



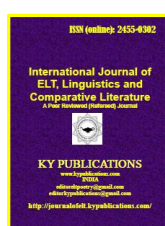
ESP in the Working Place: Exploring Non-Native Speaking Oil and Gas Engineers' Oral Performance – An Algerian Case Study

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ABSTRACT

The new dimensions of economy, dictated by the progressive growth of globalization, make Algeria deeply involved in actual worldwide business transactions. Thus, the need for English language incorporation in the working place has become a prerequisite for successful international business communication events. The aim of the present paper is twofold. First, it attempts to shed lights on which criteria are required for effective business oral communication to take place. Second, it tries to pinpoint non-native speaking engineers' difficulties in preparing and doing oral presentations within English for Specific Purposes (ESP) context. The results of the study that targets a sample of participants from the 16th International Conference on LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) –Algeria - shows that optimum proficiency in English language correlates positively with effective oral ESP performance, on the one hand. On the other hand, analysis suggests that non-native speaking presenters tend to exhibit relative need for some fundamental rules and skills of good oral communication and practice.

Keywords: ESP, General English Proficiency, Oral Business Presentation, Engineering Register, Audience and Constructive Feedback.

1. Introduction

Oil and gas companies and other industrial sectors in Algeria have put into practice the teaching of engineering English, technical English, business English, etc...as an essential element for the continuous flow and prosper of their economic activity. An actual example of the necessity to master technical English is the fact that business professionals are often asked to provide people with information, so they need to develop effective communication skills in technological and industrial areas. This is due to the fact that they have specialized knowledge and experience. In addition, they can be called on to give progress reports, discuss company policies, analyse problems, offer recommendations, or explain research. Therefore, they may give oral presentations to bring their formal written reports to life, such as project proposals, budget proposals or feasibility studies. However, not all people are fortunate to be naturally accomplished public speakers. It takes far more to keep audience's attention in today's speed world. Anyone in business may have to speak to colleagues, technicians, managers, contractors, consultants, or to salespeople; speaking at an informal gathering or giving a formal presentation at a conference. In all cases a presenter needs to be able to present information in a clear, concise and well organised manner. The prospect of giving a presentation submerges presenters with fear, anxiety and nervousness. Reasons given for this common dread of speaking in public refers to a fundamental human fear of being in front of others.

2. Theoretical Review

The present section reviews some theoretical points related to some oral business presentation



concerns. It covers the notion of ESP vis-à-vis research and practical considerations. It also sheds light on the very construct of business engineering professionalism regarding the English language variable.

2.1 ESP the Balance between Research and Practice: Dudley-Evans and St John (2002) in Carter & Nunan (2001) argue that the ESP branch has for about thirty years been separated from English Language Teaching (ELT), it has its own distinct methodology, materials and is believed to be an active movement which exerts its influence on other disciplines like applied linguistics and Teaching English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL). This particular feature influences its teaching and materials which set up on the results of needs analysis and text analysis, to make it an easy task for learners to become effective communicators within their working situations and learning contexts. In the same line of thoughts, Miliani (1985) proves that:

“When designing or teaching an ESP course... We should try to develop our students own abilities to deal with the communicative needs imposed on them by the situation they will find themselves in. I am also convinced that student motivation, generally so low in ESP courses, would become higher once the language and materials used in class had a clear connection with not only their field of specialization but also with the language used in every day life.” Miliani (1985: 21)

The belief that ESP is a branch that lacks of a basic theory is likely to be refuted. Specialists think that the theory of ESP is based either on its texts’ specific nature given as a knowledge background to learners or on teaching needs. Dudley- Evans and St John (2004) bring up that writings in ESP context focused on ESP procedures to meet learners’ specific needs rather than their theoretical aspect. Howatt (1984) attests that:

“Since the 1960s, ESP has become a vital innovative activity within the Teaching of English as a Foreign or Second Language movement (TEFL/TESL).” Howatt (1984) in Dudley-Evans & St John (2004:1)

At that time, ESP was dominated by English for Academic Purposes (EAP). A great range of materials produced, the course design and the research done were within the EAP discipline. On the other hand, English for Occupational Purposes (EOP) was in its beginning and played an important role but modest in comparison with ESP. Nowadays, the important role that the international business plays leads to a rapid growth of English for Business Purposes (EBP) as well as teachers and companies’ publications.

ESP activity expansion is a result of International business projects which are usually accompanied by expatriate British, North American and Australian teachers.

2.2 Projecting the Image of the Engineering Profession: Most oilfield engineers work hard and make their best to become technically competent as well as committed to their work, team and company. They know that professional image affects their reputation, and reputation affects their success. Dr. Wang (2008) who has been designated as a Certified Reliability Engineer by the American Society for Quality and as a Certified Master Black Belt by the International Quality Federation, states that engineers’ performance is clearly perceived through the image they reflect during a business communication. Each one is urged to show their personal touch through a specific working style. Besides, some useful techniques would significantly project a positive and reputable image about their respective company to their customers, management, engineering associates, and suppliers. In the same flow of ideas, CEO Andrew Gould (2007) expresses his expectations through an article written for his oil and gas company magazine:

“Given the changing context of the oil and gas industry, it is increasingly important that we interact with our customer through a defined business profile. This means that we maintain our established reputation as an independent service company, that we take no stake in oil and gas reserves, and that we uphold consistent relationship with all clients equally. Regular business performance reviews are an essential tool in maintaining healthy relationship with customers, and count on your support in ensuring that these are carried out.” CEO Andrew Gould (2007: 1)

Guffey & Loewy (2010) assume that organizations are more and more interested in selecting people with good



communication skills. Latest studies state that technical skills are not enough to guarantee success. Engineers would convey ideas successfully through presentations. She says:

“Speaking skills are useful at every career stage. Stanford University study found that the No. 1 predictor of success and upward mobility is how much you enjoy public speaking and how effective you are at it. You might, for example, have to make a sales pitch before customers or speak to a professional gathering. You might need to describe your company’s expansion plans to your banker, or you might need to persuade management to support your proposed marketing strategy. Speaking skills rank very high on recruiters’ wish lists.” Guffey & Loewy (2010: 336)

In parallel with Guffey’s & Loewy’s assumption, Arredondo (2007) confirms:

“The people who’ve made the most positive impression on me and who’ve had the most positive influence on others as well all share one quality. They’re excellent communicators.” Arredondo (2007: iii)

Furthermore, recent studies state that communication skills, involving presentations, affect engineers’ effectiveness and success more than any skill, including technical background. In addition, Wang (2008) attests that giving importance to delivery, style, techniques and environment would facilitate a challenging engineering presentation. If the content must be sound, accurate, well prepared, and suitable to the level of the audience; delivery techniques are equally important. He says: *“Projecting a professional and positive image is a product of good presentation etiquette, strong physical and vocal skills, and quality content.”* Wang (2008: 15). However, presenters may find impediments while organising and performing their presentations. The cardinal one is the fear of the audience.

3. Methodology and Data Analysis

The present section covers the practical side of the paper through a description of the main research procedure and instruments before reporting, analyzing and interpreting the results.

3.1 Research instruments and population: In an attempt to find some relative answers to the research questions mentioned above, the researcher uses a questionnaire and three video recordings as main data collection tools. The questionnaire, which was designed to obtain statistically useful information about the population statements, is composed of three main parts and eighteen questions.

The video recording aims essentially at studying and identifying engineers’ difficulties while performing in verbal and non-verbal presentation skills.

The population targeted in this study consists of 16 engineers and senior executives in the gas and oil field coming from different countries, including Algeria.

3.2 Data Analysis and Interpretation

3.2.1 Questionnaire: The questionnaire results as to audience concern while doing a business presentation show that 88 % of the respondents didn’t know their audience before giving their speech, whereas 12 % declared knowing it sometimes. They all (100%) used to keep eye contact with the viewers. As for the use of technical terms and complex messages supported with writing and reading an explanation to the listeners, the results obtained show that 12% were for, while 88 % did not support the idea.

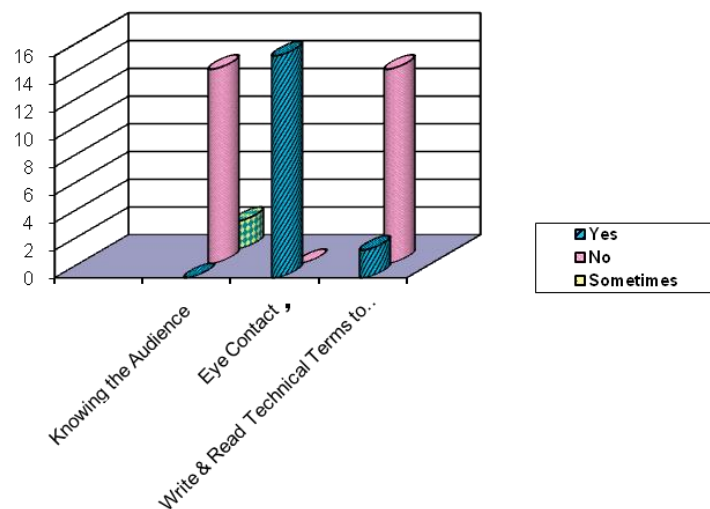


Figure 1: Considering the Audience

In order to know the reasons that may explain the results of the last question, the researcher invited the respondents to clarify the negative answer by providing her with alternative methods as shown on Table 1:

Table 1: Presenters' Alternative Options in Conveying Technical Messages

Presenters' Alternative Options in Using Technical Speech
1. I try to simplify it concept by concept.
2. I use some examples.
3. I try to explain it in simple words.
4. I learn the content, I practice it so that I know the presentation well
5. I explain it as well as I can.
6. I prefer to avoid being 'too technical' as I don't want to ignore a significant part of the audience. I find it best to alternate between high level topics with some details mixed in.
7. Usually, I explain words that I find complex or technical.

In terms of using body movements, the results shown in figure 2 denote that 12 % of the population affirmed using lots of body movements. Yet, 13% attested that they don't use anybody movement. The rest of the participants, who represent 74 % of the participants, indicated using body movements occasionally.

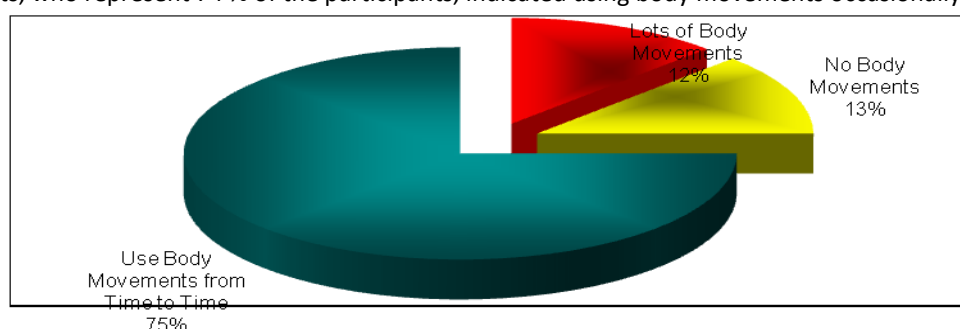


Figure 2: Body Movements Use



As for the affective variable in doing an oral presentation results show, as indicated in the figure below, that 38 % of the target population assumed to be anxious, while 62 % felt confident.

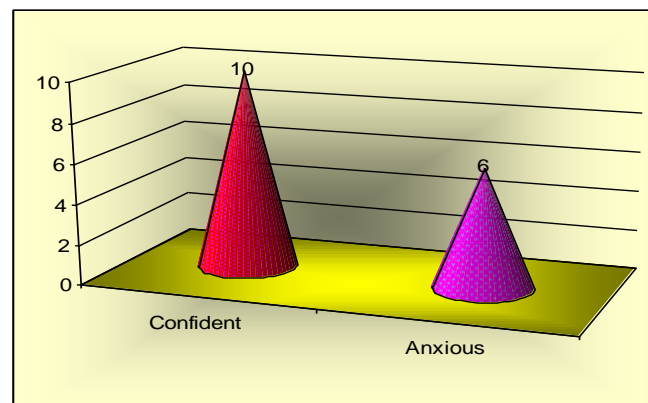


Figure 3: Confidence vs Anxiety

Engineers are known to be visual thinkers. Through the below table, the participants illustrate their choice in selecting visual aids and materials.

Table 2: Presenters' choice on Visual aids and Material

Presenters' Selection of Visual Aids & Materials
1. Few other than graphs or charts. Some photos or illustrations help. I add the watermark slide so that the presentation doesn't look boring.
2. Formal presentations: PowerPoint, overheads. Informal Presentation: visual aids, physical objects. I try to use pictures and graphs, less words on overheads.
3. PowerPoint and pictures
4. Slides.
5. Charts, graphics.

The participants were also asked to point out to their favourite tool. The results obtained are shown on figure 4. With a percentage of 88 % the respondents opted for the PowerPoint programme, while 6% chose physical objects. The other preference was made on drawings with a total percentage of 6%.

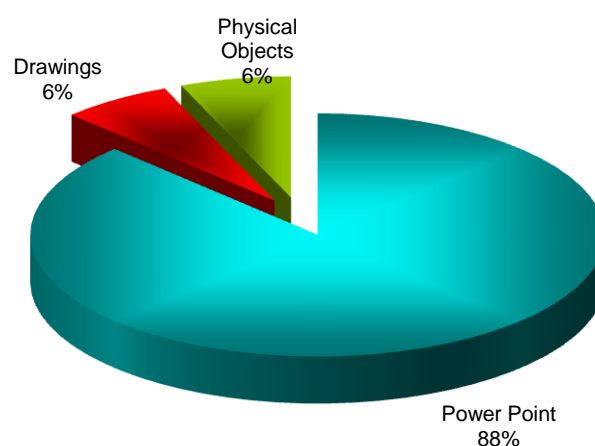


Figure 4: Presenters' Favourite Materials

Answers to the last question of the questionnaire which aims to identify the domains and frequency of English use at the participants' business area are displayed on the following table:



Table 3: Frequency of English Use According to Business Tasks

Business tasks	Regularly	Frequently	Sometimes	Seldom	Never
Presentations	87,5 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Negotiations	50 %	37,5 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Meetings	50 %	37,5 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Telephone Communications/ Conference calls	62,5 % 37,5 %	37,5 % 62,5 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
E-mails	50 %	50 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Faxes	100 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Others:					
Media Interviews	0 %	31.25 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
WIFI	75 %	25%	0 %	0 %	0 %
Cisco	80 %	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %

As shown above the business tasks that are frequently and regularly used are: PowerPoint with a total rate of 87.5%, telephone communications and conference calls with a rate of 62.5% and 35.7% respectively. Negotiations with a total percentage of 50% as well as e-mails and meetings. Other tasks were suggested by the respondents such as media interviews with a frequent use and a rate of 31.25% as well as the WIFI with a total percentage of 75% and the Cisco device with a rate of 80%.

3.2.2 Recorded Videos: The presenter is a technico-commercial engineer and sales assistant in an oil and gas national company: Sonatrach. The aim of this choice is to shed light on some common features that may hinder NNSs presenters while performing.

The purpose of the discourse analysis is to highlight the main characteristics that involve both verbal and non-verbal behaviour such as body movements as well as writing. The researcher has followed a transcription system that uses a range of standard punctuation marks like coma, full stop and question mark.

3.2.2.1 Technical words: The presenter has used a variety of technical words related to his main topic as well as to the field in which he is specialised, that is in sales. Besides, he used familiar words shown on Table 4:

Table 4: Technical Words versus Familiar Words

Technical Words	Familiar Words
Contracts	flexibility
LNG	development
Spot Market	look
liquefaction	growing
portfolio	against
wholesalers	emergence
importing	reality
spot cargoes	demand
renewable	
spot transactions	

3.2.2.2 Personal Pronouns: The presenter used personal pronouns several times. Some of them are illustrated below:

"...it's a great honour to share with you this work where we'll show the contribution of the flexibility with Long Term LNG Contracts to the development of the Spot Market."

"We emphasis here that it proved difficult to get an exact amount of contracted volumes in the



literature”

3.2.2.3 Short spoken transitions: The presenter didn’t neglect this point. The flow of spoken transitions can be noticed through the whole speech. For instance:

“...another important fact is the decline...”, “Another highlight is the constant...”,

3.2.2.4 Signposting: The speaker seems to know the importance of including signposts:

“First, the state look, a quick look to at some general figures from the gas industry evolution...”

“Another highlight is the constant rise of the utilisation rate in liquefaction capacities”

3.2.2.5 Analogies: The presenter has compared similar traits between dissimilar things, which is effective in explaining and creating connections:

“We can also notice another capacity comparing the liquefaction; this is mainly due to some speculative plans.”

As far as the presenters’ writing phase in the business field is concerned, it seems to conform to the international techniques. However, the speaker seems to miss some other valuable techniques like introducing personal anecdotes and humour. Besides, he totally missed non verbal communications.

4. Conclusion

A presentation addresses more than one skill. The use of appropriate register remains a fundamental rule. However, other areas lend themselves to presentations which employ other abilities. An effective oral presentation delivery constitutes a real handicap for some employees, as it is a vital means to take their career to the next level. Furthermore, their managers need to see them as leaders who can command attention and respect. Such a fact makes it quite important to shed light on the employees’ weaknesses in an attempt to find solutions for a better use of business oral presentation techniques.

Adapting materials according to the audience’s needs is one technique among others that leads to a successful interactive work between the presenter and the audience. Furthermore, the wrong use of other elements like body language appeared to be responsible for engineers’ failure in giving effective business presentations.

Public speaking is not so different from teaching. The theory is of limited value unless it is developed and practised. It shows how constructive feedback from others can help to objectify a process which is often marred by fear and anxiety.

Today’s business presenters often connect their presentation preparation with preparing slides only. A public speaker can make facts and figures stronger by supporting them with real evidence such as powerful numbers, examples, anecdotes, and visual images that leave a lasting impression.

It is worth mentioning that this humble work is an approach that demonstrates some empirical strategies for a successful business presentation. It is explained how it is vital that the presenter makes the subject of their presentation persistent to convince their audience. How it is important to accompany their speech by body movements and impressing visual aids. It shows also, how to prepare content considering the audience and to sum up, how to plan a business presentation from the beginning to the end.

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