The Pedagogy of Teaching Japanese Students to Make Presentations in English: The evolution of a Syllabus at Hakodate National College of Technology

Mariko Okuzaki¹, Takahiro Fujiwara², Kouji Shikano³, Larry Klingenberg⁴ and Lou Ann Bassan⁵

1. General Department, Hakodate National College of Technology (HNCT), Tokura 1-1, Hakodate, Japan, okuzaki@hakodate-nt.ac.jp
2. Department of Production Systems Engineering, Hakodate NCT, Hakodate, Japan
3. Department of Material and Environmental Engineering, Hakodate NCT, Hakodate, Japan
4. Visiting Professor, Hakodate NCT, Hakodate, Japan
5. Visiting Professor, Hakodate NCT, Hakodate, Japan

Abstract

Business English II is a mandatory class for second year students of two Advanced Courses in the Engineering Department, at Hakodate National College of Technology (NCT) in Hakodate, Japan. The class has a clear teaching objective relating six educational goals of the school, with the overall aim of producing engineers who possess a multifaceted ability to communicate in English. In tangible form, the teaching goal is that all students will be able to do their final presentations in the English language on their engineering research, which would be acceptable for an international conference. When first proposed, it was said to be “impossible in a big class.” This paper describes how the syllabus has evolved through Initial, Intralaboratory and Integrating phases, and has been improved to achieve the teaching goal of Business English II by tracing the innovations and changes in the syllabus over the past nine years.

Keywords: syllabus design, initial, intralaboratory, integrating, teaching goal

1. Initial Phase: 2004-2010

When the Advanced Courses started in 2004, all students in the Kosan system were required to achieve a score of 400 or above on the Test of English for International Communication (TOEIC) to complete the program. Many students, however, preferred to focus solely on passing the TOEIC test, and resented the time required to prepare a presentation in English. Therefore, lessons were mainly focused on TOEIC practices of listening and reading skills and, consequently, there were very few opportunities to train the students to do presentations in English. In April 2005, two engineering students (Shunzo Kawajiri and Arisa Fukushi) each volunteered to do a presentation abroad in English. One month later, Okuzaki, an English teacher in the General Department, acquired a grant from the school to investigate how to teach the two Japanese students to do a presentation in English on their research in collaboration with their academic research supervisors. Okuzaki gave the two students individual lessons (about 30 hours each) on making a presentation in English including how to prepare slides, deliver a speech and answer questions in English.

Okuzaki obtained the co-operation of teachers in the School of Engineering at San Francisco State University (SFSU) to participate in evaluations of Japanese students. (Okuzaki had studied at SFSU as a visiting scholar for 10 months from 1998 to 1999, and had made contacts in the School of Engineering.) On March 2, 2006, in San Francisco, California, USA, the first evaluation was done by four teachers from SFSU’s School of Engineering. Kawajiri and Fukushi gave their presentations in English about their research projects. They were assessed based on the SFSU student evaluation scores with a range of 0 - 6, 0: not attempted, 1: unmet, 2: less than competent, 3: minimally competent, 4: competent, 5: skilful, and 6: highly skilful. The students received 4.0 and 4.3 respectively which meant their presentations were assessed as competent by SFSU teachers.

Between 2006 and 2010, the project involved 11 students who volunteered and their 11 research supervisors at Hakodate NCT, and 15 faculty members of the School of Engineering at SFSU. The project involved both Japanese students and supervisors going to San Francisco in 2006, 2007, 2008 (twice), and 2010 (the project was interrupted in 2009 due to a swine flu outbreak.) Figure 1 below shows how the average of overall evaluation scores by SFSU teachers gradually increased during the five years of evaluations in San Francisco (Okuzaki, Sawamura, and Honmura, 2006), (Okuzaki, Mizukami, and Akiba, 2007), (Okuzaki, Mizukami, Akiba, Honmura, and Sawamura, 2008a), (Okuzaki, Hama, Obara, and Kawakami, 2008b), (Okuzaki, 2009), (Okuzaki, 2010), (Okuzaki, Moriya, Oyama, Kudo, and Kimura, 2011).

The following are the findings about this Inquiring Phase with student volunteers, their research supervisors, and SFSU faculty.

a. Japanese students are able to do their English presentations successfully with 20 - 30 hours of training.
b. In preparing PowerPoint slides, Japanese research supervisors should collaborate with the Business English II teacher to verify the presentation is valid and comprehensible.

c. Students who have a TOEIC score lower than 450 (especially if lower than 200 in the reading score) often need extra help to finish their slides and speech scripts.

d. Japanese students are able to compensate for their poor English listening and speaking skills with well-organized slides and non-verbal expressions.

e. Japanese students should practice making the presentation including vocal variety, posture, eye contact with audience, and facial expressions, as well as English fluency and pronunciation.

2. **Intralaboratory Phase: 2008-2010**

The cooperation of Japanese research supervisors was gradually demanded from the administration to make the students’ presentations valid and comprehensible. Some teachers proclaimed that school money should be used for the majority of students, not for selected laboratories. In 2008, a change of strategy was needed to deal with the costs of traveling to San Francisco. Some teachers proclaimed that school money should be used for the majority of students, not for selected ones. Okuzaki, while a member of the International Committee, proposed to invite teachers from SFSU to Japan as an international academic exchange and to visit each individual student’s research lab at HCNT. Each student would have a chance to make a presentation in in a familiar environment. It was also expected this new phase would build a stronger relationship between SFSU teachers and Japanese teachers in the Engineering Department. Between 2008 and 2010, which overlapped with the Inquiry Phase, four teachers affiliated with SFSU visited Hakodate NCT. In 2008, Mike Strange (Mechanical Engineering) visited 21 labs and evaluated 26 students. In 2009, Dr. Wenshen Pong (Civil Engineering) and Anthony Marzo (Engineering Economics) visited 20 labs and evaluated 28 students. In 2010, Larry Klingenberg (Electrical Engineering) and Ms. Lou Ann Bassan (TESOL) visited 20 labs and evaluated 28 students. Contrary to expectations, this intralaboratory phase did not have a positive outcome with the Japanese teachers and students. The following g.—n. are findings analysing the answers by teachers and students from questionnaires involving the intralaboratory phase.

g. Without having met previously, Japanese students and teachers found it difficult to foster a learning atmosphere with SFSU teachers during their 15 to 20 minute visit, including the evaluation in a laboratory. (cultural aspect)

h. Japanese research supervisors were required to guide students for their research presentation in a Japanese context, not English. It was rather an extra burden for many Japanese teachers to have SFSU teachers in their laboratories, especially when the SFSU teachers’ areas of expertise were different from the ones of Japanese teachers. (work condition)

i. For students, it was too demanding to do their English presentations in their labs for SFSU teachers as a volunteer project of the International Committee, after having already finished examinations and acquired credit for the Business English II class. The students did not like being required to study an additional period after the course completion. (curriculum)

j. In a closed laboratory without any interpreter, Japanese students and teachers became highly anxious about their communication being correctly understood by SFSU teachers. (language barrier)

k. Some Japanese teachers and students doubted that their research would be understood and fairly evaluated by the SFSU teachers, if the SFSU teachers were not familiar with the discipline or the particular area of research. This was especially true because the Japanese teachers and students generally had a very narrow specialty within their discipline. The students influenced the teachers with their concerns, and the teachers themselves were intimidated by the SFSU teachers and their broader knowledge. (research motivation)

l. Japanese students tended to feel complacency for their English presentations in a closed laboratory where they had no peer pressure or rivals. (learning model)

m. Unless the project to do a presentation in English was established as a mandatory part of the course curriculum, many Japanese teachers and students did not understand the benefits of voluntary participation. Instead, the project was viewed as having to do extra work after having completed the Business English II course. By making the presentation in English a mandatory part of the curriculum, it was no longer viewed as “extra work.” (learning motivation)

n. In a closed environment, Japanese students were encouraged to speak English by SFSU teachers. (positive attitude...
fostered by SFSU teachers)

Through these findings, new ideas(o to s) were developed to change the syllabus for teaching presentation skills in English to Advanced Course students on their research.

o. An evaluator who has fundamental knowledge and interest in the individual engineering disciplines being evaluated is preferred by Japanese students and their research supervisors.

p. Classroom setting rather than a closed laboratory cultivates student learning models and helps students learn from each other by activating peer pressure.

q. A final presentation in English should be mandatory combined with the course syllabus of Business English II. The presentation should involve both students and their Japanese research supervising teachers, so that the teachers, too, can learn from the SFSU teachers, and be motivated to use their communication skills in English.

r. In order to have Japanese research supervisors be involved in the English presentations project, the work requirement should be feasible and announced beforehand, at the beginning of the fiscal year.

s. Developing a rapport between Japanese students, Japanese teachers and SFSU evaluators is necessary before the presentations in English are evaluated. A sudden visit for evaluations creates tremendous tension among teachers and students. It is necessary to foster a trustworthy educational environment before evaluation. Without a rapport, Japanese students and teachers are not used to a conversation with a native English speaking teacher; students are afraid of questions posed by the visiting teachers; and some Japanese teachers are afraid of making a mistake (in English) in front of their students and losing face. Each time there is a new teacher there is a new stress.

3. Integrating Phase: 2011-2013

With findings and ideas acquired through the Initial and Intralaboratory phases, the syllabus was changed to be more “holistic” so that the teaching goal of Business English II is to have each student do a final presentation in English on his or her research project, and to participate in an intensive workshop under the guidance of the SFSU teachers to prepare and revise the presentation materials in English, and to be evaluated by the SFSU teachers. In 2011, 23 students were evaluated; in 2012, 29 students were evaluated; and in 2013, 19 students were evaluated. Some of the unique changes are described below from t.—y. or z.

t. Starting in 2011, the course time frame was changed from a 15-week course (April to August) to a 10-week course (May to July) with an additional intensive week in November. The first 10 weeks is taught by a Japanese English teacher, and the intensive week is team teaching, mainly instructed by SFSU teachers, assisted by the Japanese English teacher.

u. In the first 10 weeks, Japanese students learn the fundamental aspects required for a presentation in English, focusing on the physical message, the visual message and the story message, in addition to English vocabulary and grammar, using two textbooks (Kiggell et al. 2008, Harrington & LeBeau 2009).

v. Through peer evaluation of text presentation, students acquire an objective perspective about other classmates’ presentations, which help them monitor and assess their own presentation. This is called peer effects (Hattie 2002, Mawlawi Diab 2010, Zainab Abolfazli Khonbi and Karim Sadeghi 2013).

w. Putting an 8-week summer vacation between the first 10 weeks and the intensive week, students behind in their preparation for their presentations in English can be given supplemental coaching. Summer vacation provides flexible time for Japanese supervisors to guide students’ research and their presentations in English, especially organization and scientific basis.

x. School e-learning environment enables students to access former students’ presentations in English on-line anytime through WebClass to familiarize themselves with the expectations of the learning goal by watching previous students’ presentations.

y. Also starting in 2011, the school policy changed so that all evaluations must be done by native English speaking teachers.

As for the intensive learning week, Klingenberg and Bassan, the teachers who participated in the final intralaboratory project in 2010, applied to teach the 2011 intensive week class. From 2011, they have been teaching the intensive workshop class collaboratively with Okuzaki. They understand Japanese students’ English level, and are dedicated to teaching students with their professional teaching experiences. For example, they do not speak too fast, and they apply Krashen’s theory of “i+1”, and use simplified academic English. (Larson-Freeman & Long, 1991). While teaching students how to make their presentation slides, Klingenberg focuses on checking students’ slides if they make sense from the engineering professional’s viewpoint, Bassan gives advice on English vocabulary and expressions as a TESOL teacher, and Okuzaki works as an interpreter between SFSU teachers and Japanese students. The intensive-week teaching has been implemented three times: 2011, 2012, 2013. Although the time frame is limited to one week, the ideas created by the SFSU teachers have made the students’ learning styles and the atmosphere change positively andproductively. The unique aspects which makes the intensive week teaching activity successful are
described below from z-1.—z-8.

z-1. On the first day, there is a formal introduction of teachers and students in the classroom. Each student gives a very brief autobiography and description of his or her project (in English). Then the teachers give an overview of the intensive course and give interesting general reading material (in English) to the students, to encourage reading and speaking ability in English and to cultivate English language and American culture. Next the teachers give a lesson on the "do's and don'ts" of PowerPoint presentations, focusing on the message (what to say), the medium (how to use PowerPoint and various techniques and information organization), and the mechanics (body movement, voice and eye contact). The day begins at 8:40, there are breaks each hour, and there is a lunch break.

z-2. In the classroom, each student sits at a network computer, with an empty chair next to him or her for a teacher. The teachers start at different points in the room. The teachers will sit next to a student and discusses his or her slides facing the computer monitor but not each other, thus lowering the anxiety by not staring at the student directly. Comprehensible input can have its effect on acquisition only when affective conditions are optimal. (Omaggio Hadley 1993)

z-3. Once a student's presentation has been reviewed and approved as to engineering aspects by Klingenber, a blue sticker will be attached to his or her computer. After review and approval by Bassan as to English proficiency, a pink sticker is attached.

z-4. In 2011, the intensive week was Tuesday – Friday. Presentation revision was done on Tuesday and Wednesday, and presentations on Thursday and Friday. It was too intense for everyone involved, and a solution was to change the days. Starting in 2012, the intensive week starts Wednesday – Friday, then Monday – Tuesday. Now, each student learns from both teachers on a one-to-one basis for three days from Wednesday to Friday. These days are used for slide revision.

z-5. Students who have finished making their slides (and have been approved by Klingenberg and Bassan), practice Q&A session in a group with Bassan for the rest of the day. This activity is named “Hot Seat.” This started in 2012 as in improvised activity. The group makes a circle and a chair is put in the center – the “Hot Seat.” A student voluntarily takes the Hot Seat and answers questions one by one from the group members. (At first, the students are afraid, shy, and embarrassed, but once the first brave volunteer is in the seat, the group relaxes and soon everyone is having fun and laughing!) Personal questions and research-related questions are provided by Bassan on slips of paper and participants draw one or two questions and read them out loud. The student sitting in the Hot Seat has to answer the questions immediately, and with eye contact. On the third day, students who are behind making their slides catch up with the students ahead by practicing “Hot Seat” personal questions.

z-6. In 2013, another innovation was started: Students who progress on making their slides faster than others are given a role as tutors helping classmates by asking questions on their slides, and preparing for discussions with Klingenberg and Bassan.

z-7. SFSU teachers exhibited a flexible and fluid teaching style that was conducive to whole class management. It included adapting to students’ learning styles and changing their teaching methods as needed, from individual setting of one-to one, to peer learning, to tutoring, to “Hot Seat,” or to an en masse style whenever they assessed it was appropriate for students’ learning opportunity.

z-8. SFSU teachers offer English seminars after the end of the regular school day to Hakodate NCT faculty and staff depending on their needs. Through this academic opportunity, SFSU teachers help Hakodate faculty and staff to improve their English skills and to become more at ease with them and to bond with them. Each seminar is voluntary, small, intimate, informal and more friendly and less stressful to attendees.

z-9. After three days of classes, the weekend follows, providing review and practice time for students.

z-10. After the weekend, Monday and Tuesday are used for the presentations and the evaluations. Students are asked to dress more formally in business clothes. Each student’s presentation is scheduled so that the research supervisors can present to observe their student’s final capstone presentation which should reflect well on the professors when their students receive really high scores. Japanese professors are encouraged to be present to observe their students, and a few come.

z-11. Students make their presentations in English, and engage in a question and answer session with the SFSU teachers, Japanese faculty who are present, and their peers – all in English. The written evaluation on their presentation is also in English by SFSU teachers. The presentations and evaluations are open to the public and the audience also asks questions in English.

z-12. In 2011, students would arrive a few minutes before their presentation, make the presentation in a classroom, then leave, so there was no audience for the next student. In 2012, the syllabus was changed so that the presentations take place in the auditorium with a large screen, microphone and lectern. The entire class is required to participate as an audience by being in attendance for the presentations and evaluations all day together. Students are now required to attend the entire day of their presentation (optional to come for both days) in order to learn from the presentations by their peers, and to give moral support and to be an audience. Students from lower level classes are invited to observe the Advanced Course students’ presentations in English as part of observing what will be required of them when they reach the Advanced Course level.

z-13. At the end of each presentation, each student has a formal ceremony to receive a Certificate of Completion by the
SFSU teachers, receives a gift, and has memory photos with shaking of hands. Z-14. SFSU faculty has approved Mr. Klingenberg and Ms. Bassan to come to Hakodate NCT every year since 2010. These teachers have proved very effective for team teaching and adaptable and innovative. These teachers are very sociable in the expected usual American custom, and open and friendly. It is appreciated due to Japanese conventionalism. The Japanese faculty is comfortable with the team teaching approach and now look forward to it every year.

4. Results and Discussion

In the past three years of the Integrating Phase, all the students taking Business English II have acquired credit and passed the evaluation by Klingenberg and Bassan on their presentation in English of their research project. Although a few students still have some difficulty during their presentation or in the Q&A session, most of the participants finish up their presentations with confidence and gain positive remarks by the SFSU teachers. Figure 2 shows the class size of 2011, 2012, 2013 and the standard deviation (STDEV) of the evaluation scores respectively. The vertical axis shows the number of students and the STDV, and the horizontal axis shows the class year. As the STDV indicates a similar value every year, the evaluation process is not affected by the class size.

![Fig.2 Class size & STDV between 2011 and 2013](image1)

![Fig.3 Average between 2011 and 2013](image2)

![Fig.4 Students' Satisfaction Questionnaire Results](image3)

Figure 2 shows acquiring scores in 2011, 2012, and 2013 have little variation from the average. Through the graph, each class finished with the similar scores in spite of different sizes and individuals. Figure 3 shows the average scores of the presentation evaluations between 2011 and 2013. The chart shows improvement 2011-2012, then teensy little decrease 2012-2013 – we could call it a “plateau.” We could say there was a dramatic improvement after the first year of the integrated phase with the whole classroom concept, then younger students watched in 2012 as part of the audience, and then in 2013 they did equivalent or plateau work to match what had been done in 2012. Since 2002, every class taught at Hakodate National College of Technology has been assessed by a survey given to students. Students are given a questionnaire and asked to rate their overall satisfaction of the class, to rate the efforts of the teacher(s), and to give an honest self-assessment of their own individual effort in the class. (The school changed the questionnaire format in 2007.) Figure 4 shows the comparison of the results of Business English II questionnaire from 2007 to 2013.

The vertical axis indicates a five-point scale (1-5) of the assessment. The horizontal axis indicates the year. (The overall score of about 4.5 is very good, as the average in other classes is usually only 2.5.) In 2012, the teachers' efforts were assessed lower than 2011 and 2013. In 2012, there were 10 more students than usual (in integrating classroom situation). Also, starting in 2012, the school policy changed and a passing TOEIC score of 400 was no longer required. Therefore, some students were reluctant to study how to make a presentation in English. They thought it was beyond their ability to do a presentation in English about their research. They became unmotivated and fell behind. Then, teachers had to focus on students with a negative attitude toward learning English and encourage them. Consequently, students with a positive attitude were asked to do more by themselves during the class. In 2013, the class size became 10 students fewer than 2012, back to the normal number, and teachers made efforts to get closer to students through tasks individually and within groups. As a result, the teachers' efforts were appraised more highly than the previous year. In 2013, students' assessment of their own efforts were the lowest of the seven years of feedback. The students' written feedback in 2011 indicated students were satisfied with "doing" their first English presentation. The experience was rather the event of a lifetime for them. However, students in 2013 had a clearer vision about their future and anticipate, they would do presentations in English more often in a workplace or in an academic field. Students marking lower scale were not satisfied with their results. Students have given low self-assessment of their own individual efforts because they are aware of the importance of learning this skill, and students have become more aggressive and motivated in the past three years. Students had high expectations of themselves and their ability to present in English, and were disappointed in their scores and thought they should have done better. As a result, students realize they must try harder and be less complacent, and they are therefore more self-critical about their individual efforts in Business.
5. Conclusion

Over the past nine years, with numerous innovations, Business English II has been recognized as the class which cultivates English presentation skills in Advanced Course students among Hakodate NCT students, faculty and staff. Team teaching has been shown to be successful, mostly owing to the SFSU teachers’ dedication and collaboration, and cultural awareness and adaptability. The key to success is not only the syllabus but the teachers who implement the syllabus. There is a great deal of cultural collaboration and contribution which is not expressed in the syllabus. The teachers make the lessons in English interesting and meaningful to complement the syllabus. The teachers are an essential role in the success of this class. It is much more cost-effective to have native English speaking teachers come to Hakodate because each year an entire class of between 20-30 students prepares and makes a presentation in English. When students volunteered to go abroad, only three at most (March 2008) could go. It is anticipated that there will be more innovations in 2014. First, the PowerPoint slides should be in a more completed version by the time the intensive week starts. Students will be encouraged early in the school year to become independent and to show initiative, which is not a typical Japanese personality trait, and to not be so reliant on supervisory professors and the English teacher. Second, a consistent flaw has been identified in that Japanese students write their text in Japanese, then use a computer to translate, leading to bizarre results in English. There has been an expectation that the native English speakers will “fix” the translations. The English text will be re-translated into Japanese so students can see the absurd result. Third, students in the same discipline will do peer review of each other’s slides and text and English text. Fourth, supervisory professors will be encouraged to participate a great deal more and to practice interaction with foreigners to dispel some of the complacency that can happen from familiarity. This is important because at some point, the teachers may change and the stress factor must be minimized.

References

Biography
Okuzaki has been teaching English at Hakodate National College of Technology since 1991. Her teaching interests are presentation, international understanding, and team teaching with Klingenbarg and Bassan. Fujiwara and Shikano have been teaching at HNCT as engineering professors after working for Japanese companies. Klingenberg and Bassan have been visiting professors of HNCT since 2011. They have long teaching experiences at San Francisco State University.