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談話室 Effective English Presentations at International Conferences

Sharon Hanley

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Introduction

Medical English is an essential tool for publishing research and taking part in international conferences. However, while it is often the case that Japanese doctors strive to achieve excellence in written papers for English journals, this excellence does not usually extend to orally presented papers at international conferences. One reason is the fact that, while great efforts are made, and time is spent, to teach the elements of journal writing in medical school English curricula at both the undergraduate and post-graduate level, next to no time or attention is paid to teaching the linguistic, cultural or non-verbal skills necessary to develop good oral English presentations.

In this essay I shall discuss what makes an effective presentation in an international setting by giving both concrete examples and advice on how to communicate more clearly with the spoken word, non-verbal exchange and visual imagery.

1. Anatomy of the Oral Presentation

Presentations can be broken down into the following seven main sections and five sub-sections. Examples of English phrases that can be used with each part are given at the end of this essay in Appendix 1.

Main Sections	Sub-Sections
I Greetings	I Elaborating a Point
II Opening Remarks	II Postponing
III The Plan	III Referring Back
IV Opening the Main Section	IV Highlighting
V Moving to a New Point	V Indicators
VI Summarizing	
VII Thanking the Audience	

Most research presentations follow that of the written paper, namely the IMRAD (Introduction, Method, Results and Discussion) structure. However, it must be remembered that a presentation is different from a paper in that there is normally a time limit and not everything can be covered. In particular, the weighting of particular sections is different; the Introduction is usually longer in a presentation, whereas the Discussion is much shorter.

The title slide should focus on what you are going to speak about. Since it is the first "contact" the audience will have with your presentation, it should be clear and aesthetically pleasing. However, since the title of the speech will be written on this slide, the title should **NOT** be repeated word for word. This is a common mistake that many Japanese doctors make. Instead of starting a presentation by saying, "Good Afternoon ladies and gentlemen, the title of my speech today is *The Role of CT in Blunt Hepatic Trauma*", for example, it would be more natural to say, "Good Afternoon ladies and gentlemen, today I would like to present my review of the role of CT in the management of blunt traumatic injury".

The importance of the summarizing/ concluding slide can also not be overrated. When giving a speech in a foreign language, the probability exists that, since the presenter and much of the audience are not native speakers of English, some important parts of the presentation may not have been fully understood. A succinct, dynamic concluding slide, which summarizes the main points of the presentation, along with a clearly articulated, slightly louder voice, should help the contents of the presentation remain in the minds of those listening.

2. Anatomy of the Slide

2.1 Format

When giving a presentation using PowerPoint slides, the general rule of thumb should be "less is more". Slides are used to anchor what you are saying and to remind the audience of the context of your speech; however, they do not impart that information that is what you must do. Depending on the level of fluency of the speaker, one or two slides per minute is normally recommended. For non-native speakers with little experience, one slide every two minutes is probably a more realistic target. Allowing one minute for about 100 words is usually standard, but once again this will depend on the level of fluency of the speaker.

Slides should be written **in bullet form** with key words and phrases, but not complete sentences. One of the most common mistakes for Japanese doctors to make is to write out full paragraphs on a slide and then read that paragraph word for word. For many non-Japanese listeners, this may not only be annoying, but in some cases insulting and a sure way to lose their attention. Showing one point at a time will help the audience concentrate on what you are saying, prevent them from reading ahead and keep your presentation focused. If possible the "**rule of six**" should be adhered to - no more than six words per line and six lines per slide. Empty space is necessary on the slide to balance the amount of information.

Many people respond better to visual cues than to straight text or lists. Graphs are an effective way to reduce the number of words on the slide and to help emphasize a point. Data in a graph is easier to comprehend and trends can be visualized more easily. However, distracting shading, illogical color schemes and minor gridlines should be avoided. The font should not be too small and graphs should always have a title.

2.2. Background and Font

Backgrounds that are distracting or difficult to read should be avoided. A light, simple, yet elegant background is preferable. Where possible, the same background should be used throughout the presentation, with the exception of

the title slide, which may be more "fancy".

A standard font that is easy to read like *Times New Roman* or *Ariel* should be used. The size of the font should be between an 18 and 48-point font; anything smaller than 18-point will not be legible to the audience. For the slide title, a 36-point font is often used, with 28-point for the main points and 24-point for any secondary points. Capitalization should only be used when absolutely necessary, since all-capitalized sentences are difficult to read. The color of the font should contrast sharply with the background, for example, yellow font on a dark blue background, or a blue font on a white background. The color of the font can also be used to reinforce the logic of your structure such as a light blue title and a dark blue text. Color, such as red, can also be used to emphasize a point, but it should only be used occasionally.

3. Non-Verbal Communication

When presenting in a foreign language, speakers tend to concentrate on words and neglect other crucial aspects of communication. This is also true of inexperienced or nervous native-speakers. However, non-verbal information has a great impact on the listener. Hall and Hall (1990) were of the opinion that "90% or more of all communication is conveyed by means other than language, in a culture's non-verbal messages". Since the presentation of medical research is essentially a transmission of fact or information, rather than an appeal to trust and belief, this percentage may not be as high for communication in the sciences. However, in any communication attempt, the transfer of information without, or in addition to, the words being spoken should be recognized. Albert Mehrabian (1971) estimated that a listener's degree of trust and belief in a message was formed by:

the words	7%
the voice	38%
the face and body	55%.

So, while clarity of message is of utmost importance in a medical presentation, it should not be forgotten that the audience does to some extent need to be persuaded and their interest engaged.

3.1 Voice and Delivery

How you say something is just as important as what you say. Since the voice is a powerful communication tool, speaking deliberately and clearly will make a speaker sound more confident and consequently more convincing. Speaking to a large room is not the same as speaking to someone face-to-face, it is more stressful. When speakers are nervous they tend to speak faster and quieter than usual, so an effort should be made to speak a little slower and a little louder than normal to compensate for this. You should aim to project your voice to the back of the room. To make the presentation interesting, changing the delivery is important. You should try to varying the speed and your pitch of voice. The speech should start and end more slowly, with stress used for important points and contrasts. Pausing is also a means of emphasis. If the data is shocking or unexpected a pause can be given to let the listeners digest this information more. Pauses can also be used as a transition from one topic to another.

3.2 Eye Contact

The importance of eye contact cannot be stressed enough. While in some Asian cultures, staring a person in the eye is considered rude, especially if the person you are talking to is older or in a more senior position, at international medical conferences it is expected. Eye contact creates an interaction between the speaker and the audience and encourages the latter to listen. The presentation should start and end with direct eye contact round the whole audience. Your gaze should not be focused on one person as this can be intimidating, but at sections of the audience. Darting your eyes about quickly or looking at the ceiling is both distracting and unnatural. You should aim to focus on one section of the audience for 1-2 seconds; then look at another section, then another. You should **never** turn your back to the audience and speak to the screen. Neither should you read straight off a manuscript, because this will result in your having to look down and losing all eye contact with the audience. Your speech should be presented, not read.

3.3 Movement, Gestures and Posture

You should stand straight, but not stiff, with your weight evenly balanced on both feet. Good posture lets you diaphragm move better to control both your breathing and voice production. Looking down and reading your manuscript word for word will hinder this effect. While movement and gestures can be used to signal transition points or to stress points of importance, meaningless gestures and repetitive movements are distracting and should be avoided. Moving the laser pointer up and down too much can also be distracting. Finally, facial expression should match the message you want to convey. If you state that your data is interesting, you should look as if you find it so.

4. Suggestions for a More Successful Presentation

As is the case with most personal skills, oral communication is not something that be taught, rather it is something that is acquired. And of course to acquire this skill, there is nothing better than experience and practice. However, there are several points that should be born in mind to make your presentation go as smoothly as possible.

4.1 Proof Reading and Rehearsal

Regardless of whether English is your native language or not, all slides should be proof read for grammatical and spelling mistakes. Care should be taken to make sure certain words do not appear twice since these can be missed by the PowerPoint spell-checker. If English is not your first language, then it goes without saying that having a native speaker check your presentation is imperative. No matter how good your English may be, it will never be as good or as natural as a native speaker's.

The presentation should be read and timed all the way through at least twice; once by yourself and then in front of a friendly but critical audience. No more than two minutes should be spent on each slide and if you go overtime, adjust your presentation accordingly. Remember, your presentation is not the only one at the conference and the more time you go over may mean the less time others have for their presentations.

4.2 Using Navigation Shortcuts

The **F5** key will start your presentation and **<ESC>** will terminate it. Typing a number and then pressing **ENTER** will take you to the slide number you typed without any visual feedback on the screen as you enter the number. Pressing **B** will display a black screen if you want the audience to stop reading and **W** will display a white screen which is less jarring if your presentation has a white background. The pointer can be hidden by pressing **A** and the arrow keys **←** and **→** will go to the previous or next slide. Finally **CTRL-P** allows you to write on your presentation with the mouse and **E** will erase these pen marks.

4.3 Disaster Planning

Consider what could go wrong and plan accordingly. Prepare numbered cue cards with the main points of what you would say and number your slides accordingly. This means if you do drop your cue cards, the number on them will correspond with the slide it belongs to and your place won't be lost. Always save 2 spare copies of your presentation on 2 different mediums, such as CD-Rom or flash memory and store one in your hand luggage and one in your check-in luggage. Making printed handouts of the presentation is also advisable should the computer fail and an OHP have to be used.

5. Conclusion

In recent years due to various government grants, Japanese doctors have been getting more and more opportunities to present their research in an international setting. Such meetings are extremely important to the reputation of the individual and his or her institution. However, in terms of time and money spent, attendance is costly and, as a result, the more one spends, the more value for money one expects. Giving non-value-for-money presentations can damage the reputation of the individual, his or her institution and ultimately Japan, itself.

To prevent this situation from occurring, presentations should be prepared in advance with plenty of time allotted for language editing and rehearsal. The presentation should not be read straight from a manuscript, but presented with

the aid of notes. Eye contact should be made at all times with the audience and both body language and voice should express confidence and authority. Since the start and the end of the presentation are what influence the audience most, sufficient time should be spent to prepare these parts.

Finally, a good presentation coordinates communication from the speaker, the speech and the PowerPoint slides themselves. You should recognize the various elements that come together in a successful presentation, master them and be proud of your performance.

References

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Appendix 1 Anatomy of the Presentation

Main Sections

I Greetings

1. Good Morning / Good Afternoon / Good Evening
2. Thank you, Mr. Chairman / Madam Chairperson, and good afternoon ladies and gentlemen.
3. (Optional) I'd like first of all to thank the organizers of this meeting for inviting me here today

II Opening Remarks

1. Today, I'd like to talk about...
2. My topic of my talk today is.....
3. My subject today is.....

III The Plan

1. I have divided my talk/subject/presentation into 4 sections
2. The first point I am going to make concerns.....
My first point is about....
At first I would like to talk about....
3. My second point concerns...
4. In the third part I will deal with...
5. And finally, I'd like to address the problem of...

IV Opening the main section

1. Let me start by posing the question that...
2. I'd like to begin by suggesting that..
3. I'd like to start by drawing your attention to...
4. Let me begin by pointing out that...

V Moving to a new point

1. Let me now turn to...
2. I'd like to now turn to the question of....
3. Let me now move to the issue of...
4. Moving on now to the question of....
5. If we now look at....
6. Let's now look to the question of...
7. Having looked atlet us now consider.....

VI Summarizing

1. The main points that have been made so far...
2. In conclusion, I should just like to say.....
3. Let me now sum up my main points of my talk / presentation
4. Summing up then...
5. By way of summary, the main points of the study are...

VII Thanking the audience

1. Thank you
2. And let me finish here. Thank you
3. I'll finish here. Thank you for your kind attention

Sub-Sections

I Elaborating a point

1. I'd now like to look at this in a little more detail
3. If you don't mind, I'd like to develop the point further..
Let me now elaborate on this point..

4. Let's look at the problem in a bit more detail...
5. The first aspect of this problem is...

II Postponing

1. I will return to this point later...
2. I'll be coming back to this problem later
3. As I will show later...
4. As will be shown later...

III Referring Back

1. Coming back to the question of..
2. Coming back now to the issue I raised earlier...
3. As I said earlier...
4. As I mentioned earlier...
5. As we saw earlier...
6. I'd now like to return to the question of....

IV Highlighting

1. The interesting / significant / important thing about.....is.....
2. The thing to remember is....
3. What one must remember is...
4. What we have to realize is.....
5. Strangely / funnily / oddly enough...

V Indicators

1. Right...
2. Okay then....
3. Now....
4. Good....
5. Well...
6. Well now...
7. Well then