENT

On the last day of the course, I distributed the questionnaire Students’ Reflections on Peer-assessment based on Saito’s questionnaire (2000), to see what students thought of peer-assessment as an alternative assessment, how severe they found they were as a rater, how reliable they thought their peers were and whether they liked peer-assessment or not. In fact, as I mentioned earlier, I was not optimistic about the expected results from using peer-assessment, because not much research had been done in a similar situation and I worried that I might find negative results. I, however, decided to take the risk, because I hoped that students would realize the value and importance of peer-assessment. When explaining to students the concept and process of peer-assessment one week before each presentation and again on the day of both presentations, I emphasized that the purpose of peer-assessment is not to *criticize* others, but to *help* others by giving them good advice, as a “positive constructive

contribution” (Yamashiro & Johnson, 1997, p.16) for their future presentations. Hansen and Liu (2005) contended that some teachers are reluctant to incorporate peer-assessment into their classes, because they think it is not effective and takes time, and they have had unsuccessful experiences. However, if the purpose of the activity is explained to students well enough, it can be beneficial (Hansen & Liu, 2005). They also argue that “when properly implemented, peer response can generate a rich source of information for content and rhetorical issues, enhance intercultural communication, and give student a sense of group cohesion” (p.31). In the next section, I will report on how beneficial the implementation of self- and peer-assessments was for both the students and myself.

## FINDINGS

### SELF-ASSESSMENTS

Students submitted a self-assessment sheet twice to evaluate their presentation skills (see MAYA! website for Appendix 5A). Students knew that the grades they gave themselves in their self-assessments would not be their final grades. I expected that its aim was for students to realize what they could do to make their presentations more successful. They were to determine their goal for their future improvement by repeating the same list and reflecting on the evaluation. Table 1 shows how students rated their own performances and what the difference was between the first and the second assessments. On average, they improved by 0.31 points according to their self-assessments. In particular, students realized after they finished the first presentations that it was better to prepare visual materials (cf. item nine and eleven in Appendix 5A on MAYA! website), and further developed their presentations for the second time. It means that they had learned that the aim of the presentation was not just reading their findings, but also conveying information and their messages to their audience.

**Table 1. Differences between First and Second Presentations in Self-assessments**

Presentation	Item evaluated												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Avg.
First	3.79	3.50	4.04	3.33	2.08	3.29	4.42	3.79	1.42	3.96	1.38	4.29	3.27
Second	3.85	3.19	3.78	3.00	2.00	3.07	4.37	3.78	4.07	4.19	3.44	4.26	3.58
Difference	0.06	-0.31	-0.26	-0.33	-0.08	-0.22	-0.05	-0.01	2.66	0.23	2.07	-0.03	0.31

Students, on the first self-assessment sheet, gave 17 kinds of comments related to feelings, regret, and hope, such as “I was shy and tense,” “I had no smile on my face,” and “I was shocked to find me talking in a small voice and had no eye contact on video.” All of those students’ comments I edited partially were from students’ questionnaires. I had encouraged them to write in English. As for the second self-assessment after their finishing the second presentations, I found that they had more kinds of comments, 20 in all, with more detailed and concrete explanations than in the first self-assessments. They had regrets, but they had tried to find solutions through reflection:

- “I should have prepared visual materials.”
- “I should have used some gestures.”
- “I should have pronounced clearly.”
- “We had to make a lot of preparations.”

- “If I could speak more fluently, I could make a better presentation.”

However, they also said they felt a sense of fulfillment:

- “Our presentation was more successful than before.”

In addition, they became more highly motivated and determined to work harder:

- “I want to master the presentation skill.”

### PEER-ASSESSMENTS

In regards to the students’ peer-assessments, I had astonishing results. I had expected that the students would hesitate to carry out their peer-assessments properly, which would in turn lead to negative results coming out of this project. In fact, the students seemed a little reluctant to do them at first but they were more enthusiastic about it later, especially during the process of the second presentations. It may be because they had become accustomed to the new system or understood my message, “positive, constructive contribution” (Yamashiro & Johnson, 1997), *peer-assessment was not meant to criticize, but to give good advice* to their friends. Table 2 illustrates that the students’ performances improved by 0.74 points according to their peer assessors. Notice that items nine and eleven showed remarkable improvement (see MAYA! website for Appendix 5B). It means that they had become interested in the message the presenters were trying to convey and the visual materials greatly helped facilitate communication.

**Table 2. Differences between First and Second Presentations in Peer-assessments**

Presentation	Item evaluated												
	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Avg.
First	4.35	4.35	4.65	3.92	2.46	3.88	4.69	4.38	1.58	4.12	1.77	4.88	3.75
Second	4.53	4.29	4.71	4.00	3.18	3.94	5.00	4.76	4.94	4.76	4.76	5.06	4.50
Difference	0.18	-0.05	0.05	0.08	0.71	0.06	0.31	0.38	3.36	0.65	3.00	0.17	0.74

After students made their respective presentations, I personally discovered some differences between the two assessments. For the first peer-assessment as a whole, students provided non-specific positive comments to encourage their friends. For example, “I hope you will give a better presentation next time.” They also used the sentences from the list (see MAYA! website for Appendix 5 B), such as “The content was clear and easy to understand.”

As for the second peer-assessment, on the other hand, there was the observed tendency where the students’ comments were very specific (Chauk, 1994, p.184). It was surprising to find “specific comments” that were almost like or even more concrete than those that may come from teachers. For instance, “Good job, great presentation, terrific, successful!” “You practiced (prepared) a lot (enough, perfectly).” “You should have confidence.” “Thank you, (name)! was the superb way to continue the presentation.” The students also tended to use more polite language than in their first assessments. “If you make more eye contact, your presentation will be perfect.” “If you can speak more fluently, your presentation will be better.” It seemed that they tried to give honest opinions, but also be careful not to hurt their peers’ feelings. The details of their comments clearly showed that students paid more attention to the content of their partner’s presentations and got themselves involved. This evidently fostered more interaction and discussion between partners after the presentations in order to further clarify

and explain the meaning of the comments. In the next section, I am going to write in detail about how students responded to being peer-assessed.

### STUDENTS' REFLECTIONS ON PEER-ASSESSMENT

Students responded quite positively to this assessment (see item 6 in Figure 1 and Appendix 5C on MAYA! website). They were hesitant at very first, but later they seemed to like it as a whole. As Figure 1 shows, they thought that their peer raters were reliable (item 5). Actually, students' rating is fairly reliable as Kumazawa (2005) claims. It was also surprising to find that students found it acceptable that the final grade reflected the peer-assessments (item 1). In short, they trusted their peers. Moreover, not many students wanted the instructor to be the only grader (item 2). Hatch (1991) claimed, "the more raters, the higher the reliability" (p.533). Students were severe when they graded themselves (item 3), whereas they were not so severe when they rated their peers (item 4).

Amazingly, students gave comments more critically than they did for the very first self-assessments. Their comments were not only detailed, but also included many ideas and various topics as discussed in this section. Some students wrote, "Marking should be based on a variety of opinions." Others have learned the importance of assessing others. "What is important is the effort to evaluate someone's performance properly." It was great that students also understood the aim of peer-assessments.

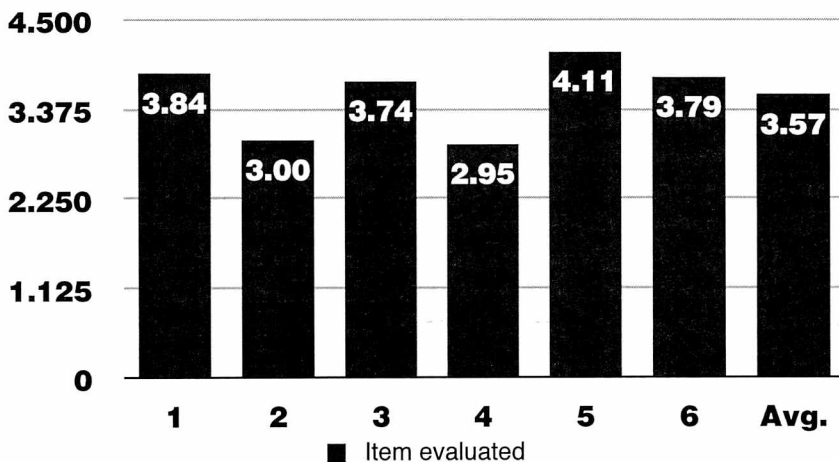


Figure 1. Students' Reflections on Peer-assessments.

Some students went on to claim that they would rather receive critical comments rather than simple compliments. "Since only compliments are usually given, as our teacher said, I want others to evaluate my performance a little more critically." Others became aware of the significance of presentation even further. One wrote, "What is important in giving a presentation is that it should be done not only for ourselves to be satisfied, but also for others to understand." I believe they have learned the real purpose of presentation by experiencing peer-assessment.

In fact, I had not mentioned the benefits of peer-assessment to my students at all, but many students went ahead and pointed out the possible benefits. They discovered themselves here through peer-assessment:

- I can see myself objectively.

- I can work on my own weakness.
- I can better myself.
- I think assessing others is beneficial to ourselves.
- When we evaluated others, almost all of us got serious.
- In order to evaluate others, we had to listen to the presentations carefully.

## CONCLUSION

In this paper, my focus was on the simultaneous development of learner autonomy and presentation skills. In conducting this study, I incorporated some features of autonomy such as a curriculum-based approach (Benson, 2001), cooperative learning (Armanet, & Obese-jecty, 1981; Kohonen, 1992; O'Keefe, 1999; Schelfhout, et al, 2004), and reflection (Cotterall, 1995, 2000; Kohonen, 1992; Leki, 1991) using self- and peer-assessments.

In conclusion, I believe that the idea of autonomy would be essential pedagogically, which would motivate students to learn on their own, and eventually achieve what they wanted. Therefore, I believe that autonomy can be implemented in a student-centered classroom using not only presentations, but any kind of activity, where choice and responsibility for learning are stressed (Mizuki, 2003). The students may have thought that there would be a certain level of freedom in the course activities and thus felt more involved in their studies. In fact, five students wrote in their reflection notes that they were motivated to study harder because they could choose their preferred text and topics to discuss.

Self-awareness is vital in learning, especially, when trying to improve one's presentation skills. As Nunan (1998) points out, "self-assessment develops critical self-awareness as a learner and skills in learning techniques" (Nunan, 1998, p. 116). By checking items on the assessment sheets and reflecting on what they did, students became aware of what they were lacking and where they needed to improve in order to develop their presentation skills. They discovered their own strategies and they used "self-assessment as aids to self-improvement" (O' Keefe, 1999, p.5). Brown and Hudson (1998) also stated the various benefits of having students conduct self-assessments.

Self-assessments have a number of advantages. First, self-assessments can be designed to be administered relatively quickly. Second, they inevitably involve students directly in the assessment process. Third, in turn, such involvement may help students understand what it means to learn a language autonomously. Finally, both the students' involvement and their greater autonomy can substantially increase their motivation to learn the language in question (Brown & Hudson, 1998, p.666).

My students were facilitated to learn more, by repeatedly reflecting on their performance (Kohonen, 1992; Yada et al, 2005; Yamashiro & Johnson, 1997) and eventually became autonomous learners. As I mentioned earlier, I believe that Japanese students in Japan can be classified as passive and less autonomous learners. Presenting may be intimidating to Japanese students, but with proper education, it would be possible for them to be successful. Teachers should encourage them to be more active and give them more opportunities to work on their own. I have confirmed this theory by finding that students become both more active and autonomous learners if only provided with the opportunities to be so.

Concerning peer-assessment, Cheng & Warren (2005) emphasize as follows:



Peer assessment is believed to enable learners to develop abilities and skills denied to them in a learning environment in which the teacher alone assesses their work. In other words, it provides learners with the opportunity to take responsibility for analyzing, monitoring and evaluating aspects of both the learning process and product of their peers (Cheng & Warren, 2005, p.94).

Assessing their peers' presentations helped students realize what should be considered to improve their own presentation as students. Students commented that they watched their peers' presentations more seriously than they did in the past, perhaps because they felt more responsibility. Students had to be both actors and observers of their own learning (Kohonen, 1992). Furthermore, Rollinson (2005) suggests that peer feedback can inspire students to have a collaborative dialog where meaning is negotiated. "Peer response can create a rich source of information for content and rhetorical issues, enhance intercultural communication, and give students a sense of group cohesion," if properly conducted (Hansen & Liu, 2005, p.31). Thus, students could become critical and autonomous learners through peer-assessment.

Littlewood (1999) contends,

If we define autonomy in educational terms as involving students' capacity to use their learning independently of teachers, then autonomy would appear to be an incontrovertible goal for learners everywhere, since it is obvious that no students, anywhere, will have their teachers to accompany them throughout life.

### **CLOSING REMARKS**

At the early stage of my writing, I received many invaluable comments from my peers. I often wondered whether I was on the right path or how I could develop my project into something original and insightful. One person said to me, "Where is autonomy?" Another said, "Oh, that's your new approach!" Even though each comment was short, each struck me as if it was a flash of lightning. That must be it! I would think to myself. At each moment, I was reminded time and again how great it was to have collaborative support such as this. I also appreciate my peers who worked with me to finish this report, which gave me a hint of pressure but also inspired me to pursue the challenge further. Without a doubt, I could not have completed this project on my own.

## CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 1

**SARA COTTERALL, AKITA INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY**

I was delighted to be invited to respond to Yoko Wakui's paper for two reasons. Firstly, I too teach a course which includes peer assessment of students' presentation skills. Therefore I was able to compare some of Wakui's experiences with my own. Secondly, I have recently been thinking about the relationship between self-assessment and learner autonomy. Wakui's paper has helped me clarify my ideas.

Early in her paper, Wakui states that she expected her (Japanese) learners to be passive in their approach to learning. I have heard such stereotypes a great deal since I arrived in Japan; whenever possible, I try to challenge them. In this case however, Wakui's own data disprove the myth, as we shall see.

The study's research questions will interest many language teachers. Exploring the impact of self- and peer-assessment on the development of presentation skills is likely to produce insights for both learning and teaching. While Wakui's methodology did not allow her to interview students, her questionnaire findings suggest that learners' awareness of the characteristics of good presentations was raised, and their skill levels increased.

Several aspects of Wakui's research design are worthy of note. Firstly, she encouraged her students to plan their presentations in pairs. Secondly, she required students to watch and critique videotaped recordings of their performance, and also to discuss their peers' assessment of their presentations. I believe that these two aspects of the design optimized the students' chances of learning from the experience.

However, two questions struck me while reading about the intervention. Firstly, what was Wakui's rationale for assigning only one student to assess each presentation? In my own class, every student assesses every presentation. I believe this helps students internalize the assessment criteria by requiring them to make relative judgments. It also gives them repeated opportunities to exercise their new assessment skills. My second question was – did Wakui provide any instruction in the skills of presentation, or did she leave students to “find their own way?” It would be interesting to know what intervention she used, if any.

The improvements in students' self- and peer-assessments reported by Wakui are extremely positive. (However, based on the examples provided, I could not agree that the second round of comments were more specific.) The learners report that their understanding of the features of effective presentations increased and their awareness of their strengths and weaknesses as presenters was enhanced. This suggests that reflecting on performance is essential for effective learning.

In concluding her paper, Wakui cites Mizuki (2003) who claims that wherever choice and responsibility for learning are emphasized, autonomy can be encouraged. Self-assessment lies at the heart of responsibility for learning, since it obliges learners to determine the focus, pace, and direction of their individual learning path. In my view, Wakui's study provides eloquent support for Mizuki's claim.

## CRITICAL READER RESPONSE 2

## BRAD DEACON &amp; ROBERT CROKER

This paper captured our attention initially because we also teach presentation courses and use presentation within many of our classes. Moreover, we utilize various forms of self-and peer-assessment and have wondered how other teachers are using them as tools for student growth.

In addition to Yoko's three principle research questions, we, too, had some questions before reading this paper including: 1) would it be too cognitively demanding to add the skills of self-and peer-assessment on top of student's presentation content, presentation skills, and other learning skills in this course?, 2) would some students reflect and deliver feedback in ways that were either too general to be beneficial, or too direct in ways that might constrict other's openness to learning?, and 3) what might the results hold for our students in terms of their own capacity to reflect and develop? We are pleased to say that this paper answered each of the above questions and more.

In this study, Yoko hands over much of the responsibility to her students to take over and notice what is salient in terms of their growth through not only assessment of their presentation skills but also their ability to develop greater awareness of their own and each other's learning processes through reflection. Admittedly, this is a challenging task as Yoko alludes to when stating that the difficulty of getting her passive, shy students to overcome their barriers is, "to (first) become aware of the fact that they are the ones who are responsible for their own learning."

We think she was wise to include multiple opportunities for students to reflect on their presentations. Students need time to gain familiarity and comfort with new practices and the quantitative and qualitative results in the second questionnaire clearly show that students benefited from repeated exposure. As Yoko points out, there was a positive shift in the rather general and tentative comments that students wrote in their first assessment forms and the more specific and less inhibited comments that were evident on the second. This positive trend suggests that students could potentially gain even further from future self- and peer-assessments. For example, we wonder how the students would develop over a four-year program using such a method and how these skills may serve them beyond their formal university years?

Yoko gave a great deal of thought and care to the delicate balance between student initiative and teacher control by not only providing a clear rationale, but also encouraging and supporting students to assume a more active and responsible role in selecting assessment criteria, conducting, and reflecting on their presentation assessment experience. Also, students were given scaffolding opportunities to gradually build their presentation, reflection, and assessment skills and thus gain more confidence in the process and enhance their awareness. These are useful pointers for all teachers to consider especially when offering new activities and practices.

As these learners continue their education, begin careers, and form various future relationships, we imagine that their experience in this course will give them greater awareness and appreciation of their own autonomy and the capacity to further develop many other skills in order to function successfully.

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**



**Mark Surma**

Niigata University of Health  
and Welfare

surma@nuhw.ac.jp



**Miyuki Usuki**

Joetsu University of  
Education

usuki@juen.ac.jp

### 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。

### ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First of all, we would like to thank our international students in the Oral Presentation course for giving us the opportunity to include their feedback in this paper. Many thanks also go to Miki Kohyama and Eric Skier for their proofreading of our paper and their very encouraging words. Finally, a big thank you to Yoko Wakui for her comments.

### 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.