

UDC 37

Nadežda Stojković,

PhD, Lecturer

Faculty of Electronic Engineering,

University of Niš, Serbia

redaction-el@mail.ru

TEACHING PRESENTATIONS IN THE ENGLISH LANGUAGE INSTRUCTION AT FACULTIES

English language instruction today is often one of the crucial aspects of preparing students for their vocation in a highly competitive international professional environment. Teaching principles of written and spoken communications at faculty level is an especially relevant curriculum segment and is done with the ultimate purpose of better communicating professional knowledge to other professionals but also nonspecialists. Every professional is involved in some aspect of communications which usually involve gathering, analysing, and distributing of scientific and/or technical information efficiently and accurately for specific audiences. The fundamental purpose of professional discourse is not mere presentation of information and thought, but rather its actual communication. The content that the author wants to convey is inseparable from the form they employ. Depending on the exact profile of the target science/occupation, specific vocabulary, style, and organisational structure of presentation need to be taught. Teaching students to design effective presentations implies training them insightful and well-trained thinking strategies that can produce clarity in communication without oversimplifying scientific or vocational issues. The results are substantive, not merely cosmetic: improving the quality of presentation actually improves the quality of thought and vice versa.

Key words: organization, structure, vocation, written and spoken presentations.

Defining the terms

One specially relevant part of foreign language instruction curriculum at faculties (but also in high schools) are the principles of spoken and written presentations for academic and professional purposes. *The importance of these skills lies in the fact that they have a completely practical purpose and, are directly related with the real future needs of the students.* The term presentations refers to various kinds of reports (laboratory reports, feasibility studies, research studies, journal papers, correspondence, spoken presentations in front of management, government representatives and officials, clients, students, conference audiences, colleagues, etc.). The term academic refers to the process of enabling students to advance (postgraduate, doctoral studies, specialisations), and the term professional points to enabling students to perform their profession successfully with the overall

aim to prosper in that same profession. Mastering the skills of professional and academic presentations, in today's highly competitive professional environment is more important than ever, and perhaps crucial for advancement.

By their nature, it is most convenient that these skills be taught at language classes. Yet, they do surpass the knowledge of a language. Through the study of spoken and written communications *the capabilities of analytical thought are enhanced, students work on their personal improvement in terms of behavior, manners, self awareness.* Many faculties do not have the subject of methodics of teaching. Therefore, the study of presentation techniques is *a chance for students to gain insight into knowledge and skills that make a good lecturer* which often turns to become their vocation (Stojković 2005: 4).

Basic characteristics of presentation

Learning the principles of written and spoken presentations in English is done with the ultimate purpose of better communicating scientific and/or technical knowledge to other professionals but also nonspecialists. The principles of presentations considered here are based on *the scientific method of research*. If those are consistently applied, the scientific content that is presented will be better comprehended, analysed and critically examined.

The scientific method is a process by which scientists endeavour to construct an accurate representation of the world. In order to achieve that it is a must to avoid all possible personal and cultural influences in the interpretation of the phenomena in question. That is done by the use of standard procedures and criteria in developing a theory or an explanation. The same idea applies to the written or spoken presentation of those findings. The use of standard presentation structures ensures clarity, obvious rationale for the thesis, and is highly persuasive in the sense that the audience gets a strong impression that the author is a knowledgeable person, an expert.

Scientific and technical presentation communicates specific information about a specific subject to a specific audience for a specific purpose. Generally speaking, scientific and technical presentation often focuses on resolving some problem or the delivery of information. The audience element is crucial for successful presentation. One has to make a precise judgment about who they write for or talk to, and according to that adapt the presentation to the audience's needs, expectations, levels of understanding, background. The purpose of scientific

presentation may be to inform and/or persuade the audience that the proposed method of resolving a problem is effective and efficient. The achievement of the preset purpose proves the validity of the presentation.

Types of communication

Professional communication is generally divided into three types:

Scientific communication deals with ideas rather than products. It presents data, inferences and conclusions drawn from those. The information or the idea is the message. Most scientific information is communicated through articles in journals or in conference proceedings. Scientists' reputations are based on the papers they publish, i.e., the results of their research.

Closely connected to this is *science communication*. It will not be the subject of this paper, as it is more of a "popular writing". Opportunities in science communication are growing rapidly as science and technology become more complex and there is an increasing need for writers to "translate" information about science and technology to non-specialists. Science writing presents information for a general audience, such as readers of newspapers or magazines, newsletters, press releases, TV and radio broadcast scripts.

Technical communication shares with science communication the primary objective to inform, yet is done for an even broader range of readers. It involves proposals, instructions, manuals, etc. Those can be classified as external documents. Technical communication also includes in-house documents such as standards and procedures relevant for the proper and easier work. Technical communication is a subset of business communication which presents a wider group of information related to the overall functioning of an organisation.

The relevance of presentation structure

The fundamental purpose of scientific discourse is not mere presentation of information and thought, but rather its actual communication (R.Barass 1978). The content that the author wants to convey is inseparable from the form they employ. With that as an aim we should always bear in mind that audience does not simply read or listen, they *interpret*. Information is interpreted more easily and more uniformly if it is placed where it is expected. These needs and expectations of the audience affect the interpretation not only of tables and illustrations but also of prose or speech. Audience has relatively fixed expectations about where in the structure of prose they will encounter particular items of its substance. If authors

can become consciously aware of these locations, they can better control the degrees of recognition and emphasis audience will give to the various pieces of information being presented.

This underlying concept of audience expectation is perhaps most immediately evident at the level of the largest units of discourse. (A unit of discourse is defined as anything with a beginning and an end: a clause, a sentence, a section, an article, etc.) A research article, for example, is generally divided into recognisable sections, sometimes labeled Introduction, Experimental Methods, Results and Discussion. When the sections are confused - when too much experimental detail is found in the Results section, or when discussion and results intermingle - readers are confused. In smaller units of discourse the functional divisions are not so explicitly labeled, but the audience has definite expectations all the same, and they search for certain information in particular places. If these structural expectations are continually violated, they are forced to divert energy from understanding the content of a passage to unraveling its structure.

The principles of spoken presentations we have suggested here make conscious for the author some of the interpretive clues audience derive from structures and the information conveyed non verbally. Armed with this awareness, the author can achieve far greater control (although never complete) of the listeners' interpretive process. As a concomitant function, the principles simultaneously offer the author a fresh re-entry to the thought process that produced science. *In real and important ways, the structure of the prose becomes the structure of the scientific argument. Improving either one will improve the other. **The aim of the study is for the students to realize that a single, basic model of analytical thought is at the core of both most simple and most complex presentations.***

The structure of scientific argumentation and the structure of presentations

Prior to commencing work on this part of the curriculum it needs to be noted that these principles are just a general starting point only to be upgraded or modified in accordance with the demands of concrete situations (Clarke, B., Henderson, L.D. 2002: 12, VanAlstyne, J.S. 2001: 57).

The work on scientific presentations structures should begin with the lecture on **titles**. That is the first instance when students become aware of *what is meant by precision in science, and why it is crucial to bear in mind the expectations of the audience, that is to control the flow of their understanding*. The title contains the topic

a and clearly defined angle from which it is being presented. It needs to be emphasised that this is the case when dealing with highly scientific or professional topics, not those written for general public. An example of a bad title could be 'Computers are Useful', as it is almost infinitely general and is a too well known fact. But a title like 'The Architecture of Today's Computers' directs as to what kind of argumentation follows.

The next step in the analysis of structures is a **paragraph**, *the smallest, nucleus logical piece of every presentation*. On the example of a paragraph students should comprehend the 'ruling' model of scientific argumentation. The three, most common parts of a paragraph are: *topic sentence, supporting sentences, and a closing one* (A.O. Strauch 1998). Depending on the type of paragraph, the topic sentence can be a definition, an expression of the author's personal viewpoint, etc. Supporting sentences explain, describe or develop the thesis and provide examples that illustrate it properly. Concluding sentence sums up the idea of the entire paragraph. *In all more complex structures of presentation this nucleus of the logic of scientific argumentation is only further developed and/or multiplied.*

According to the content, paragraphs can be classified as following: definition, classification, description, compare and contrast, sequence, choice, explanation, and evaluation paragraphs (L.Hamp-Lyons 1987). This, however, is not the only possible classification. The classes may differ according to various criteria employed.

Once the principles of structuring a paragraph is mastered, as well as its various kinds, it is easy to move on to teaching the principles of structuring an **essay**, since it follows the already presented logic of organisation. For the beginning it is recommended that students write essays within the frame of a *five paragraph essay*. Seemingly a limitation, this only helps students acquire higher precision when numerous pieces of information are to be presented on a limited space. The most often types of essays in scientific/professional literature are: process analysis, exploratory, argumentative, cause and effect, compare and contrast, classification, definition, narrative. Yet, the types are not clearly delienated but mutually intertwined. This work should be the preparation for writing professional documents. But before that, students should be taught *the special relevance of proper documentation of sources, referencing and quoting*.

Types of professional documents and their form

The most common types of professional documents are:

- feasibility study,

- laboratory report/experiment report,
- design report,
- manuals,
- scientific papers,
- PhD theses

The basic format of a professional document is the following:

1. Title
2. Abstract
3. Introduction
4. Materials and methods
5. Results
6. Discussion
7. References/Literature cited
8. Appendices

Yet another useful aspect of this approach to teaching presentations is that if a student is familiar with these structures, they are taught a kind of *fast reading*. It is enough to read the first and the last sentence of a paragraph or chapter as they contain theses and the hint of the arguments that follow. The in-between are concrete examples, elaborations, that are not always necessary. Another relevant gain is the mastery of **writing abstracts** (Popović, V.Z. 2004: 38). In scientific world, abstracts have special significance. They are usually written after completing the paper itself, and the easiest way is to rephrase the initial sentences – theses from the paragraphs or chapters.

Correspondence

In today's fast and competitive world, correspondence often plays *the crucial role in promoting work, establishing contacts, enhancing profession*. The work in this field begins with the structure of a common letter. The upgrade is the work on the vocation specific situations. Some of the basic types of correspondence are:

- initiating cooperation;
- initiating visits abroad;
- requesting/inviting a guest professional from abroad;
- recommending technical training;
- requesting information;
- application letters;

- letters of recommendation;
- complaint and adjustment letters;
- thank you letters;
- resume/CV;
- cover letters;
- memorandums;
- emails.

One of the examples that illustrate the importance of professional correspondence is the fact that the global world of an immediate information exchange with no intermediary, relies on certain known norms, codes of correspondence. It is obvious already at the example of CVs. Not following the standards of it disqualifies the candidate as a person illiterate of the professional codes.

Spoken presentations

Spoken presentation means public speaking. It is much more than a simple delivery of one's scientific knowledge. The preconditions of an effective, but most importantly good spoken presentation are many. Sole mastery of the scientific knowledge is insufficient in this case. The success largely depends on judging all the specifics of the situation and responding to those properly, the impression one gives as a person, the way they stand, move, the way they articulate words, look at the audience. Spoken presentation should never be a monologue, but an active dialogue in which verbal communication is not the only constituent (Stojković 2005: 118, Walters, E.D., Walters, G.C. 2002: 45). The facts that need close attention are:

1. Audience analysis

First thing to be done when preparing an oral presentation is to *identify the audience* as precisely as possible. It is not always an easy task, but is necessary. Different audiences require and are prepared for different amount and depths of information. The success of a presentation depends on knowing those in advance.

2. Determine primary purpose

The presentation can have one of these aims: to inform, persuade, teach.

3. Knowing the time frame and designated space

Students should gain the mastery of organising and selecting their arguments or pieces of information so as to respect the time allotted. Also, for the sake of their assertiveness they should familiarise themselves with the physical space for their presentation and visualise their movements within.

4. Shaping the presentation

Depending on the needs and the audience one of the structures illustrated above in the part on writing should be considered.

5. Choosing appropriate visual aids

When designing a visual, students should consider its effect on the audience. Visual aids function as "cue cards" clarifying the message and allowing the audience to remember the main points.

6. Preparing a suitable introduction and establishing contact with the audience

The introduction must draw the audience's attention, identify the topic, and create expectations in the audience that the presenter will satisfy in the course of the presentation.

7. Familiarising the audience with the aim, content, and structure of presentation

The audience should know what to expect and should be immediately persuaded that these expectations will be fulfilled. This requires clear statement of the content organisation at the very beginning.

8. Preparing a closing summary

An effective conclusion develops naturally from the structure and content of the preceding material. It reaffirms the connection between the audience and the material presented.

9. Delivery

During the presentation the students need to:

1. maintain eye contact with the audience,
2. use natural hand gestures,
3. keep body movement quiet and natural,
4. maintain appropriate voice volume,
5. avoid wearing distracting clothing or accessories,
6. maintain a constant rate of speech,
7. nervousness is to be expected, just should be turned into enthusiasm,
8. establish contact with the audience, talk to them before actual presentation,
9. walk purposefully and confidently to the front of the lecture room,
10. concentrate full attention on what they say.

Teaching principles of organisation of spoken presentations by far exceeds language instruction and subsumes aspects of sociology, psychology, and methodics of teaching.

Spoken and written communications for academic and vocational needs occupy a significant part of language teaching classes. By their nature they can be taught only as an interactive kind of lecturing. Through practice work students reproduce the knowledge lectured through their own examples. The aim of such classes is practical and concrete. It is tailored according to the needs of specific professions and allows students to present the acquired academic knowledge in both academic and professional environment.

REFERENCES

1. *Clarke, B., Henderson, L.D. (2002). From Energy to Information: Representation in Science and Technology, Art, and Literature (Writing Science), Stanford University Press.*
2. *Popović, V.Z. (2004) Kako napisati i objaviti naučno delo, Institut za fiziku, Beograd.*
3. *Stojković, N. (2005) Written and Spoken Communications in English for Science and Technology, Elektronski fakultet, Niš.*
4. *VanAlstyne, J.S. (2001) Professional and Technical Writing Strategies: Communicating in Technology and Science (5th Edition), Prentice Hall; 5 edition.*
5. *Walters, E.D., Walters, G.C. (2002) Scientists Must Speak: Bringing Presentations to Life (Routledge Study Guides S.), Routledge.*

25 мая 2014 г.
