Oral Presentations in Business English: Utilizing Smartphones for Indirect Negative Feedback

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Abstract

Giving oral presentations in business-related scenarios is commonplace. Moreover, being able to effectively communicate key information to management, colleagues, and clients is the foundation to a productive working environment. Therefore, the importance of possessing effective communication skills upon entering the workforce cannot be understated. Additionally, the increasing interconnectedness of the global market has pushed the importance of obtaining effective English language communication skills to the foreground. When designing effective business English courses for non-native speakers of English, one goal of the curriculum should be to elicit improvements in oral presentation and general communication skills. This research examines the potential benefits of utilizing the video recording feature of students' smartphones as a method to provide objective negative feedback on the quality of oral presentations in a manner that does not impede on the motivational effect of positive feedback from the instructor. The results of this research suggest that the video-recording method presented in this study is more effective, relative to a control group, at eliciting objective evaluations of components of the student oral presentations that need to be improved on.

Keywords: negative feedback, EFL oral presentations, CALL, MALL, applied linguistics

Whether it is effectively describing product information to make a sale, successfully detailing business plans to potential investors to secure financing for a start-up business, dealing with customer complaints, finding just the right slogan for a marketing campaign, or simply participating in a company meeting, communication skills are a key component to success in many areas of business. Successfully being able to communicate in any of the abovementioned scenarios is not something that comes naturally for most people. In fact, forms of public speaking are one of the most commonly reported social phobia (Ruscio et al., 2008). The difficulty that

many people face with communication tasks in formal environments is compounded when using a second language. The prominence of English as the de facto language of international communication coupled with the increasing interconnectedness of the global economy has made the subject of English a prominent if not necessary feature in educational institutions with business-oriented departments in many countries outside of the English-speaking world (Warschauer, 2000). One goal of these business-oriented English courses should be to improve upon English as a foreign language (EFL) communication skills to be used in business-related scenarios such as sales pitches, business proposals, customer service, marketing campaigns, and business meetings. Luckily, as with many other business-related skills, practice makes perfect and EFL communication in business scenarios can be improved upon in objective ways.

Objectively improving EFL communication skills in business English courses lies firmly in the field of applied linguistics. As such, research regarding effective instructional practices in courses with a focus on second language acquisition (SLA) can inform the construction of curricula designed to objectively improve EFL communication skills. This study specifically examines how the concept of "negative feedback" may be used to provide students with objective input on the quality of EFL oral presentations and information about what they need to specifically improve on. Moreover, this study will examine how utilizing the video recording feature on students' smartphones in conjunction with self-evaluation surveys can provide the students with the opportunity to receive this negative feedback indirectly (as opposed to directly from the instructor) to avoid diminishing the motivational effect of receiving positive feedback from the instructor.

This study attempts to use video recordings of student oral presentations in four business English courses throughout one academic year in conjunction with self-evaluation surveys to allow the students to provide their own negative feedback. To ensure that utilizing smartphone video recordings of oral presentations can produce significantly different scores in self-evaluation surveys relative to self-evaluations conducted without the use of smartphone video recordings, the students conducting their self-evaluations with smartphone video recordings (the treatment group) are compared to those of students conducting self-evaluations without smartphone video recordings (the control group). This study uses the results of the data of the two groups of self-evaluations to draw a conclusion about the effectiveness from utilizing smartphone video recordings of oral presentations to provide indirect, objective negative

feedback, and how this video-recording method may be beneficial to preserve student motivation.

Negative Feedback Vs. Motivation in the L2 Classroom

Negative feedback is one form of corrective feedback. The pedagogic principle underlying the potential educational benefit of negative feedback in an EFL context is simple: draw attention to the mistakes that students make so that they may avoid making the same mistakes at a later date. The concept of negative feedback also aligns itself well with the concept of the "internal syllabus" which has been advocated by researchers such as Michael Long. In the second language (L2) classroom, every student will be at a different level of development, and the SLA process is dependent on where the student is in their internal syllabus. The vast majority of errors made in L2 production tasks has also been shown to be mostly due to developmental stages in the internal syllabus rather than through the process of L1 transfer interference (Benson, 2002). Therefore, proponents of the internal syllabus model argue that the L2 educational process needs to be as individualized as possible to accommodate for the varying levels of each student (Long & Crookes, 1992). This process of individualizing L2 education may be effectively carried out through the process of individual negative feedback, whereby each student is provided feedback as to what mistakes they are making (Long, 1996). Negative feedback has also been shown to objectively improve a number of skills in the SLA process such as grammar acquisition (Kubota, 1994), writing (Robb et al., 1986), and speaking (Smith & King, 2004). With the long list of potential benefits that negative feedback may have in the SLA process, one could assume it is the go-to method in the L2 classroom for achieving individualized improvements corresponding to the internal syllabi of the student population. However, there are critics of the negative feedback method who cite concerns over how it may adversely impact the motivation of students who receive negative feedback.

Motivation has been shown in numerous studies to play a crucial role not only in developing fundamental skills in an L2, but also in constructing student self-identities relating to the culture and speakers of the L2 (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). However, in contrast to the host of potential benefits in the SLA process that negative feedback may have, negative feedback has been shown to potentially pose a threat to student motivation (Deci & Cascio, 1972). Furthermore, negative feedback and other forms of corrective feedback are not the only forms of feedback. Indeed, positive feedback (e.g. praise for or affirmation of the correctness of a

linguistic response in the L2), in particular from the instructor (Dörnyei, 1994), has been theorized to encourage students to internalize goals aligned with the acquisition of the L2, which will then motivate students to continue to pursue those goals (Ryan & Deci, 2000). In other words, the instructor can create a learning environment that encourages the evolution of "extrinsic motivation" factors (e.g. studying to receive a good grade) to "intrinsic motivation" factors (e.g. studying to achieve an internalized goal of improving in the L2). Considering how the principles of motivation and negative feedback may adversely affect one another, the successful integration of negative feedback in an L2 task would hinge on how little the negative feedback affected overall student motivation.

Positive feedback and negative feedback are not mutually exclusive. Indeed, instructors should aim for a balance between the two in order to effectively utilize the educational benefits of each type of corrective feedback (Fishbach et al., 2010). Methods of providing negative feedback on L2 tasks are also numerous. Research on the varieties of corrective feedback generally divides them into two categories: explicit (e.g. pointing out a mistake and immediately providing the correct answer) and implicit (e.g. signaling to the student that a mistake has been made and prompting the student to come up with a revised response). Negative feedback, whether explicit or implicit, may be accomplished through such means as instructor-based feedback, recasts, and correcting responses on graded material. This study will further divide negative feedback into direct negative feedback (e.g. negative feedback provided by the instructor either explicitly or implicitly) and indirect negative feedback. Indirect negative feedback may be thought of as a method for the instructor to provide negative feedback to the students through another agent. Providing negative feedback through another agent may be accomplished by conducting peer review sessions, whereby other students may point out mistakes made during an L2 task, or by conducting self-evaluations, whereby students are prompted to identify their own mistakes made during an L2 task. By utilizing indirect negative feedback, an instructor in the L2 classroom can provide negative feedback while not undermining his/her position as an agent of motivation through positive motivation. In this study, smartphone video recordings of oral presentations in conjunction with self-evaluation surveys are employed to achieve indirect negative feedback.

Methodology

In order to measure the ability of smartphone video recordings utilized in conjunction with

self-evaluation surveys to achieve significantly lower quality (and more objective) assessments of student oral presentations than self-evaluation surveys conducted without the use of smartphone video recordings, four university level business English classes with oral presentations as a part of the curriculum were utilized for data collection. The study was conducted over the course of one academic year at a private Japanese university in four levels of business English courses: Business English (BE) I, II, III, and IV. The students enrolled in the courses ranged from 2nd to 4th year students, and all students were majoring in the Department of Business Administration. The aim of the BE courses is to familiarize the students with English terminology utilized in a range of business scenarios, improve English reading and writing skills in business contexts, and to improve public speaking skills.

With specific regard to improving public speaking skills, the students enrolled in the BE courses represented in this study were responsible for giving one oral presentation for each academic semester on a range of four business-related topics for each academic semester (Figure 1). In preparation for each oral presentation, each student was required to research an English language video relevant to the oral presentation topic and to submit a practice presentation recording before the presentation date. In order to objectively determine a grade for the oral presentation, objective grading rubrics were passed out at the start of each semester (Appendix A). On the day of each oral presentation topic, the presenting students were randomly assigned to the treatment group (self-evaluation with smartphone recordings of the oral presentation) or the control group (self-evaluation without smartphone video recordings). Students assigned to the treatment group had their oral presentations recorded on their smartphones and were provided instruction to complete the self-evaluation survey after reviewing the smartphone recording of their oral presentations. Students assigned to the control group were instructed to simply complete the self-evaluation survey after the oral presentations had finished. This study collected data from 82 students, 41 of whom were assigned to the treatment group, the remaining 41 to the control group.

Both the treatment group and control group received the same self-evaluation survey. The survey itself consists of seven questions, five questions using a five-point Likert scale to quantifiably evaluate the quality of the oral presentation in five categories (overall quality, content quality, voice/eye contact quality, confidence, and amount of effort put into making the presentation), and two open-ended questions to qualitatively evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the oral presentation (Appendix B). All questions and responses were conducted in

Date	BE I Topics	Date	BE III Topics
4/29/2019	Networking	5/10/2019	Networking
5/20/2019	Work-Life Balance	5/31/2019	Career Paths
6/17/2019	Community Projects	6/28/2019	Business Planning in Reiwa
7/8/2019	Reviewing Products and Services	7/19/2019	2020 Olympics
Date	BE II Topics	Date	BE IV Topics
10/14/2019	Customer Service	10/11/2019	Teamwork in the Workplace
5/20/2019	Conference Scheduling	11/8/2019	Innovation in Business
6/17/2019	Working Online	12/6/2019	Learning After Graduation
7/8/2019	Business Proposal and Financing	1/10/2020	Employee Satisfaction

Figure 1: BE Oral Presentation Topics and Schedule

Japanese, the native language of the majority of students. English translations have been provided for presentation in this research. The following sections will provide the results of the year-long study and discuss the implications of the data as well as the direction of future research.

Results

The average scores of the five five-point Likert scale (with 1 being the lowest, 5 being the highest) questions for both the treatment group and control group are summarized in Figure 2. The overall average Likert score for all five categories in the treatment group is 2.98 out of a possible 5 points. The overall average for the control group is 3.43. Furthermore, as is demonstrated in the data in Figure 2, the treatment group consistently produced lower scores across all five categories of questions. The p-value of 0.0015 from the paired, two-tailed t-test also demonstrates that the differences in average Likert scores across all five categories are statistically significant (significance observed at <0.01), and the null hypothesis may therefore be rejected. After qualitative analysis of the two open-ended questions, no significant differences were identified in the types of responses between the treatment and control groups. The most common responses for the open-ended question inquiring into the strengths of the oral presentations were in reference to the quality of voice projection and content. The most common responses for the open-ended question inquiring into the weaknesses of the oral presentations were in reference to the lack of eye contact and lack of confidence in accurate English pronunciation.

Question Category	Treatment Group (n＝41) 5-Point Likert Averages	Control Group (n＝41) 5-Point Likert Averages
Overall Quality	3	3.37
Content Quality	3.17	3.66
Voice Quality／Eye Contact	2.24	2.83
Confidence Level	2.73	3.27
Level of Effort	3.76	4.02
Overall Averages	2.98	3.43

Figure 2: Self-Evaluation Survey Likert Score Averages

Discussion

The results of this research suggest that utilizing the recording feature on students' smartphones as a method to evaluate the quality of oral presentations is more effective at eliciting objective evaluations of the components of the oral presentation that need to be improved on relative to methods that do not use video recording. The significantly lower scores on the Likert-scale questions from the self-evaluation survey in the treatment group indicate that using smartphone recordings of oral presentations may therefore be an effective tool to deliver negative feedback to the students in an indirect manner. As was hypothesized at the start of this study, delivering indirect negative feedback on the quality of oral presentations may elicit objective improvements in EFL communication skills without adversely affecting the potential of the instructor to be a motivating agent with positive feedback.

Limitations

The purpose of this research was to determine whether utilizing smartphone video recordings of oral presentations was an effective method at eliciting more objective self-evaluations in post-presentation surveys. The data collected in this study supports this conclusion. This not to say, however, that this present study is without limitations. Another hypothesis proposed by this research is that providing indirect negative feedback to students is preferable to direct negative feedback as an indirect method may not adversely affect student motivation levels in the same way that direct negative feedback (whether explicit or implicit) has been demonstrated to have. With that being said, this present study did not attempt to gather any data to reflect changes in overall motivation in either the treatment group or control group. Another limitation of this study is in the curriculum of the BE courses. Each student is only responsible

for giving one oral presentation in a semester. With such a curriculum design, it is difficult to measure any objective improvements in the oral presentations that the indirect negative feedback may be affecting. In order to address these limitations, future research must be conducted that continues utilizing indirect negative feedback through smartphone video recordings of oral presentations, collects data on changes to in-class motivation, and analyzes any objective improvements in the oral presentations for both the treatment and control groups.

Future Research

In order to address the abovementioned limitations, two critical changes must be made for future research into utilizing smartphones for indirect negative feedback on EFL oral presentations. The first is to implement a method of either quantitatively or qualitatively measuring how L2 motivation shifts throughout the semester in reaction to the feedback method for both treatment and control groups. The second is to change the curriculum of the BE courses to require each student to give a minimum of two oral presentations in each semester in order to analyze any objective improvements in oral presentation quality for both the treatment and control groups. The initial results of this research have shown that utilizing smartphone video recordings successfully prompted students to provide their own negative feedback more objectively than without the use of smartphone recordings. The goal of future research will be therefore to both corroborate and elaborate upon how utilizing smartphone video recordings may be a useful educational tool to improve the quality of EFL oral presentation skills in BE courses by providing negative feedback without adversely affecting L2 motivation levels.

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Appendix A

English Speech Rubric (100 points)						
	0	**1** (4 pts)	**2** (8 pts)	**3** (12 pts)	**4** (16 pts)	**5** (20 pts)
Language (20 points)	All in Japanese	Mostly in Japanese	A lot of Japanese	Some Japanese	Almost no Japanese	All in English
Presentation Practice Recording (20 points)	No practice recording turned in					Turned in before presentation date
Time (20 points)	Less than one minute	Less than two minutes	Less than three minutes	Less than four minutes	Less than five minutes	Five minutes or more
Research Videos (English) (20 points)	Highly irrelevant research videos	Irrelevant research videos	Slightly irrelevant research videos	Slightly relevant research videos	Relevant research videos	Highly relevant research videos
> 5 Second Eye Contact (20 points)	Did not look up	Looked up at least once	Looked up at least twice	Looked up at least 3 times	Looked up at least 4 times	Looked up more than 5 times

Appendix B

	発表の自己評価 Presentation Self-Evaluation Survey				
1	自分の発表を全体的に以下のスケールで評価してください（1は最低で，5は最高） Please evaluate the overall quality of your presentation（1 being the lowest, 5 being the highest）				
	1	2	3	4	5
2	自分の発表の内容を評価してください。 Please evaluate the quality of your presentation's content.				
	1	2	3	4	5
3	発表をする時の声質とアイコンタクトを評価してください。 Please evaluate the quality of your voice and how well you made eye contact during the presentation.				
	1	2	3	4	5
4	発表する時の自信度を示してください。 Please indicate the level of confidence you had during the presentation.				
	1	2	3	4	5
5	今回の発表を作成するために自分の努力度を表してください。 Please rate the amount of effort you put into making this presentation.				
	1	2	3	4	5
6	発表の良い所を下に記入してください。 Please record what you did well on in your presentation.				
7	発表の改善できる所を下に記入してください。 Please record what you need to improve on in your presentation.				