

MAKING PRESENTATIONS – A COMMON TASK INVOLVING PLENTY OF COMMUNICATIONAL SKILLS

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Abstract

A very much used activity in the modern society is represented by presentations that occur in all domains and address extensively to various target groups from local to international level. Thus, methods of making presentations were developed and English has become the language most used for this activity. Besides communicational skills, presenters will need an adequate vocabulary and specific phrases for each particular situation. This study provides several examples aimed at helping acquisition and mastering of the elements involved in making presentations.

1. Introduction

Presentations are among the most common activities in any domain of human activity, being a very useful means of dissemination, information, marketing, promotion, advertising, introducing reports, displaying performances, explaining compatibilities, a.s.o. Being extensively used, it developed method and acquired style and the method has gained importance, and has become a must in the preparation of prospect members of various companies.

“Most people presume that we live, at the onset of the new millennium, in a golden age of communication. In terms of technology, we do. And the age grows more golden every day, because each day brings new and faster machines and software. But this is no golden age in terms of individuals communicating with one another.” [4, p. 14] We still have a lot to learn in this respect and making presentations being just one of the many activities that require extensive communicational skills, will comprise it’s peculiar needs. “The ability to deliver an effective talk is one of the most valuable skills you can possess.” [5, p. 46]

2. Aspects of preparing a presentation

Apart from the physical preparation, the formal dressing and the extra attention to be paid to the nonverbal messages the body language can transmit [cf. 3], the person that has to make a presentation also needs training in the art of orally exposing things - certain findings, results of research, given facts, promotional material or own ideas - in a persuasive, tactful and trustful manner, so that the audience would take the steps the presenter intended. As a researcher in the matter once asserted: To be a successful public speaker, there are three big steps one should observe: 1. Tell the audience what he/she is going to say. 2. Say it. 3. Tell them what he/she said. [see 2, chap. 6]

Focusing only on the communicational side of making presentations, we shall look closer into the language specific to the phases of the presentation.

3. Presentation stages and their specific lexical elements

At the beginning, after addressing the audience and greeting (*Good ..., ladies and gentlemen...*), there are some specifications, some mentions that should be made, about the subject of the presentation and the way of organizing it – the structure, the duration, the discussions.

The communicational elements [5, p. 50] met in this part would range from the following:

- *I am going / plan / would like to talk about / to give you an overview of / to say a few words about...*
- *The theme / subject of this presentation / my talk is...*
- *I've divided it in... parts. (In the) First (part)... . (Then in the) Second (part).... Next... Finally...*
- *My presentation will take about...(there will be a ... break / we'll stop for...)*
- *If you have / there are any questions, feel free to ask / please interrupt / we'll have ... minutes for discussion after my talk / there will be time for them at the end...*

During the presentations there will be references to the specific material presented usually using several visual helps that will have to be commented, indicating for instance the most relevant figures and insisting on the ideas directly relevant to the issue presented. The vocabulary will be much concerned with this helping material and will be discussed below in a separate title.

As connectors, moving to following parts in the presentations, one may use [5, p. 71]:

- *To begin with....*
- *We can see some advantages and disadvantages.*
- *As for advantages, one is... another...*
- *Let's move to the... part, which is about....*
- *Now I want to turn to / describe... / we come to.../ the next part.*
- *There are ... things / different stages to consider / steps involved.*
- *On one hand, ... on the other hand....*
- *First / At the beginning ... Second / Then / Later / Next... Finally / Last (but not least)...*
- *This completes / concludes...*
- *This is / That's all (on...) for now.*

Dealing with the questions from the audience will imply the use of structures like:

- *It is not an easy question to answer here briefly, but in my opinion / experience... / it could be/*
- *I would say*
- *I don't think I'm the right person to answer, ... (maybe our PR manager might help here), it is not my field /*
- *I do not have much experience in...*
- *I'm afraid that is outside the scope of this presentation /*
- *I'll come to that later (in my talk / during the break) /*
- *You'll have to discuss that with...*
- *Sorry, I didn't catch /*
- *I'm not sure I've understood...*
- *Are you asking...?/*
- *Do you mean...?*
- *Could you repeat..?*
- *Is that okay now?*
- *Does this answer your question?*

For ending the presentation, some closing structures [5, p. 78] like the following might come handy:

- *I'd like to end / finish by emphasising (... / the main points) / with some observations / recommendations / conclusion / a summary.*
- *There are... conclusions....*
- *Right, that ends my talk.*
- *Thank you for listening.*
- *Now I would like to hear / invite your comments.*

4. Presentation aids. Auxiliary material

A presentation is now unconceivable without visual support. Most commonly a laptop and a video projector, projecting the presentation slides on a screen, will do. Still, other devices might be used, such as: OHPs (for transparencies), flip chart, whiteboard.

The material presented should be schematised as much as possible, especially in business, words are mostly to be said, as explanations of charts, diagrams, pictures, graphs, rather than written and read from the material prepared. Still, the vocabulary that will be used at this point is again important, from introducing the visual to describing the images shown or comparing the data presented [5, p. 60]:

- *Have a / Let's look at this...*
- *Here we can see...*
- *I'd like to show you...*
- *This ... shows / (re)presents...;*
- *increase / climb / rise / go up / improve / get better/ recover \leftrightarrow decrease / decline / fall / go down / get worse;*
- *reach a peak / a maximum \leftrightarrow hit bottom / reach a low point, stabilise / level out / stay the same \leftrightarrow undulate / fluctuate;*
- *Let's compare the...*
- *This compares ... with ...*
- *Here you see a comparison between the trends in ... and*

Much of this vocabulary involves terms from the domain and a lot of economic terms, especially when it comes to describing graphs and diagrams. A series of verbs that are specific for presentation of charts are distinguishable above.

5. Importance of vocabulary acquisition

The spread of the use of this procedure of making presentations in all domains of activity from business to industry, from engineering to advertising, speaks for the increasing need to assimilate, master and make use of the vocabulary specific to the field and the communicational elements inferred and the conversational skills in the language of presentations, very commonly English, as lingua franca of most activities.

Knowing the standard language and being skilled in delivering speeches can surely be a help but not necessarily enough as presentations involve also special elements of the certain fields they belong to. However, another aspect might impede communication: "... most people are afraid of public speaking... Stage fright is not uncommon, even among good speakers." [5, p. 47] Being well prepared is then of utmost importance in overcoming some of those fears.

Being a good orator is unquestionably an advantage and can save one's face in some situations; still it is not the most relevant characteristic in making presentation. Knowledge of the particular phases and their standard phrases might be more helpful even

for those who are not masters of speeches. A bit of a show man is preferable in any presenter but not all of us are actors and learning some standard lexical elements will then be safer and quite formal. Professionalism is more formalism than charm though the latter is much appreciated.

For non-speakers of English or those who only know basic level English it would be undoubtedly more difficult to manage a presentation without such aids as the ones provided above. The models given are not difficult to assimilate and use even by the less experienced and they endow them with a certain ease and confidence. Knowing the standard phrases and being able to use them offers comfort and reduces the stress of any presentation.

6. Conclusion

From introducing oneself and the topic of the presentation, from welcoming participants and stating the structure or duration of the presentation, to actually presenting facts and data by means of visual help and finally concluding, answering questions and inviting further discussions, the activity of addressing to a mass of people more or less interested in the topic, more or less critical in tone, more or less willing to accept you and your talk, proves a hard task to perform, after all. "Despite the obvious importance of communication, it is something we are often quite poor at." [1, p. 3]

Preparation is thus essential, in all aspect and more important in the communicational performance.

Well equipped with the formal phrases that are standardly used in the specific phases, it is easier to deal with the unexpected events of any oral presentation, from slip of mind or tongue to interruptions or bitter remarks.

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