

Pechakucha Presentations in the Classroom - Supporting Language Learners with Public Speaking

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Abstract

Presentation skills are vital for language learners, but traditional PowerPoint presentations are often intimidating for second language students because of their length. They can also be very boring with students speaking slowly and hesitating constantly. Pechakucha presentations are a special type of presentation that was initially started in Tokyo, but has now spread all over the world. Each presentation consists of twenty slides; each slide is on automatic timer for twenty seconds. For this reason these are sometimes known as 20/20 presentations. The fast pace, but short time period is ideal for language learners. Each slide lasting only twenty seconds reduces pressure on students to memorize long passages, whilst the slides changing automatically discourages hesitation or going off topic. The slides are also very simple and visual. This paper will outline how the unique nature of the automatic timings in Pechakucha presentations can be used to motivate and support students with public speaking in their second language. It is also ideal for classrooms, when there is a limited time period to watch numerous presentations. The presenter will outline how Pechakucha can be used as an entire course to teach public speaking, but also as an activity and evaluation tool that could be used in any class. The presenter will share classroom materials that have been used very successfully in a monolingual situation in Japan encouraging public speaking with intermediate level students.

Keywords: Presentations, Pechakucha, Public Speaking

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Introduction

When Steve Jobs said “I hate the way people use slide presentations instead of thinking”, (Isaacson, 2012) he was probably referring to long boring presentations with complex slides that no one can read or understand. Pecha Kucha presentations use slides, but in their simplest form. They are fast paced, visual and over in a few minutes. Pecha Kucha presentations support nervous presenters, but also limit overly loquacious speakers. This is true for all presenters, but especially true for non-native English speakers lacking confidence in speaking English. When presenters are nervous about speaking they often create complex slides, to detract from their speaking skills. Through forcing students to use the Pecha Kucha format students create simple visual slides, practice more, keep their audience interested and are assisted in continuing to speak at a steady pace throughout their presentation.

What is Pecha Kucha?

Pecha Kucha presentations are a special type of presentation, which were initially started in Tokyo by Astrid Klein and Mark Dytham of Klein-Dytham Architecture, but have now spread all over the world. Each presentation consists of twenty slides; each slide is on automatic timer for twenty seconds. For this reason these are sometimes known as 20/20 presentations. The presentation format was devised as a way for designers to display their work, but also to avoid long boring presentations. As Klein and Dytham say “Give a microphone and some images to an architect -- or most creative people for that matter -- and they'll go on forever! Give PowerPoint to anyone else and they have the same problem.” (Klein & Dytham, 2015) Each slide automatically changes after twenty seconds and there are only twenty slides in each presentation. This means that the presentation lasts exactly six minutes and forty seconds. Pecha Kucha presentations were traditionally held as social events- ‘Pecha Kucha Nights.’ There are currently more than 800 cities around the world hosting Pecha Kucha nights along with many more educational and corporate organizations organizing in-house events.

Pecha Kucha in the Language Classroom

Presentations are a very effective way to improve students’ oral and aural skills as well as gaining vital presentation skills necessary for their future. Whether you become an office worker, teacher, or member of your children’s school parent teacher association, there are situations throughout your life when you need to speak in public. Increasingly there are situations where this needs to be done in English for non-native English speakers. Many forms of speaking needs to be done off the cuff with no time to practice, however much you practice English conversation there will not be enough time to practice every possible question, which you might be asked. However presentations are an opportunity for students to practice their oral skills in a controlled atmosphere. Al-Issa & Al-Qubtan (2010) state that oral presentations facilitate the practice of all four skills; reading, writing speaking and listening. In the case of Pecha Kucha, due to the visual slides there is little practice of reading and writing, but listening and speaking skills can be improved through presenting and being a member of the audience. Adding worksheets or student evaluation can increase the benefit of these activities.

There are numerous problems with teaching non-native English speakers to make

presentations. One of the biggest problems is that when teaching students to present, teachers tend to tell students what to do, but the students get very little actual practice at presenting. This is partly due to logistics; it is very difficult for students to practice presentations without taking up a lot of classroom time with most students sitting and listening. In this article I would like to describe why I think that Pecha Kucha presentations are great for non-native English speakers, why they work so well in the classroom and how to set up your classroom to incorporate presentations, either for a whole course or just part of a course.

Why is Pecha Kucha good for language learners?

Many people, not only second language learners, are afraid of public speaking. The thought of standing up in front of an audience for thirty minutes is daunting. Shorter presentations can be easier for nervous public speakers. As Pecha Kucha is focused on each slide for 20 seconds it makes students feel that it is short enough to accomplish. Anyone can speak for 20 seconds!

Many nervous public speakers have poor public speaking skills. They either hesitate too much, trying to remember their words or rush through the presentation without explaining their ideas properly. Pecha Kucha with its built-in 20 seconds per slide controls the speaker's pace in a very natural way. An added benefit is that the presenter is forced to consider their words very carefully to fit into a 20 second slot and they need to practice carefully. Students reported spending more time practicing Pecha Kucha presentations than other PowerPoint presentations (Anderson & Williams, 2012).

The nature of Pecha Kucha is that the slides need to be very visual to be read in 20 seconds. Complicated graphs and charts, which are often the worst part of PowerPoint presentations, need to be avoided. This very visual aspect makes the presentations far more entertaining for the audience. It also means that the audience needs to listen to the presenter rather than just read the slides. Audiences in Anderson and Williams' (2012) study reported that the Pecha Kucha presentations were more enjoyable than normal presentations. As one audience member said, "It is immensely more entertaining for the audience-sometimes sitting through presentation after presentation is painful, but the Pecha Kucha went by in a flash." (Anderson & Williams, 2012, p. 5)

Pecha Kucha can be done using PowerPoint, so that it does not need any special software or equipment. PowerPoint has been used in classrooms for a long time, and students need to learn to use PowerPoint. Added to which students want to use technology in the classroom. As Beyer (2011) said, "Students enjoy integrating technology into the classroom and rate professors more favorably when PowerPoint is used" (Beyer, 2011, p. 122). However in many cases students rely on PowerPoint instead of presentation skills. The PowerPoint slides are often works of art, but the presentation still fails due to poor presentation skills.

What Topics are Good for Pecha Kucha Presentations?

Pecha Kucha presentations were initially designed as a way to showcase the work of designers. In reality they can work for any type of presentation. As the slides are

only on the screen for 20 seconds, clear simple visuals are best, but this could be a picture or a simple graph or chart. It discourages the use of complicated graphs and charts, which are probably unsuitable for presentations anyway.

PowerPoint software supports most languages, so Pecha Kucha presentations could be in almost any language.

Arguments against the use of PowerPoint presentations in the classroom

There have been a number of arguments against using PowerPoint in the classroom. The most serious is that students rely too much on the PowerPoint slides. This is possible in Pecha Kucha as with ordinary presentations, but I think with the shorter time scale and extra practice this can be minimized. Secondly Murphy (2006 cited in Taylor, 2012) states that the sequential nature of PowerPoint slides make the audience feel separated from the learning process. This is a criticism, which is very true of Pecha Kucha. Especially because of the speed of the presentations and the short time of the slides there is very little opportunity for interaction between the audience and the presenter. This can be lessened by providing opportunities for questions and answers at the end of the presentation. During a Pecha Kucha event there will typically be about three presentations and then a break. The break period is an opportunity for people to talk to the presenters. When I make a Pecha Kucha presentation many people came to talk to me during the break. This was a refreshing change from the typical question and answer session, although you do not have the advantage of learning from other audience members' questions.

How to set up your class

Pecha Kucha is suitable for use as an entire course or for assessment in any other content-based courses. In either case there are some important skills, which need to be taught.

Body Language

- i. Hand gestures
- ii Body gestures
- iii Facial gestures

These are best taught through pair work or small group guessing games. Giving students cards with words written and students have to show these emotions or ideas without speaking. This type of charades game makes students overact, which helps them to overcome some of their inhibitions. "On stage, it feels really awkward to do large movements because — normally in life — we're talking to someone in a more intimate setting and moving your arms really big feels melodramatic. But on the stage, you have to move your body in really big gestures" (Torgovnick May, 2012).

Eye Contact

Eye contact is very difficult for many students, but I have found that it can be particularly difficult for second language learners, who do not usually sue direct eye contact in their own culture. This is a skill that can be taught, but it needs lots of practice. Developing from one on one eye contact, to small groups and finally to large

groups can help students to gradually get used to the feeling of looking into someone's eyes. I usually ask students to make short one-minute self-introductions, firstly to a number of partners, then two pairs join to make a group of four and students give the same short self-introduction to a group of four students, then two groups of four join to make a group of eight and each student stands up to give the same self-introduction to the larger group. In this way students become very confident with the content of what they are saying and gradually build up to a larger group.

Volume

Many people use a microphone when giving presentations, but unless you have the highest quality Wi-Fi clip-on microphone it is going to seriously impede the presentation. I like to encourage students in a classroom to learn to project their voice. We start by dictating short sentences aloud to a partner on the other side of the classroom. As everyone is speaking at the same time you need to speak as loudly as possible. Your partner must write down the sentence accurately, which necessitates understanding and hearing accurately.

Word stress

To make your voice interesting and emphasize the important points of your presentation you need to use word stress. I usually start with a very simple sentence such as the one below. Initially students listen to the teacher, and identify the stressed words. Then the students practice with a partner. Again this helps students to lose their inhibitions.

There are **two** big black rats in the kitchen.
There are two **big** black rats in the kitchen.
There are two big black **rats** in the kitchen.
There are two big black rats in the **kitchen**.

Planning your presentation

The biggest mistake that most presenters make is to start planning their presentation by opening the PowerPoint application. Nancy Duarte (2012) recommends starting with PostIt stickers. These should then be transferred to a planning sheet such as the one in Figure 1. If a full Pecha Kucha presentation is being done there should be exactly twenty slides. Each slide should contain phrases, which will be used in the presentation. In 20 seconds you can say a maximum of 50 words. Students should practice saying the words from each slide within 20 seconds. If they speak slowly they should reduce the number of words. The Slide Planning Sheet should also include ideas for gestures and a note about the picture. After that students can start looking for suitable pictures for each slide.

Slide Planning Sheet

Figure 1

Slide 1	Slide 2
Slide 3	Slide 4
Slide 5	Slide 6
Slide 7	Slide 8
Slide 9	Slide 10

Parts of the presentation

Students need to be taught specific language for parts of the presentation. Firstly explicit teaching of opening phrases for the introduction helps students to start their presentation confidently. State your name, the title of your presentation and a simple opening sentence, “This presentation will move you, entertain you, and will most definitely inform you. Today, I’m going to talk to you about 3 things...” (Kwan & Lusk, n.d.) Secondly, transition phrases help students to move smoothly from slide to slide. State when you are moving onto new topics use words such as; ‘next’, ‘after this I will talk about...’ Thirdly, students need to be taught specific language to describe pictures and explain graphs. Teach students phrases such as; ‘at the top of the picture’ ‘in the background’. With graphs you can teach words such as ‘axis’, ‘sharp increase’ and ‘small decrease.’ Finally, teaching phrases to finish the presentation helps students to finish the presentation smoothly. This should include a repetition of your main topic, ‘thank you for listening’, and a way for the audience to contact you if they have any further questions.

Evaluation

In most academic settings there is a necessity to evaluate students. More than this presentations can be used as a way to evaluate students’ understanding of content of a course or as an alternative to writing a research paper. If your students have strong verbal skills, but weak writing skills, this can be very effective. Firstly individual presentations or pair presentations are probably better suited to Pecha Kucha, due to the short time scale. Secondly, between ten and twenty slides is best, always use 20 seconds per slide, any less and the students do not have time to say what they need to say, any more and the students will begin to hesitate. Thirdly it is better to incorporate

two presentations in a semester, as this allows for improvement and students can try different styles. Finally make sure that all your students have the transitions set on automatically

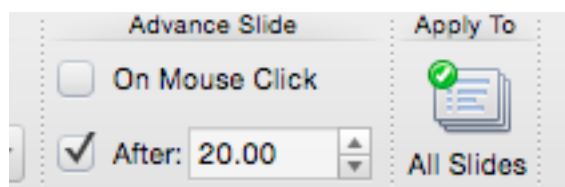
I always prepare a 5-point evaluation sheet in advance. There is very little time; so having boxes you can just check is very useful. The evaluation criteria will depend on what you have taught, but will probably include some of these points. There is very little time to write extensive comments, so unless you are recording videos to evaluate later this should be kept to a minimum.

• Body Language	1	2	3	4	5
• Eye Contact	1	2	3	4	5
• Volume	1	2	3	4	5
• Intonation	1	2	3	4	5
• Introduction	1	2	3	4	5
• Conclusion	1	2	3	4	5
• Timing	1	2	3	4	5
• Slide information	1	2	3	4	5
• Slide visuals	1	2	3	4	5
Comments					

Logistics

Setting up the automatic transitions.

1. Open transitions
2. Click on the advance slide 'After:' and set to 20.00
3. Check 'All Slides'



Load slides onto the classroom computer before the presentations start

When you have many students presenting in a short time period you should have the students upload slides onto your computer one week before their presentations. Due to the size of Pecha Kucha files do not try to email them, as some email services cannot accept the file size. In emergencies you can download software to help you send large files. Up loading slides in advance serves three goals, firstly, it forces students to practice body language and speaking in the week before the presentation, without spending their time making slides. Secondly, the teacher can grade the slides in advance. Finally there will be no lost USBs on the day of the presentations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, presentations are an excellent way to improve speaking and listening skills. They are also a skill that all students need to learn. Pecha Kucha presentations are ideal for students and classrooms due to their short length and speed. They enable teachers to incorporate a large number of presentations within a class period. They also help to scaffold and support students, who are nervous speaking in public in a second language. Finally students, who took part Pecha Kucha presentations said that they learned to present more confidently. They also enjoyed watching other class members giving presentations.

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