

FEEDBACK ASPECTS ON ECONOMIC PRESENTATIONS

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Abstract

This paper focuses on both giving and receiving feedback on students' five-minute economic presentations. The target students are first year undergraduates with the Faculty of Cybernetics and Faculty of Accounting within the Bucharest University of Economic Studies.

The first part of the paper consists in a wide range of the most frequent types of mistakes made by students while delivering their presentations on economic topics.

The second part of our research contains students' feedback on their own presentations being guided by a feedback leaflet. We find students' feedback on their own presentations an important component which has deep motivations such as: establishing a connection between the topic they themselves have chosen to research and their future careers, trying to find starting points for further research, thinking about ways of making better presentations in the future.

Keywords: economic presentations, teachers' and students' feedback, further research, future careers.

1. Mistake correction and feedback

It is generally accepted that an effective presentation is a convincing one. The literature in this field presents lots of tips for effective presentations in detail, but our main purpose in this section is to draw attention upon some feedback aspects supported by the examples provided by our students while delivering economic presentations.

Even if the reasons for all kinds of mistakes can be understandable up to a point, nevertheless their occurrence should be discouraged. Most of the times, when signaling them to their "authors" they look surprised and say they have been in the rush of delivering the presentation, they have not had enough time to concentrate on each and every letter or word they pronounced or that they have been very nervous and all these have affected the correctness of their presentation delivery. Surprisingly, there are some students who do not consider some grammatical or pronunciation errors as very severe, being convinced that they are able to make

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themselves understood even if they make some sort of mistakes here or there, as Emmerson (2002: 3) states “Business students are usually more interested in clear, effective communication than in high levels of grammatical accuracy”. Making some errors is human, but a strong knowledge and command of English doubled by care and preparation can definitely prevent them. In this case, the choice of several areas for feedback (e.g. vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation) is highly advisable (Emmerson, 2002: 3). The range of errors that have occurred with students delivering economic presentations is a varied one and can be grouped as follows:

1. First of all, we have focused on pronunciation errors because “intelligible pronunciation [...] is particularly important in oral presentations where poor delivery can undo even the most interesting subject matter” (Bell, 2014: 8). With few exceptions this issue cannot be found in textbooks probably because it is considered that correct pronunciation is something that can somehow be learnt in time (Bell, 2014: 8).

Here are some instances of students’ wrong pronunciation of terms:

- (v.) receive /rɪ'saɪv/², c.p. /rɪ'si:v/;
- (n.) violation /vɪə'leɪʃən/, c.p. /,vaɪə'leɪ.ʃən/;
- (n.) engine /'endʒɪn/, c.p. /'en.dʒɪn/;
- (adj.) subtle /'sʌbtəl/ c.p. /'sʌt.əl/;
- (n.) conclusion /kən'klʌʒən/, c.p. /kən'klu:zən/;
- (n.) guidance /'ɡaɪdəns/, c.p. /'ɡaɪ.dəns/;
- (n.) globalisation /glɒkəlɪ'zeɪʃən/, c.p. /glɒs.kəl.aɪ'zeɪ.ʃən/;
- (n.) violence /'vɪələns/, c.p. /'vaɪə.ləns/;
- (n.) multitude /'mʌltɪtʃud/, c.p. /'mʌl.tɪ.tju:d/;
- (n.) priorities /praɪ'ɔrɪtɪz/ c.p. /praɪ'ɔr.ɪ.tɪz/;
- the strong form of the determiner “the”/ði:/ is replaced by its weak form /ðə/: e.g. the others /ðə 'ʌð.ərz/ for /ði:'ʌð.ərz/.

2. The wrong pronunciation of the third person singular “is” /ɪz/ of the verb *to be* is unfortunately a frequent mistake even among B2-C1 level EFL³ students. Here are some examples: “the first offer is /ɪts/ very important”, “the presentation is /ɪts/ about”, “the name is /ɪts/ more important than the quality”, “all the responsibility is /ɪts/ on you”, „choosing the name of the company is /ɪts/ difficult”.

Sometimes the wrong pronunciation is doubled by incorrect stress. Here are some instances of the kind:

- (n.) loyalty /lə'ɪælɪti/, c.p. & s. /'ləɪ.əl.ti/;
- (n.) recipe /rɪ'saɪp/, c.p. & s. /'res.ɪ.pi/;

² The first phonetic transcriptions are the incorrect ones and belong to students, the second ones are correct and are from the online edition of the Cambridge Dictionary: <http://dictionary.cambridge.org>

³ EFL= English as a foreign language

- (n.) analysis /'enəlaɪsɪz/, c.p. & s. /ə'næl.ə.sɪs/;
 - (adj.) communicative /kə'mju:nɪ.kətɪv/, c.p. & s. /kə'mju:.nɪ.kətɪv/;
 - (n.) aspect /ə'spekt/ c.p. & s. /'æs.pekt/;
 - (n.) manager [me'neger], c.p. & s. /'mæn.ɪ.dʒər/;
 - (n.) resource ['rɪsɔ:rs] c.p.& s. /rɪ'zɔ:s/;
 - (n.) asset [ə'set] c.p.& s. /'æs.et/;
 - (adj.) successful ['sʌksesfʌl] c.p.& s. /sək'ses.fəl/;
 - (n.) success /'sʌkses/, c.p.& s. /sək'ses/;
 - (n.) category /kə'tegəri/, c.p.& s. /'kæt.ə.ɡri/;
3. Word-by-word translation from Romanian into English:
- “even if you’re not agree” (compare with Rom. „chiar dacă nu ești de accord”) instead of “even if you don’t agree”;
 - “they influence one each other” (compare with Rom. „se influențează unul pe celălalt”) instead of “they influence each other”;
 - “he tried to take into contact” (compare with Rom. „a încercat să ia legătura”) instead of “he tried to get into contact”;
 - “they put questions” (compare with Rom. „ei/ ele pun întrebări”) instead of “they ask questions”;
 - “rivality” (compare with Rom. „rivalitate”) instead of Engl. “rivalry”;
 - “offert” (compare with Rom. „ofertă”) instead of Engl. “offer”;
 - “he reached to success” (compare with Rom. „a ajuns la succes”) for “he reached success”;
4. Omission/ unawareness of indirect questions:
- “I will tell you what is a family business” instead of “I will tell you what a family business is”;
 - “If you figure out what do you want” instead of “If you figure out what you want”;
 - “It is not important where do we come from or where do we live” instead of “It is not important where we come from or where we live”;
5. Subject-predicate disagreement:
- “both of them offers” instead of “both of them offer”
 - “ten rules that applies” instead of “ten rules that apply”
 - “his body language denote” “his body language denotes”;
6. The wrong use of prepositions:
- “focus at them” for “focus on them”
 - “interested of what you do” for “interested in what you do”;
7. Omission of certain prepositions required by verbs:
- “I’ll explain you what competition means” instead of “I’ll explain to you [...]”;

8. The use of the definite article instead of the 0 article:
- “the capitalism is characterized by [...]” instead of “capitalism is [...]”;
 - “the competition is present in the entire world” instead of “competition is present [...]”;
9. The use of adjectives instead of adverbs or vice versa:
- “is typical called” instead of “is typically called”;
 - “it’s very probably” instead of “it’s very probable”;
10. The use of wrong tenses:
- “In 2013 Iceland has used Facebook [...]”;
11. The wrong use of the relative pronoun:
- “a special soft who activates” instead of “a special soft which/ that activates”;
 - “families which have children” instead of “families that have children”;
 - “people which succeeded” instead of “people who/ that succeeded”;
12. Unawareness of plural form defective nouns:
- “interview advices” instead of “interview pieces of advice”;
 - “negotiate with other peoples” instead of “negotiate with other people”;
13. The use of *romglis*⁴ terms:
- “cercetation” /tʃɛrtʃeˈtɛɪʃən/ (compare Rom. cercetare) instead of “research”;
 - “execution” /ɛkɛkɪuteɪʃən/ (compare Rom. executare) instead of “execution”;

The meaning of the term *romglis* used by us in this paper refers to Romanian terms that have been “dressed in an English coat”. However strange they may look they are used by some Romanian EFL speakers and, of course, they reveal unawareness or unintentional omission of the English existing correct terms.

14. Verb confusion:
- “don’t sell something that would not raise /raiz/ the interest“, instead of /reiz/. It is obvious that the pronunciation of the intransitive verb “to rise” has been used to pronounce the transitive verb to “raise”.

⁴ The term *Romglis* has been used by Rodica Zafiu referring to the large amount of English borrowings used by Romanian speakers which has led to a “*romglis*” language”: „Nu atât împrumutul cuvintelor englezești - limba „romglis” - e un lucru grav, ci clișeizarea anumitor formulări” <http://www.gandul.info/interviurile-gandul/noua-limba-a-romanilor-lingvistica-rodica-zafiu-explica-la-interviurile-gandul-cum-am-ajuns-sa-vorbim-si-sa-injuram-romglis-13874343>, accessed January 16, 2016

2 Students' feedback on their own presentations

We believe that in the feedback process students' opinions on their own economic presentations are of great importance. In my teaching career I have asked students to prepare and deliver economic presentations each semester. But our interest in what they really believe about the usefulness and the improvement ways of such an assignment as well as the high number students (240) have encouraged us that by means of such a feedback method we can get pertinent and valuable responses. That is why in this next section of our paper we will concentrate upon our students' responses to the questions on the feedback leaflet which sound as follows:

- 1. The title of your presentation*
- 2. How useful do you think the whole presentation process is for you and your future career?*
- 3. If you were to choose something interesting from your presentation to research further which thing would that be?*
- 4. What do you think needs improving in order to have a better presentation next time?*

The reasons that we have had in mind for each question on the feedback leaflet were: the second question is meant to make a connection between what students are required to do and the relevance of such an assignment in order activate and improve their English language skills (oral production mainly, reading while researching, writing slides for instance), because presentation process refers to both preparation and delivery; the third question has been included in order to encourage them to continue their research on a topic they themselves have chosen to analyze and develop in a presentation, the only limit being its belonging to the economic, business field; and, as there is always room for better, the last question is motivated by the fact that students should always be encouraged to exceed their limits and wish for better, in this case better future presentations.

1. The title of your presentation

The topics chosen by students for their presentations are challenging and some even very inspired ones (We are going to mention here some of them): "Forbes 30 under 30", "Weird business ideas", "My personal budget", "Be a leader, not a boss", "Non-verbal language in job interviews", "Women vs. men in business", "Innovative interviews", "The economic impact of professionals' exodus", "Successful businesses during the financial crisis". When choosing their presentation topics students have been encouraged to think if they themselves would have the patience and the curiosity to listen to a presentation on the topic they have thought about, so as to motivate them to research challenging and interesting topics.

2. How useful do you think the whole presentation process is for you and your future career?

We are extremely happy that students' effort has been perceived by them as being a useful one. With no exception, all the students find the presentation process useful: "The presentation was very helpful for me, but also for the people that the presentation had been made for [...] when you have to deliver a presentation, you have to read a lot, to be prepared for possible questions that may appear." They already know how important presentations are in business, therefore in their future careers (Spring-Wallace, 1992: 74).

There are some students' opinions that make us believe that although the whole presentation process may seem very stressful at first sight, it proves to be perceived as a "must be experienced" thing in order to improve their public speaking skills: "It helped me overcome my fear about speaking in public."; "Had it not been for this presentation, I would not have done anything to fight my public speaking fear or exercise my presentation skills.", "I have got used to the presentation process".

Being challenged to deliver a presentation really makes changes: "The rate of unemployment in Romania is very high and made me think seriously about what kind of job I want to have in the future"; "I know more about negotiation tactics now".

Students have hobbies and this is an opportunity for them to research a topic they really like, for instance how to start a business or how to open an animal sheltering. The presentation experience is also a starting point for thinking about having their own business in the (near) future: "Now I really want to have my own business and invest in my country."⁵

3. If you were to choose something interesting from your presentation to research further which thing would that be?

Students have chosen several interesting things to research further such as career consulting, non-verbal language in business, start-ups, online businesses, new product risks, jobs of the future, business failures, the room escape business concept, communication skills, ethics in business, parents' influence upon children's financial future, ethics and culture in business, or manipulation techniques in supermarkets.

4. What do you think needs improving in order to have a better presentation next time?

Most students have mentioned the nervousness that they experienced, and when answering the fourth question they saw an improvement of the presentation delivery having the next time the power to control their feelings, to be calmer. Very frequently students feel that this nervousness as the source of most their mistakes, the lack or very little eye contact with the audience, the inappropriate level of their

⁵ See also Bell (2014: 8)

voice (too low). A solution for diminishing this performance anxiety could be the “simultaneous presentation” technique (“students make presentations simultaneously in pairs, one makes a presentation, one listens to the presentation, and then they switch roles”) (Shimo, 2011: 228). This technique could function as a previous stage to the presentation in front of the whole students’ group, which seems more intimidating especially for shy performers and could be also meant to get them prepared for larger audiences.

Here are some of the students’ quotes when answering the fourth question: “I need to be calmer, to speak more fluently and without being nervous.”, “Back then I got a little nervous, and, for a moment, I lost some of my ideas”. Very often more information on the topic or a sub-topic is seen as a means of improvement or of being able to answer the audience’s questions: “more information about how a business family can work”, “information from different books, not only the Internet”. And students’ presentation improvement solutions are various: better vocabulary, exercising presentation delivery in front of a mirror, more optimism, an extended length of time spent for presentation preparation: “I need to improve my vocabulary so I can explain my thoughts better”, “I have to exercise public speaking in front of a mirror”, “I should have more self-confidence”, “I should be less pessimist about a possible fail”, “I am a very shy person and I am nervous when I stand in front of many people”, “I should allocate more time to do the research.”. These quotes speak for themselves: students feel the need to improve their presentation skills like adequate eye contact and posture, control of nerves ability to design along with their linguistic accuracy (Bell, 2014: 8).

3. Final remarks

We have chosen to draw attention to some instances of various errors made by EFL students while delivering five-minute economic presentations. Among these errors an important part is represented by pronunciation and stress errors because we believe that the effectiveness of an oral presentation depends to a great extent on correct pronunciation. We have discovered that once students have been advised of their mistakes, they have become aware of them and thus more prepared to prevent them during future oral presentations.

Students’ feedback on their own presentations has given us the certainty that oral economic presentations are not perceived by students as just a type of assignment that has to be done in order to get a grade, but something that has to be done by them if they want to improve their English knowledge and be prepared for their future careers.

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<http://dictionary.cambridge.org>

Abbreviations

- | | |
|-----------|------------------------------------|
| c.p. | - correct pronunciation |
| c.p. & s. | - correct pronunciation and stress |
| Engl. | - English |
| Rom. | - Romanian |

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