

## What Constitutes a Good English-Language Presentation?

—Investigating Differences in Metacognitive Knowledge—

OMOTEDANI Junko

SANNOMIYA Machiko

**Key words:** metacognitive knowledge, oral presentation, English as a foreign language

### 1. Introduction

#### 1.1 English Education in Japan

In response to the increasing influence of globalization, the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science, and Technology announced an action plan whose goals included university graduates' being able to communicate in English in a business setting (Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology, 2003). Amid a global growth in business, students need English oral communication skills to be competent in the job market after graduating from university (Nakamura, 2002). Indeed, not only oral presentation skills but also other English-language communication skills are crucial in business situations. For example, giving a good oral presentation requires planning, performance, and evaluation based on metacognitive knowledge about the nature of a good oral presentation – but if the metacognitive knowledge itself is incorrect or inappropriate, then the oral presentation will fail (Dunlosky & Metcalfe, 2009; Sannomiya, 2008). Accordingly, it is of the utmost importance to understand L2 learners' and L2 teachers' metacognitive knowledge about the nature of a good oral presentation, identifying any differences. Studies on assessment and evaluation of oral presentations have investigated important criteria for a good oral presentation in English, and many textbooks on English presentation, containing evaluation rubrics, have been written for university students. However, few studies have focused on metacognitive knowledge about what constitutes a good oral presentation from the perspectives of learners and teachers in EFL (English as a second language) settings. Accordingly, the aim of this paper is to investigate what metacognitive knowledge about the nature of a good English-language oral presentation first-year university students (Students), Japanese English teachers (JETs), and native-English English teachers (NETs) have while also examining any differences in metacognitive knowledge about the nature of a good English-language presentation using presentation software such as Microsoft PowerPoint (PPT presentation).

## **1.2 Criteria for a good English-language oral presentation**

Because the quality of an oral presentation depends on many factors, King (2002) has noted the importance of informing students of the criteria against which their presentations will be evaluated and has recommended the preparation of peer and teacher evaluation forms. The evaluation form King (2002) introduced includes 20 criteria, such as preparation (e.g., ensuring that all equipment is in working condition), organization (e.g., logical development), content (e.g., originality), presentation (e.g., holding the audience's attention), and oral skills (e.g., clarity and fluency).

Many textbooks on English-language presentation for Japanese university students include evaluation rubrics. Typical criteria in such rubrics include physical aspects, such as eye contact, gesture, and posture; oral/language aspects, such as pronunciation, expression, fluency, clarity, and voice volume; visual aspects, such as media used and slides; and organizational aspects, such as logical organization, structure, contents, and transition words (JACET Material Development Group, 2005; 2013; Matsuoka, Tachino, & Miyake, 2014; Morita, Harada, Kitamura, Sugimoto, & Benfield, 2018).

Otoshi and Heffernan (2008) asked which kinds of English-language oral presentations Japanese university students considered to be effective, using a questionnaire developed based on related studies (e.g., Cheng & Warren, 2005; King, 2002; Nakamura, 2002; Patri, 2002), which featured 30 evaluation criteria for oral presentations. A 5-point Likert scale was used to measure each item. The results of the principal analysis identified three influences on Japanese university students' view of an effective oral presentations: clarity of speech and voice quality, correctness of language, and interaction with the audience.

The findings of Otoshi and Heffernan (2008) also suggested that students pay less attention to the preparation, organization, and content of presentations, all of which have been identified in related studies as important factors in presentation quality. Otoshi and Heffernan (2008) identified a need for further research that would focus on instructors' ideas about what constitutes a good oral presentation, thereby increasing the effectiveness of instruction in EFL oral presentation classes.

## **1.3 Metacognitive knowledge**

According to Schraw and Dennison (1994), metacognition, or “the ability to reflect upon, understand, and control one's learning” (p.460), has two major components: “knowledge about cognition” and “regulation of cognition” (Schraw, 1998; Schraw & Dennison, 1994). Knowledge about cognition usually includes three subcomponents: declarative, procedural, and conditional knowledge (Brown, 1987; Jacobs & Paris, 1987). Declarative knowledge refers to knowing “about” self and strategies, procedural knowledge to knowing “how” to use strategies, and conditional knowledge to knowing “why” and “when” to use strategies (Schraw & Dennison, 1995; Schraw &

Moshman, 1995). Regulation of cognition includes three essential skills: planning, monitoring, and evaluation (Jacobs & Paris, 1987). We plan, set a goal, and choose strategies for achieving that goal. As we perform, we monitor our pace, strategies, and affective state, then evaluate our performance and reflect and evaluate in preparation for the next setting of goals and choice of strategy (Sannomiya, 2008).

Knowledge of cognition and regulation of cognition are related to each other, with regulation of cognition occurring based on knowledge of cognition (Sannomiya, 2008; Schraw, 1998). Metacognition is important because it works as a central executive for cognition (Shimamura, 2008), with inaccurate metacognitive knowledge causing the failure of metacognitive regulation (Dunlosky & Metcalfe, 2009; Sannomiya, 2008). Accordingly, investigating people's metacognitive knowledge is an essential part of certain actions and activities.

## **2. Method**

A previous study in which Otoshi and Heffernan (2008) employed the research method used a 5-point Likert scale to measure 30 criteria for evaluating oral presentations. However, such a method could implant new ideas and knowledge in survey participants as they answer the questionnaire. To avoid this potential problem, we adopted a research method that allowed survey participants to freely provide answers.

### **2.1 Participants**

The participants in the study composed three groups comprising 23 NETs (1 female and 22 male teachers), 22 JETs, and 65 Students (37 female and 28 male students), respectively. The NETs had taught English in Japan for an average of 17.39 years and had worked as EFL teachers at Japanese universities for an average of 10.35 years. Twenty had assigned PPT presentations in their classes, and the remaining three had assigned other forms of presentations in English, whether a poster presentation or the like. The JETs had taught English in Japan for an average of 20.10 years and had been EFL teachers at Japanese universities for an average of 13.09 years. Twenty-one had assigned PPT presentations in their classes, and one had assigned a poster presentation.

The students' English proficiency level was between beginner and pre-intermediate level (TOEIC L&R mean score: 364, SD 74.3). They were first-year students majoring in English at a Japanese private university. At the time of the survey, they had not taken English-language presentation classes at their university. Three-quarters already had experience giving PPT presentations, but 65% had never done so in English. Before taking the survey, all participants were told that their survey responses would be kept strictly confidential and that the data from this research would be reported only in the aggregate, with all resulting information coded and kept confidential. In addition, all

student participants were assured that their answers would in no way affect their grades.

## **2.2 Procedures**

The authors conducted web-based surveys asking which criteria students should be able to meet in order to give a good English-language PPT presentation. Following are the directions supplied to the teachers and to the students.

Teachers: If you assign a 3- to 4-minute PPT presentation in English on a free topic (things students would like other students to know, think about, or learn, etc.) to a class of Japanese university students whose English proficiency level is A 2-B 1 (CEFR-J) or TOEIC 350-550, what do you think are important criteria for a good PPT presentation in English? Please list criteria which you think students should be able to meet in order to give a good PPT presentation in English (e.g., students should be able to \_\_\_\_\_; \_\_\_\_\_ is important; good \_\_\_\_\_, etc.) There are 10 answer columns, but you don't have to answer all of them.

Students: If you are assigned to give a 3- to 4-minute PPT presentation in English on a free topic (things students would like other students to know, think about, or learn, etc.), what do you think are important criteria for a good PPT presentation in English? Please list criteria which you think you should be able to meet in order to give a good PPT presentation in English (e.g., students should be able to \_\_\_\_\_; \_\_\_\_\_ is important; good \_\_\_\_\_, etc.) There are 10 answer columns, but you don't have to answer all of them.

Accordingly, participants listed criteria for a good English-language PPT presentation, and the text data thus obtained from Students, JETs, and NETs were used to analyze each group's metacognitive knowledge regarding the nature of a good PPT presentation.

## **2.3 Data analysis**

The text data collected from the survey participants on "criteria for a good PPT presentation" were analyzed as follows. First, the text data were examined to determine the number of elements of "a good PPT presentation in English," with one element equivalent to one text datum. For example, a participant's description of "good eye contact with audience" would be considered one text datum ("good eye contact"), but mention of "good eye contact with captivating voice" would be considered two ("good eye contact" and "captivating voice").

Second, text data corresponding to similar elements were classified. For example, "facing

audience,” “eye contact with audience,” and “look at audience” all refer to a similar action and thus would be classified under the subcategory “eye contact.” Third, subcategories having similar features were grouped together, so that “eye contact,” “posture,” “gestures,” “voice,” and “facial expressions” would all fall into the category of “nonverbal communication skills.” Subcategories that could not be grouped with other subcategories (e.g., effective visuals) were left as categories of their own. Finally, quantity and ratio of text data in subcategories and categories were compared among Students, JETs, and NETs.

### 3. Results

The quantities of text data obtained from Students, JETs, and NETs were 210, 145, and 175, respectively. These were classified into subcategories that were in turn grouped into categories (Tables 1, 2, and 3). The category “nonverbal communication skills” accounted for the largest percentage of the text data in Students (25.7%), JETs (25.5%), and NETs (30.3%), but the subcategories that composed “nonverbal communication skills” differed between teachers (JETs and NETs) and Students: Although “voice” (volume and speed), “eye contact,” and “gestures and facial expressions” were cited by JETs, NETs, and Students, “posture” was cited only by JETs and NETs.

Other differences among Students, JETs, and NETs were also evident (Table 4). For example, the “clearly rehearsed and practiced presentation” category represented 1.4%, 13.1%, and 12.6% of the text data for Students, JETs, and NETs, respectively. Similarly, the percentages for the “organization” category were 3.8% (Students), 15.9% (JETs), and 9.7% (NETs), indicating that JETs and NETs are more likely than Students to see organization and practice as important elements of a good PPT presentation. By contrast, the figures for the “effective slides” category were 20.0% (Students), 11.0% (JETs), and 12.0% (NETs), indicating that Students see the making of effective slides as more important than JETs and NETs do. Intriguing differences were found for the “content” category, which saw percentages of 9.0% for Students and 6.3% for NETs but no text data among JETs, indicating that JETs are less attentive to the content of their students’ presentations when evaluating them. For “linguistic competence,” the figures were 17.6% (Students), 20.7% (JETs), and 24.0% (NETs; Table 5). Although at first these figures did not seem to indicate much variation among Students, JETs, and NETs, examination of the “linguistic competence” category revealed certain differences, with the figures for the “pronunciation,” “accuracy,” and “clarity” subcategories differing greatly among Students, JETs, and NETs.

Table 1 *Categories and subcategories of text data on a good PPT presentation (Students)*

Categories	Subcategories	Data <i>N</i> = 210	Total data in group	% of total
Linguistic competence for communication	pronunciation	5	37	17.6
	English ability for output	10		
	accuracy of English	2		
	clarity of English	20		
Effective visuals (slides)	effective visuals (slides)	42	42	20.0
Nonverbal communication skills	voice (volume, speed)	22	54	25.7
	eye contact	21		
	gesture, facial expressions	11		
Positive attitude and confidence	positive attitude	8	9	4.3
	not afraid of making mistakes	1		
Delivering a clear message to the audience	clarity of the presentation	18	34	16.2
	clear message and opinions	9		
	check for audience understanding	7		
Interesting and reliable content	reliability of information	6	19	9.0
	interesting topic	13		
Logical and persuasive organization	organization	6	8	3.8
	persuasive argument	2		
Clearly rehearsed and practiced presentation	rehearsal and practice	3	3	1.4
Manipulation of PC	manipulation of PC	3	3	1.4
Preparedness for Q&A	preparedness for Q&A	1	1	0.5

Table 2 *Categories and subcategories of text data on a good PPT presentation (JETs)*

Categories	Subcategories	Data <i>N</i> = 145	Total data in group	% of total
Linguistic competence for communication	pronunciation, intonation	10	30	20.7
	accuracy of English	14		
	clarity of English	6		
Effective visuals (slides)	effective visuals (slides)	16	16	11.0
Nonverbal communication skills	voice (volume, speed)	15	37	25.5
	eye contact	7		
	posture	5		
	gesture, facial expressions	10		

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Clearly rehearsed and practiced presentation	speak without relying on script	7	19	13.1
	rehearsed manipulating PPT	8		
	speak in own words	4		
Involving the audience	involving the audience	13	13	9.0
Clear thesis statement and logical organization	organization	15	23	15.9
	clear thesis statement	8		
Manipulation of PC	manipulation of PC	5	5	3.4
Indications of cited documents	indications of cited documents	1	1	0.7
Complete avoidance of Japanese	complete avoidance of Japanese	1	1	0.7

Table 3 *Categories and subcategories of text data on a good PPT presentation (NETs)*

Categories	Subcategories	Data <i>N</i> = 175	Total data in group	% of total
Linguistic competence for communication	pronunciation, intonation	6	42	24.0
	appropriate introduction and concluding remarks	7		
	appropriate use of discourse markers	4		
	appropriate use of vocabulary and register	4		
	accuracy of English	7		
	clarity of English	14		
Effective visuals (slides)	effective visuals (slides)	21	21	12.0
Nonverbal communication skills	voice (volume, speed)	24	53	30.3
	eye contact	17		
	posture	6		
	gesture, facial expressions	6		
Clearly rehearsed and practiced presentation	speak without relying on script	18	22	12.6
	speak in own words	4		
Delivering a clear message to the audience	clear message	4	6	3.4
	make the audience care	2		
Appropriate and interesting topic	appropriate and interesting topic	11	11	6.3
Organization	organization	17	17	9.7
Attitude	attitude when giving presentation	1	1	0.6
Complete avoidance of Japanese	complete avoidance of Japanese	1	1	0.6
Time management	time management	1	1	0.6

Table 4 *Comparison of groups and categories of text data on criteria for a good PPT presentation among Students, JETs, and NETs*

Category	practice	organization	slides	contents	linguistic competence
Students (text data: $N = 210$ )					
$N = \text{category}/N = \text{Total}$	3/210	8/210	42/210	19/210	37/210
Ratio to the total (%)	1.4	3.8	20.0	9.0	17.6
JETs (text data: $N = 145$ )					
$N = \text{category}/N = \text{Total}$	19/145	23/145	16/145	0/210	30/145
Ratio to the total (%)	13.1	15.9	11.0	0.0	20.7
NETs (text data: $N = 175$ )					
$N = \text{category}/N = \text{Total}$	22/175	17/175	21/175	11/175	42/175
Ratio to the total (%)	24.0	9.7	12.0	6.3	24.0

Table 5 *Comparison of subcategories of text data on linguistic competence among Students, JETs, and NETs*

Subcategory of linguistic competence	pronunciation	accuracy	clarity	vocaburlary & expressions	ability for output
Students (L.C. text data: $N = 37$ )					
$N = \text{subcategory}/N = \text{L.C.}$	5/37	2/37	20/37	0/37	10/37
Ratio to the L.C. category (%)	13.5	5.4	54.0	0.0	27.0
JETs (L.C. text data: $N = 30$ )					
$N = \text{subcategory}/N = \text{L.C.}$	10/30	14/30	6/30	0/30	0/30
Ratio to the L.C. category (%)	33.3	46.7	20.0	0.0	0.0
NETs (L.C. text data: $N = 42$ )					
$N = \text{subcategory}/N = \text{L.C.}$	6/42	7/42	14/42	15/42	0/42
Ratio to the L.C. category (%)	14.3	16.7	33.3	35.7	0.0

L.C. = linguistic competence

In the “linguistic competence” category, Students’ ratios for the subcategories were 13.5% for pronunciation, 5.4% for accuracy, and 54.0% for clarity, indicating that Students’ metacognitive knowledge about “linguistic competence” focuses more on clarity than on accuracy. The remaining subcategory, “English ability for output,” accounted for 27.0% of the data, indicating that Students are well aware of the importance of speaking freely rather than merely reading from scripts or slides.

For JETs, the subcategory ratios were 33.3% for pronunciation, 46.7% for accuracy, and 20.0% for clarity, indicating that JETs tend to focus more on accuracy and pronunciation. For NETs, the subcategory ratios were 14.3% for pronunciation, 16.7% for accuracy, and 33.3% for clarity, whereas other subcategories, such as “appropriate introduction and concluding remarks,” “appropriate use of discourse markers,” and “appropriate use of vocabulary and register” accounted



for 16.7%, 9.5%, and 9.5%, respectively. These latter three subcategories, all of which relate to English expressions and vocabulary, together accounted for 35.7 % of the “linguistic competence” category for NETs, suggesting that NETs regard clarity and appropriate use of expressions as important elements of a good student presentation. Thus, the results of this study revealed the differences not only between teachers’ and students’ metacognitive knowledge of the linguistic competence that students should have to make a good PPT presentation but also between JETs’ and NETs’.

#### **4. Discussion and Conclusion**

This study investigated Students’, JETs’, and NETs’ metacognitive knowledge about the nature of a good English-language PPT presentation, seeking to identify any differences among them. To extract metacognitive knowledge about good English-language PPT presentations, the research method relied on free answers from survey participants. Ultimately 210, 145, and 175 text data were obtained from Students, JETs, and NETs, respectively. The results of this study can be summarized as follows.

Students, JETs, and NETs considered “nonverbal communication skills” to be important elements of a good PPT presentation, so that they accounted for the largest percentage of the text data for all three groups. Comparison of the elements of “nonverbal communication skills,” however, revealed that Students did not consider “posture” an important element of a good oral presentation – with no mentions among 210 text data. In addition, far fewer text data on accuracy (two text data), the importance of practice and rehearsal (three text data), and organization (eight text data) were received from Students – but approximately twice as many Students as JETs or NETs mentioned “effective slides.” Beyond “nonverbal communication skills” and “effective slides,” text data on “clarity” comprised 20 text data on clarity of English and 18 on clarity of presentation among Students.

Differences in metacognitive knowledge about the nature of a good PPT presentation were also seen between JETs and NETs, with far more text data on accuracy and pronunciation found among JETs. NETs, by contrast, produced more text data relating to English expressions and vocabulary. Among 145 text data from JETs, none spoke of “content,” in contrast with 19 text data among Students and 11 among NETs.

These results support three findings concerning the metacognitive knowledge of Students, JETs, and NETs about the nature of a good English-language PPT presentation. Each has several educational implications for the teaching of English-language presentation classes.

First, Students tend to believe that preparation for a presentation is completed as soon as the slides and script have been created. Because some text data on “clarity” and “nonverbal

communication skills” were found in Students, we assume that Students think it important that their presentation, and their use of English, be understood by their audience. However, Students’ lack of metacognitive knowledge about the importance of accuracy and the need for practice and rehearsal could lead them to use inappropriate planning strategies and procedures. It is highly likely that Students will not be able to convey what they wish to say to their audience without practicing. They might rely too much on their slides or script, reading them throughout the presentation instead of employing nonverbal communication skills. Although some might give presentations without reading their slides or script, thereby making greater use of nonverbal communication skill, lack of practice could degrade the accuracy and clarity of their English. In addition, their lack of metacognitive knowledge about the importance of logical organization for presentations could make their presentations difficult to understand. Accordingly, teachers must give students many opportunities to practice and rehearse their presentations and should check the logical organization of students’ presentations during the preparation stage.

Second, Students might well have difficulty monitoring themselves when giving a presentation in English. The lack of text data regarding “posture” could indicate that Students are not observing themselves objectively – that is to say, from the audience’s perspective. Students have metacognitive knowledge about voice, eye contact, gesture, and facial expressions as important nonverbal communication skills for use in presentations, but they might not realize the breadth of the gap between the skills they know and the skills they can actually employ. “Posture” should thus be understood as a broad impression of a presenter’s presence rather than as mere skills for communication. Because JETs and NETs observe their students’ presentations, they are well situated to note inappropriate posture on the part of a presenter. Although Students may have knowledge of skills needed for nonverbal communication, they might not have integrated the image of a presenter’s using these skills successfully with good posture.

Accordingly, L2 learners could watch exemplary English-language PPT presentations to help them build up a good internal image of a presenter, which would give them the chance to monitor their presentations and compare them to these examples. In view of the cognitive load put on L2 learners when giving presentations in English, self-monitoring can be very difficult during a presentation. However, students can use smartphones to videotape a presentation from the rehearsal stage for later comparison with example presentations. Peer evaluation can also provide students with opportunities to understand the audience’s point of view. These and similar strategies can help students gain the metacognitive knowledge they need to monitor, evaluate, correct, and plan their presentations.

Third, JETs seem to focus more on “how” to give presentations than on “what” to convey through presentations, producing no text data on “content” of presentations but more text data on

“accuracy” and “pronunciation” than among Ss and NETs. Because presentations are used to convey a message to an audience, content is an essential part of any presentation. Accordingly, JETs should focus more on the content of student presentations – although admittedly a certain level of accuracy is needed for the audience to comprehend the content. Although JETs’ metacognitive knowledge about students’ English-language presentations seems more accuracy-oriented, that may be a response to Students’ lack of metacognitive knowledge about accuracy. Having been L2 learners themselves, JETs might be aware of students’ tendencies and seek to compensate for areas that students tend to overlook.

Compared with JETs, more of NETs’ text data focused on English-language expressions and vocabulary, particularly relating to organization and flow – for example, “appropriate introduction and concluding remarks” and “appropriate use of discourse markers.” NETs, perhaps aware that Ss lack metacognitive knowledge of the importance of organization, might think that teaching these expressions will cause students to focus more on organization and flow. Considering that Ss tend not to practice enough, teachers should introduce vocabulary and expressions that are commonly used to enhance organization and flow, explaining the importance of their use and having students practice them in class before then using them in their presentations.

This study revealed differences in metacognitive knowledge about the nature of a good English-language PPT presentation among Students, JETs, and NETs, giving rise to certain educational implications. Students, for example, may lack metacognitive knowledge about the need for practice and organization and the importance of seeing their presentation from the audience’s point of view – causing them to employ inappropriate planning strategies. Conversely, JETs and NETs’ metacognitive knowledge indicates that a “well practiced and well organized presentation is a good presentation” – although JETs have more accuracy-oriented metacognitive knowledge and NETs tend to pay more attention to vocabulary and expressions related to organization and flow. Based on these findings, L2 teachers of oral presentation classes should pay special attention to the criteria that L2 students tend to overlook and should give them ample opportunities to practice and rehearse their presentations.

The students who participated in this study are all first-year students majoring in English, but students’ metacognitive knowledge of the nature of a good English-language presentation could easily differ with their major, level of English proficiency, experience giving English-language presentations, and topic presented on. Accordingly, further study, including quantitative study, is needed to confirm and broaden this study’s findings. Although the categories identified in the current study are not suitable for their own quantitative analysis, it is likely that future research can use metrics adapted from these categories in order to further investigate metacognitive knowledge.

## Acknowledgments

This study was supported by a grant from Kobe Gakuin University for special overseas research. We would like to express our gratitude to two anonymous reviewers for insightful comments and feedback on an earlier version of the manuscript.

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