Presentation practices:

Re-construction of identity and intercultural communication

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Abstract This study aims to explore effective ways of preparing and delivering persuasive presentations. Japanese people are often considered as having low proficiency in intercultural communication, especially public speaking in such settings as business meetings. A common phenomenon is that consensus building among business partners who come from different cultures tends to be challenging in Japan. As many Japanese people struggle to communicate in English in various international settings, Japanese college students have been greatly encouraged to develop more practical English skills, as prerequisites to playing an active role in global society. In developing such skills related to intercultural communication, however, students should also be supported in considering their own identity. Thus, I will demonstrate the relationship between presentation practices and identity issues through class activities using case studies. Students need to develop "communicative flexibility" (Gumperz and Gumperz, 1982) in dealing with both their own cultural perspective and the different views that are directly connected to their target language and culture to cope with both local and global contexts.

Keywords: presentation practice, identity, communicative flexibility, intercultural communication, public space

プレゼンテーションの実践
―アイデンティティの再構築と異文化コミュニケーション―

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あらまし　一般的に日本人は外国人とのコミュニケーションが関わる仕事の会議など，いわゆる公共の場におけるコミュニケーションに対して苦手意識が強いと言われることが多い．その結果，日本人にとって海外の取引先などのやりとりを通して何も問題なく取引の合意に至ることは非常に難しい．多くの日本人が国際的な場所で，英語でやりとりを上手くこなしていくことに奮闘している．このような苦い背景に基づいて，現在日本の大学生はこうしたグローバルな社会で活躍するために，より実践的な英語力を養うことが大きく求められている．異文化コミュニケーションが関連づけられたこのような力を培うには，学生が自分のアイデンティティを考慮することも非常に重要である．従って本稿では，説得力のあるプレゼンテーションが可能となる効果的な方法を検討し，プレゼンテーションの授業で行った授業活動を通して，プレゼンテーションの実践とアイデンティティ問題の関連性について述べる．ローカルとグローバルの両方を組み込むことによって，学生自身の持つ文化的視点と目標言語文化，つまり自分とは異なる文化的視点，の両方を上手く扱うことで「対話の柔軟性 (communicative flexibility)」（Gumperz and Gumperz, 1982）を養うことが重要であることを示唆する．

キーワード　プレゼンテーションの実践，アイデンティティ，コミュニケーションの柔軟性，異文化コミュニケーション，公共での空間

1. Introduction

The Japanese are commonly deemed as poor intercultural communicators, especially in public speaking. Despite such a shortcoming, Japanese college students are encouraged to study abroad or participate in internship programs overseas to increase the number of the students who can play an important role in international settings. As the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) actively promotes such students, each university is urged to develop students' communicative skills for them to thrive in global society. One such skill would be presenting in English. However, English programs that provide such training remain unavailable to many students. In addition, although identity issues are significant for students when dealing with intercultural communication, few studies have dealt with such a perspective focusing on presentation practices.

This study thus aims to explore effective ways of delivering persuasive presentations. In examining these methods, the research clarifies the relationship between identity issues and presentation practices through the class preparation and activities. The outcomes of this research may thus contribute to the studies of English Education and intercultural communication, by suggesting the importance of developing "communicative flexibility" (Gumperz and Gumperz, 1982) in relation to re-constructing one's identity.

2. Identity

People are unlikely to be constantly self-aware in daily life. However, grasping one's identity is indispensable for a deep consideration of the close relationship between the self and social interaction. Joseph (2004) characterized identity as follows:

> …[L]anguage and identity are ultimately inseparable ---again, independent from any considerations of 'consciousness'[…]. Thinking about language and identity ought to improve our understanding of who we are, in our own eyes and in other people's, and consequently it should deepen our comprehension of social interaction. Each of us, after all, is engaged with language in a lifelong project of constructing who we are, and who everyone is that we must, or whose utterances we simply hear or read. (Joseph, 2004: 13-14)

His quotation suggests the importance of understanding one's identity deeply by associating it with one's method for communication.

Identity has two distinctive features. The first feature is social identity. In this regard, Berstein (1964, 1996) distinguished between two languages in a society. The first type is called "restricted code," which is used in public, mainly by working class people. The second type "elaborated code" is used in more formal situations, mainly by middle class people. Certain facets of identity are revealed by focusing on the relationship between the social system and people's language use.

The second feature, cultural aspects, gives in-depth details on identity. Barnlund (1975) identified a distinction between the cultural identity of the Japanese and American:
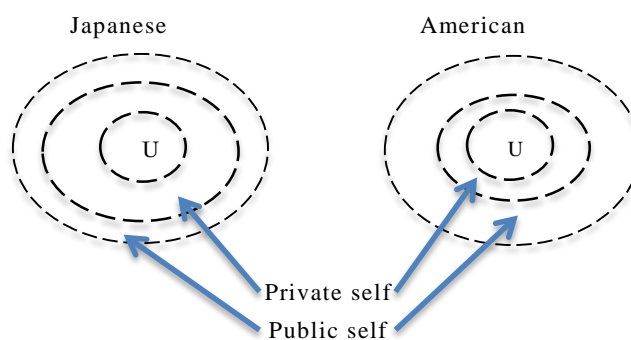

Figure 1. Japanese and American people tend to have different views of their public and private selves. (Barnlund, 1975, partly revised by the author.)

Figure 1 shows a contrast between "public self" and "private self" in the two cultures and languages: 1) the Japanese have a narrow range of public self, whereas Americans have the wide range of it; and 2) the Japanese have a wide range of private self, whereas Americans have a narrow one.

In Japanese communication, such a distinction between the public and private self is also significant to grasp the relationship between the self and others in particular. Miyake (1994) illustrated three types of social and personal relationships, namely, *uchi* (in-group), *soto* (out-group), and *yoso* (out-group of out-group), which are sensitively distinguished from one another in Japanese communication. These relationships also closely relate to language use. For instance, the Japanese are expected to use honorifics to show their respect to their interlocutor(s) in the case of *soto* (out-group) or *yoso* (out-group of

out-group) relationships.

Another difference in identity recognition between Japanese and American cultures is in communication style. In focusing on distinctive communication styles in business meetings, Yamada (1997: 20) concluded that "implied" is better than "spoken" in Japanese interaction, whereas the other way around applies in American interaction. She also suggests that interdependence is preferred over individuality in Japanese interaction, whereas independence is stronger than interdependence in American interaction. However, Yamada (1997:21) also noted that each speaker performs fair play in attempting to achieve their goals in interaction, as each has a logic all on its own.

Reflecting such characteristics of cultural identities on communicative performance could often occur in learning a second language. The degree to which learners can acquire a more flexible attitude in their culturally different communication without ignoring their own identity is a most significant point. Sociolinguists Gumperz and Gumperz (1982) mentioned that people facing intercultural settings need to achieve "communicative flexibility." Communicative flexibility refers to the ability in adapting strategies depending on the audience and cues, both direct and indirect, so that the participants are able to monitor and understand at least parts of one another's meaning (Gumpertz and Cook-Gumperz, 1982: 14). The ability to expose enough of the implicit meaning to make for a satisfactory encounter between strangers or culturally different speakers requires communicative flexibility (Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz, 1982: 14). As for learning English at the college level, the instruction needs to be underpinned by a focus on developing learners' communicative flexibility in addition to helping them recognize their own communication style that reflects their cultural identity.

The discussion of identity issues encompasses such streams as gender, generation, and ethnicity. However, the current work focuses on language, social interaction, and cultural diversities, as these directly relate to learning English as a second language. Attaining a balance between students' own identity and the identity connected to the target language and culture must be highly challenging. Therefore, class activities blending these two identities are useful to develop students' input and output communication skills. The detail on such activities through presentation classes will be discussed below.

3. Learning process and organization of academic presentations

Practicing presentation skills by dealing with projects is an essential way of learning English communication styles for the public space that can ultimately develop students' communicative flexibility. This might be regarded only as training output English skills, such as speaking. However, views of these practices come from developing all of the four English skills, namely, speaking, listening, reading, and writing, through preparing each project. It is also dispensable for Japanese learners who study English as a second language to experience all of the processes of dealing with one project, and thus recognize a different logic between the Japanese and English languages.

3.1 Presentation process

Students must recognize the coherent process for the achievement of a successful presentation by experiencing and dealing with their own project. This process has three basic steps: planning, preparing, and presenting:

> Step 1: Planning (brainstorming, outlining)
> Step 2: Preparing
> (searching for references,
> conducting detailed research, making
> slides, and practicing talking)
> Step 3: Presenting

The first step always begins with planning. Brainstorming for possible themes through group discussions is essential in this phase. Indeed, brainstorming is indispensable whether beginning a new teamwork-based (Wood, 2011) or individual project. The goal of this activity in-group work is to come up with as many ideas as possible leading toward evaluative discussion (Wood, 2011). In individual projects, students may adopt good ideas or discard impractical ones after brainstorming. The next step in planning is to prepare an outline of the project. Instructors must emphasize these two steps as invaluable to the success of students' projects.

Step 2 or preparing covers various activities: searching for references, conducting in-depth research, creating PowerPoint slides, and having a dry run as many times as possible, based on the outline. This step is in fact the same as writing an essay or paper, except the output is a PowerPoint slideshow.

Searching for references tends to be a daunting task

for students, as it is challenging to find and choose which information is trustworthy or credible. Hence, how the instructors encourage students to work on their independent study outside classes is vital for such a work. Students may need training in reading and collecting journal articles, especially those directly connected to their specialty or what they would like to pursue in their future career. They can then become aware of the importance of media literacy by developing analytical skills through experiencing and reading a variety of in-depth materials.

In conducting research, students should not limit themselves to searching for useful references. Emphasis should be given on conducting original research. Whether to have or skip this stage might rely on the students' academic level, but it is a good opportunity for them to start organizing their own research. Recruiting classmates, instructors, and international students to participate in a questionnaire survey can be a good start as one of the possible research methods. This method enables students to pursue both quantitative and qualitative research.

The PowerPoint slides prepared in the third phase should reflect the outline and the original research. Indeed, whether or not the outline has a clear and logical structure influences the successful outcome of making the slides. In this sense, the outline organization cannot be overlooked.

The final preparation phase is practicing the actual presentation. Many students are likely to skip this final stage, perhaps because they tend to allocate nearly all their time to the previous steps in the preparation process.

3.2 Organization of an academic presentation

This part requires awareness of the difference in logic between Japanese and English and flexibility to use such awareness in accordance with the context. In other words, communicative flexibility, coupled with recognition of one's identity, is the foremost skill required. One way is to ensure logical and coherent organization in dealing with English to help others, especially non-Japanese speakers, follow the discussion smoothly. As mentioned in Section 2, the identity recognition between Japanese and American speakers is different from one another in dealing with their communication styles. The characteristic of that "implied" is better than "spoken" in Japanese interaction may connect to the fact that Japanese speakers are poor communicators in public speaking. In order to overcome this situation, to develop the logical skill is necessary.

Of course, it takes time for Japanese students to get used to the logical structure associated with English because of the significant differences in the communication styles between Japanese and English. Kaplan (1966: 21) reported the variety of cultural thought patterns at play, particularly the two distinctions between "English" and "Oriental." The English pattern is indicated by an arrow, whereas the "Oriental" one, reflecting Japanese thought pattern, is described as a spiral with an arrow. In the English pattern, speakers start with an important statement, which is then directly connected to the conclusion. In the Japanese pattern, however, the important aspects come at the very last, after the introductory remarks and background. These patterns suggest how such different cultural thought patterns influence diverse communicative behaviors between them. In consideration for these differences, Japanese students must adopt the different pattern and be flexible in English learning.

Toward this end, Japanese students are strongly encouraged to master basic writing and presentation organization reflecting the English pattern, especially in dealing with an academic presentation. For instance, students need to grasp the basics of the paragraph structure because it illustrates how a main point should be stated in the beginning as a topic sentence. English speakers might take it for granted that this sentence should be noted at first. However, this practice is unfamiliar to Japanese speakers owing to their "Oriental" cultural thought patterns. Instructors should be aware of the need to teach this basic pattern to students. Becoming acquainted to the English pattern is directly related to the successful outcome of delivering a clear and logical presentation.

Once students understand the way of structuring paragraphs, the next step is instruction on the presentation structure (incorporated by the essay organization). The overall organization is described below:

1. Introduction
   Research question or motivation
   Purpose of this study
   Thesis statement
2. Body 1 (Topic sentence 1)[1]
   Evidence and findings
3. Body 2 (Topic sentence 2)

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[1] Parts of the body are based on the organization of academic presentations in general; however, another option, such as "IMRAD," should be noted to math and science students in the advanced class.

Evidence and findings
4. Body 3 (Topic sentence 3)
Evidence, findings, and solutions
5. Conclusion
Summary
Strong conclusion
References

The so-called English pattern is reflected in the introduction section: it should begin with the main points and then state the research questions, purpose of the study, and thesis statement. Students need to understand their main points to grasp the larger picture of their theme. Therefore, instructors are expected to emphasize the importance of the purpose of the study and thesis statement in the introduction (Wood, 2011).

The parts of the body should logically support what was specified in the thesis statement. Students need to note whether the beginning of each part starts with a topic sentence, or the main idea of the part. Based on this, supporting details, such as statistics and quotations from previous studies, must be provided. In the case of science-based projects, this part should cover the overview of previous studies, methods including data collection and specific frameworks for the forthcoming analysis, findings, and the related discussions or solutions toward the research questions raised in the introduction. Lastly, the paper must end with a concluding paragraph that summarizes the discussion in the body, followed by final remarks that give a strong impact to the audience. A notable point should be whether the thesis statements in the introduction and what was described in the conclusion are coherent and closely connected. In understanding certain forms and patterns of each part in the academic presentation, students can apply the logical organization adopted in the English pattern. Grasping the basic organization of English communication through making such an outline and slides is the first step toward recognizing the differences in logic between Japanese and English and in identity recognition between these speakers.

4. Case study

The case study will involve presentation classes the author taught in the past to highlight ways for students to develop their communicative flexibility and consider their identity. As a background, presentation classes under courses in the liberal arts have been offered for

second-year students since 2013 at the university, where the author teaches, and the classes are compulsory subjects. In addition to this class, presentation practice has been introduced in other classes taught by the author, such as Advanced Class (elective course), Listening, and Writing, all offered to first- and second-year students. The list of courses with presentation practices is as follows:

・Compulsory courses (second-year students)
　Integrated English 5 (Presentation)
　Integrated English 5 (Writing)
　Integrated English 5 (Listening)
・Compulsory courses (first-year students)
　Integrated English 1 (Speaking)
　Integrated English 3 (Writing)
　Integrated English 4 (Listening)
・Elective course (all students)
　Advanced English

Although Integrated English 5 (Presentation) and Advanced English fully cover presentation skills and practices, other classes focusing on one skill (e.g., listening and writing) also partly covers presentation skills by dealing with a project that involves giving a presentation. Regarding the above compulsory classes, they are divided into three groups (arts, natural sciences, and life sciences). The arts group consists of the Faculties of Letters, Economics, Law, and Matching Program (taking courses through multiple faculties); the natural sciences group includes the Faculties of Science, Engineering, Agriculture, and Environmental Science; and the life sciences group covers the Faculties of Medicine, Dentistry, and Pharmaceutical sciences. Advanced English has no restrictions in terms of student major.

The focus here will be on Integrated English (presentation) and Advanced English because presentation practices are fully covered in these classes.

4.1 Goals of the presentation course

The goals of Integrated English (presentation) are
・To help students learn effective ways of persuasive presentations
　(Organization, communication styles in public)
・To help students consider how they can be "themselves"
　(Adjusting and maintaining their own identities in intercultural contexts)
・To deepen students' understanding and respect of cross-cultural perspectives

(Customs, habits, and communication styles)

The class activities toward these goals are explained in the following sub-sections.

4.2 Class activities

Integrated English (presentation) has five main activities:

・TED reports to learn presentation skills

Listen to two favorite talks and write a report about them every other week.

・Super-mini talks

Prepare a three- to five-minute talk at home on a theme given in each class, and give the talk to a different partner three or four times by shuffling partners.

・Class discussions and reflections

Watch both non-Japanese and Japanese celebrities' speeches and interviews and have group and class discussions.

Read through news or journal articles related to intercultural perspectives and have group and class discussions.

Write down a 400-word reflection on the themes.

・Two presentations

1) Organize a project under a couple of choices for in-group presentation style (themes: my hometown, my role model, and ecology and environment).

2) Organize a project on each student's academic interest associated with intercultural perspectives and their own specialty.

・Essay writing

Write two academic essays on the themes dealing with the above two presentations in more than 500 words.

The rationale for these activities come from the following aspects: 1) to help students utilize all of the four English skills, 2) to develop students' input and output skills related to delivering presentations, and 3) to deepen students' understanding and knowledge of various themes featured in each class, and to encourage them to have their own creative and critical views for each theme. TED reports, super-mini talks, and group and class discussions on various themes are designed to lead the students to develop certain basic skills to perform their two presentations successfully.

4.3 Presentations

Two class presentations (first: in-group presentation; second: individual presentation)[2] are held in the mid-term and finals of each semester, respectively. Both types of presentation are based on a 10-minute talk and then followed by a question-and-answer portion. Each presenter needs to prepare two discussion points to encourage the class to discuss the presentation theme. The two presentations follow the process and organization of projects and presentations described in Section 3. As regards the connection between the presentation themes and identity issues, the first presentation is designed to consider certain local perspectives (e.g., culture and habits surrounding students)[3] to help students recognize their own identity. On the other hand, the second project is designed to give them an opportunity to deepen their perspective in more global and intercultural contexts by associating their discussion with their specialty or intended career path. The students are expected to consider different systems, values, customs and rules from their own ones and to understand the differences of identity recognition between them[4]. By dealing with both local and global contexts, they can have opportunities to reflect on themselves and face issues on who they are and who they will be. This relates to "the self [as an] ever-changing system of perspectives that is formed and sustained in communication with others and ourselves" (Wood, 2011: 181). Hence, the process of constructing or re-constructing the self or identity is not static but rather, dynamic. One student's reflection on his project of "my hometown" revealed a connection between the project and his own identity issue:

> [B]y talking to my friend about my hometown, I realized why I love Osaka now […]. Actually I didn't like Osaka when I lived there because it was [a] noisy place. But [after] leaving Osaka and living in Okayama, I noticed that I liked the kind of "mess" of Osaka which consists of many sounds…like the noises of trains or cars and voices of people who speak [the] Osaka dialect. I don't know why I like it, but it is somehow a

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[2] Each form of presentation depends on class size. If the number of the students is small, the two presentations are individual in nature. Otherwise, both presentations are done according to the in-group presentation style.

[3] Some examples of the first project are, "My hometown," "My role model," and so on.

[4] The examples of the second project are, "Death penalty," "Same-sex marriage," "Different medical systems between Japan and America," "Social security program in Sweden," and so on.

part of me. I like Osaka since it's a messy place. In conclusion, this presentation gave me the opportunity to think about my hometown and my presentation style […].

Working on such a project has posed to students the significant issue of who they are though merely one assignment in English class. In this regard, instructors can indirectly tell their students that their identity will be re-constructed through various encounters and communication with others when facing different cultures, values, and customs. Recognizing their own identity and respecting others' cultural values would be indispensable under such a circumstance. In this sense, learning students' communicative flexibility would be key to their success in diverse intercultural settings.

5. Concluding remarks

The discussion has addressed how academic presentation practices could relate to the (re-) construction of college students' identity by helping them consider intercultural perspectives. Further, the study has proposed learning English as a second language as a means to develop communicative flexibility. As specific steps, the work has presented both the essential preparations and effective ways of delivering persuasive presentations through dealing with an academic project. The actual practices in the author's presentation classes clarified how specially designed activities could give students the precious opportunity to consider their own identity at present or who they are and in the future time or who they will be. The first project could tell students the importance of recognizing their own identity under local contexts surrounding themselves, and the second project could then show them the pleasure to discover certain distinctive ways which derive from different cultures and societies by dealing with more global contexts. As further issues, it would be necessary to give the students a task to take notes on their identity recognition and communicative flexibility through those two projects. To conclude, the presentation experiences and practices indicate the significance of developing communicative flexibility associated with re-constructing one's identity in dealing with certain intercultural perspectives.

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