Explicit Metaknowledge Instruction of Oral Presentation

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Many ESL/EFL teachers assume that there is a considerable need for learners to learn how to make a good, clear oral presentation, but little research has been done regarding a systematic approach to teaching oral presentation to L2 learners. Oral presentation is a highly demanding communicative activity that involves presenting a report or a viewpoint on a particular topic as a part of work or academic study. It requires the speaker’s careful control of language and content, and awareness of a largely passive audience, yet being the focus of attention. As we all have experienced, oral presentation is not an easy skill even for L1 speakers, much less so for L2 learners. However, in the growing needs for international communication in business and academic worlds, oral presentation has become one of the important skills that are taught in the ESL/EFL class.

Since metaknowledge of oral presentation is not systematically learned or acquired in a natural context and many learners do not know where to start to develop their presentation skills, explicit instruction of metaknowledge is thought to have significant effect on the quality of the learner’s performance. The instruction of metaknowledge in this study refers to explicit teaching of oral presentation skills such as structuring, elaboration, eye contact, voice work, and visual aids. Thus, the present study investigated the explicit instruction of English expository oral presentation to Japanese EFL learners with the following research questions: 1) Does explicit instruction of metaknowledge have an effect on the development of learners’ L2 oral presentation? 2) Does explicit instruction of metaknowledge with subsequent communicative practice have more effect on the development of learners’ L2 oral presentation than practice-only instruction?

The data collected from 21 participants were transcribed relying on audio and video tapes and analyzed interpretive-qualitatively. The analyzed data showed some interesting results in the performance of the participants, who had had no prior experience in delivering English oral presentation. The introduction, structuring of the body, and elaboration of main points, which were the target of the explicit instruction, were clearly observed in the data. Therefore, the explicit instruction of metaknowledge that consisted of the initial classroom instruction, additional instruction with the handouts, repeated oral feedback, and peer evaluation is thought to have had effect on the development of the participants’ L2 oral presentation. The conclusion part that was eliminated from the course of
metaknowledge instruction did not emerge as frequently as the other items, so communicative practice only may not be sufficient for the development of the target skill. In addition, though the participants were initially instructed that the conclusion was one of the required items, their awareness was not raised enough through peer evaluation only. Peer evaluation was certainly one of the factors, but the overall awareness seems to have been most effectively raised when additional instruction or feedback was given.

To conclude, this study suggests that it is better for learners to equip themselves with some idea of what oral presentation consists of before engaging in the activity. Moreover, repeated input of the metaknowledge is thought to be useful to raise learners’ awareness while in activity, by making explicit what is important in oral presentation and how it can be successfully realized in performance.

References