

Blended Learning: using technology in and beyond the language classroom

Pete Sharma and Barney Barrett

Update 5: January 2009

This fifth update focuses firstly on the use of **PowerPoint** by teachers in the language classroom, and then a lesson plan based on **Google Trends**.

Part one PowerPoint re-visited

We deal with PowerPoint in Chapter 5 of Blended Learning. Presentation software such as PowerPoint has been available to language teachers for a long time. However, it has usually been business English students who have used this to deliver their in-class presentations. Nowadays, increasing numbers of schools are installing interactive whiteboards, and therefore electronic data projectors. As a result, more teachers are discovering the benefits of using some of the software they have had installed on their computers, such as PowerPoint.

I teach at a university and now have an 'always-on' internet connection, as well as PowerPoint available at any time in every lesson. This, along with the facility to 'save' work done in class onto a server, or memory stick, has resulted in me changing my teaching practice. For example, I have transferred the information I used to deliver on OHP transparencies into Power Point. This means I can up-date slides each time I teach a class.

Here is an example of a fluency lesson developed for use with EAP (English for Academic Purposes) students.

Controversial issues

Aims: to raise awareness of argumentation in EAP fluency

Level: upper intermediate

Interaction: whole class, group work

Technology: data projector and computer with PowerPoint

Rationale: The teacher uses PowerPoint to create a handout.

Procedure:

1. Introduction

Write down the headings of the controversial issues you decide to deal with on the whiteboard. E.g. ID cards / capital punishment / censorship

Ask students to tell you if their country has ID cards or not, has capital punishment or not, censors web-searches or not etc. Write the names of each country on the whiteboard in a 'yes' or 'no' column under the headings

2. The teacher reveals a number of controversial statements on the whiteboard, or in PowerPoint, such as:

The UK should introduce ID cards

3. Divide the class into small groups to discuss each area. Encourage each sub-group to vote at the end.
4. Groups then report on the voting and the arguments used by both sides. When the groups feedback, the teacher opens the PowerPoint and chooses the template in Figure 1. The teacher takes on a secretarial role by typing the key points into PowerPoint.

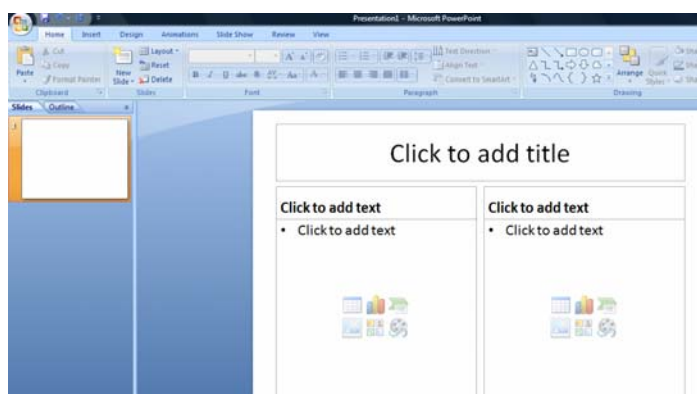


Figure 1. Inserting a new slide

5. When all the groups have presented, the PowerPoint can be used by the teacher to sum up the lesson. See Figure 2. for a typical screen of arguments used. Give language feedback as usual.

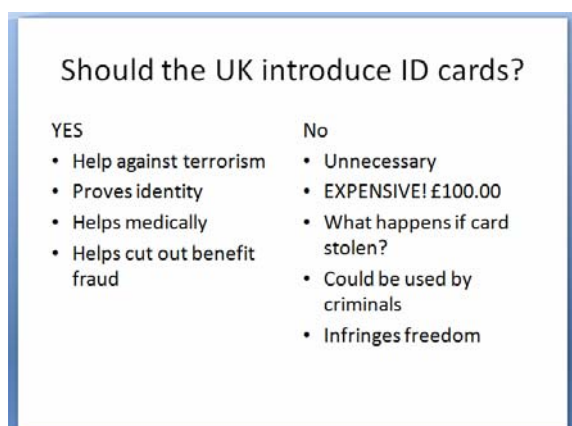


Figure 2. The pros and cons of introducing ID cards in the UK

Post lesson: Use PowerPoint to print out class handouts. Press *CTRL + P* in order to print. Under *Print what*, select *Handout* from the drop down menu. Then, for the number of slides per page, select 6. This way, your one page Handout will contain the student's arguments for each topic covered. See Figure 3.

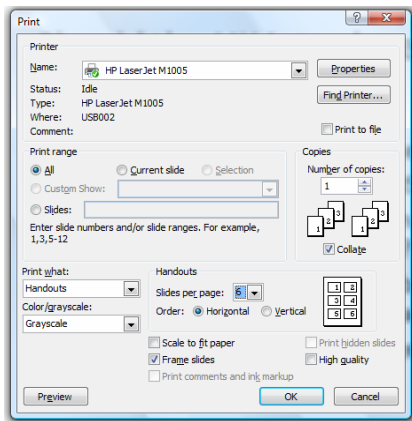


Figure 3. Printing a handout in PPT

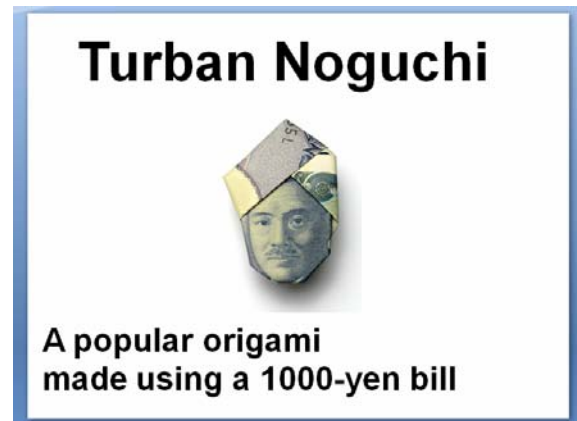


Figure 4. Slide from a student presentation on origami, Pre sessional EAP course

Presentation skills classes

In presentation skills lessons, my students bring their PowerPoint presentations on their memory sticks. The first few minutes of a class can be taken up with students transferring their presentations onto my computer. One accidental result of this transfer is that, at the end of the class, I have copies of all the PowerPoint presentations created by the students. This means I can access them at will to help when finalising their written feedback sheets, and it means I have a record of their written mistakes, again enabling me to write feedback after the actual real-time presentation. In business English, there is a clear opportunity to reformulate the PowerPoint with the learners and allow them to leave the course with a revised version of their presentation. See: Figure 4. above.

Part two Google Trends

We deal with Internet search engines in Chapter 5 of Blended Learning. Google remains the world's most popular search engine. It is constantly adding new features. Google Trends is one of these. It is of interest to business English teachers. Here is an example of an activity using this feature to practise the language of trends.

The language of trends

Aim: to practise trends language

Level: intermediate to advanced

Interaction: pairwork, whole class, individual

Technology: search engine

Rationale: This uses an experimental feature of Google to create instant charts of trends based on Google searches: <http://www.google.com/trends>

Before class: The activity is suitable as a follow-up to a lesson introducing the language of trends, e.g. rise, fall, remain steady, etc. This is a common topic in business English for talking about business trends but is also useful for a variety of other topics, e.g. economic

trends, fashion and other popular trends (see the example below in Figure 5), other trends in the news, improvements and declines, etc.

Procedure:

1. In pairs, learners brainstorm topics that exhibit trends, i.e. that fluctuate in how much people have searched Google find out about them. As well as individual topics, the pairs can brainstorm sets of related topics.
2. There are two possible procedures:
 - The pairs go to Google Trends; enter their topic(s). They then prepare how they will present the chart using the trends vocabulary. This can be done in a self-access centre or as homework for a subsequent lesson. In the classroom, the chart is projected onto the screen and each pair gives their presentations.
 - The Google Trends page is projected onto a screen. Each pair enters their topic(s) and improvises a short presentation of the trends on the chart. This is a more challenging activity for higher levels.

Note: The period for the chart can be set to include the current date, i.e. the last 30 days or 12 months, or to show a period from the past. The region can also be set to particular countries or regions of those countries. See the example below in Figure 5 in which the period is set to the last 12 months and the region is the UK.

Variation:

Learners predict what the trend will be before entering the topic(s) into Google Trends.

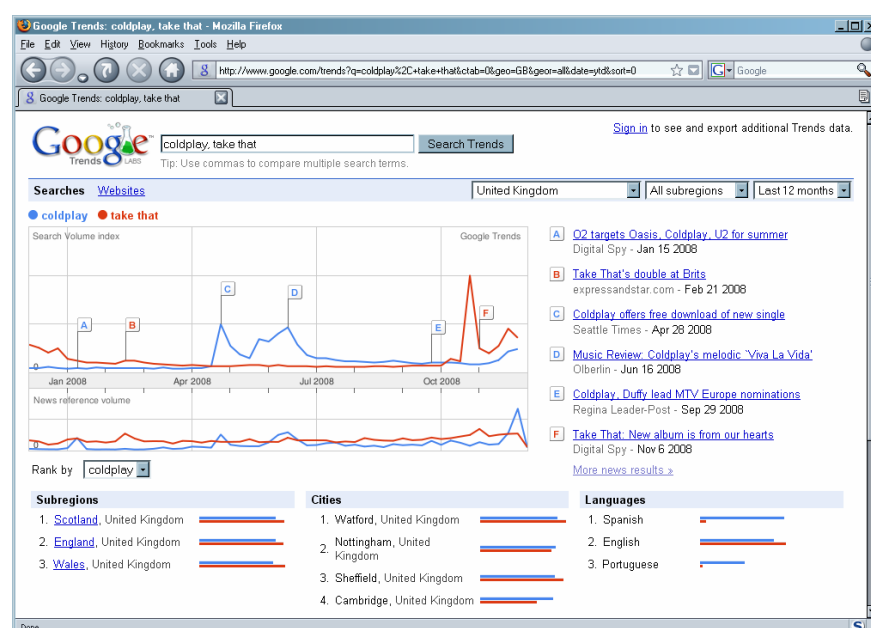


Figure 5. Google Trends results for *Coldplay* and *Take That* in the UK in the last 12 months.

Acknowledgement

Thanks to students at Oxford Brookes University and Warwick University for their enthusiastic participation in fluency and presentation skills classes. Also to business English students at Marcus Evans Linguarama participating in lessons on trends language.