

## Developing Effective Presentation Skills in Technical Communication Course

The paper emphasizes the need for introducing a technical communication course in the programs of training translators of technical literature. The main goal of the course is to equip students with the skills of technical writers that will enable them to communicate successfully in diverse technical environment including writing technical materials and delivering presentations.

The paper examines some strategies of planning and preparing a technical presentation such as defining the purpose, analyzing the types of the audience and their needs and selecting visual aids to enhance the presentation. Both verbal aspects of structuring and delivering a presentation with a culturally diverse audience, such as the use of language and terminology, and non-verbal communication aspects are discussed.

**Key words:** technical communication, technical writers, presentations, cross-cultural communication, visual aids, nonverbal communication.

**Statement of the scientific problem and its importance.** Since the end of the XX century and especially within the last ten years the face of technical communication and technical writers have changed dramatically due to the increasing role of high-end information technologies in our lives. To keep pace with the modern changes Ukrainian universities have to train specialists in the field of scientific and technical translation who possess skills of effective technical communicators. The main goal of the course of technical communication is to equip students with skills of technical writers that will enable them to communicate clearly and concisely in diverse technical environment including technical writing and technical presentations.

The educational background required in technical writing is demanding. Technical writers should have a good command of both English and the technical field for which they are writing. The most important aspect is knowledge of terminology in a particular field as well as the format of typical literature found in the industry. They also should develop their expertise in this field. This is the reason why technical writing courses should be more industry-specific than others.

Communication theorists define technical communication as the process of conveying technical information in a written or verbal form, intended to a particular audience. Technical writing is an informative form of writing, which often includes technical, scientific and engineering based materials [1, 3]. The most common methods of technical communication are writing technical documentation and presentation materials. Thus, **the objective of the paper** is to analyze some of the new forms, methods and cross-cultural aspects of technical communication, especially, while drafting materials, analyzing the audience and preparing visual aids for technical presentations.

The analysis of the current research into technical communication, familiarity with the work of the Society for Technical Communication and the Association of Teachers of Technical Writing makes it possible to define strategies and tactics to ensure effective technical communication and the language tools necessary to implement them. These findings can be of great use in developing graduate and undergraduate programs in technical communication, technical writing studies and English.

As a rule, technical writers write, research and edit user manuals, training materials, instructions, specifications not only for the consumer or machine operators, but for those who must install, program or service the product. The technical communication specialists also write promotional materials, presentation materials, surveys and assessments, and many other complex documents for various media, including paper, video and the Internet.

In our media-driven society technical communicators have to be information managers in the digital workplace. The modern technical workplace is centered round the computer. Richard Johnson-Sheehan [2] presents computers as *thinking tools* that powerfully influence how we develop, produce, design, and deliver technical documents and presentations. Technical communicators today have to understand technology's impact on their work, identify new ways to adapt, adjust and evolve in order to fulfill their own professional potential. They must be ready to respond to the constant changes and challenges in the new digital universe [3].

Computer-generated presentations are frequently delivered in the modern technical communication world. The progress in technology sets high standards to the forms of their planning, organizing and

delivery. To make a successful presentation the first areas that the technical communicator needs to address are presentation goals and audience analysis.

In general, the communication scientists define two main kinds of presentation: informative and persuasive, each of which requires different presentation strategies and the right kind of language. A presentation goal needs to be clearly stated to the audience and should be expressed in a one-sentence statement. In an informative presentation the audience learns about a new subject or learns something new about a familiar subject. Persuasive presentations involve the process of influencing another person's values, beliefs, attitudes, or behavior [4].

When planning, organizing, and structuring a technical presentation, it is necessary to identify the type of the audience and discover its attitude towards the topic. A major cause for ineffective presentations in technical environment is the failure to analyze the audience and their needs, anticipate any negative reactions and adapt to their expectations. The audience may range from experts to non specialists in the field, and from future clients to international audiences.

A communication challenge with experts is presenting the information at a level of expertise that will engage the expert at a technical level of understanding. A subject matter expert will not need a definition of the term but will want plenty of details, evidence and quotations of the consulted outside sources [1, p. 20].

The members of the audience who don't specialize in the field have limited knowledge of the technical aspects and are interested in what practical ways the product or service can be useful to them. They will need definitions of all technical terms and might also benefit from additional charts and graphics to explain difficult concepts visually.

The goal of presenting to future clients is to sell a future service, product or a proposal. The presentation needs to supply detailed information with the emphasis on the positive elements of the proposal. The audience must understand what is being asked of them and be persuaded to accept the need for the proposed action. It might also be necessary to include definitions of some commonly known terms, even if the audience is knowledgeable in the field.

With cross-cultural audiences special attention must be paid to clear, concise and standard language. It is a good idea to keep sentences and paragraphs short and include one thought per sentence when preparing a presentation. For that reason the presenter should use active voice and a limited number of modifiers for a culturally diverse audience. Avoidance of idioms, slang and jargon can reduce the possibility of misunderstanding or offending a nonnative listener. Humor, especially sarcasm, that insults others, such as topics related to ethnicity, religion, or ability, should be avoided at all times.

Additionally, rhetorical strategies differ greatly between cultures. In some low-context cultures, it is important that the presenter gradually leads the audience to a conclusion, using logical succession of points. In weak uncertainty avoidance countries, where the culture is more relaxed, people might dislike too much structure and are happy with more open-ended situations. There are countries where a more indirect and circular presentation style is preferred. Long-term oriented cultures may be excited about figures, others would rather learn more about the presenter's qualification and experience.

In a cross-cultural presentation much attention should be paid to non-verbal communication, particularly hand gestures, eye contact and dress. Colors also have different meaning in different cultures, e. g., Americans typically view red as a sign of danger, whereas in some Asian countries it is viewed as a sign of luck. To a Latin from Southern France or Italy, a presenter who uses his hands and arms when speaking may seem dynamic and friendly. To an Englishman, the same presenter may seem unsure of his words and lacking in self-confidence. Even sitting arrangements can have a profound effect on the way that the members of the international audience respond both to the presenter and the presentation [5, p. 81].

In order to make a technical presentation successful, it is beneficial to have a visual support for the information. The advantages of using presentation visual aids, such as PowerPoint slides or a whiteboard, include improving the listener memory, and increasing the audience's comprehension of the technical material. Besides, presenters who use visual aids are generally perceived as being more professional and persuasive than those who rely on speech alone.

Research on listening reveals that the average audience member will remember about 70 per cent of a purely verbal presentation three hours later, and as little as 10 per cent after three days. However, about 85 per cent of a mixed/visual presentation will be recalled after three hours, and as much as 66 percent will be remembered after three days [5, p. 64].

Recent advances in graphics technology and information technology have given rise to new attempts to understand the potential of multimedia learning as a means of promoting human understanding. An American cognitive psychologist Richard E. Mayer [6] examines whether people learn more deeply when ideas are expressed in words and pictures rather than in words alone. The result is what Mayer calls the cognitive theory of multimedia learning.

According to Mayer, separate channels of working memory process auditory and visual information. Consequently, a learner can use more cognitive processing capacities to study materials that combine auditory verbal information with visual graphical information than to process materials that combine printed (visual) text with visual graphical information. He reviews two principles related to the importance of visual aids. The «coherence principle» explains that people learn better when words and pictures are used together. The «contiguity principle» states that people learn better when the pictures are next to the words they illustrate.

To summarize, for a truly powerful and memorable presentation it is necessary to include some form of visual aid. Visual aids commonly used for professional presentations include models, objects, handouts, flip-charts, posters, marker boards, photographs, slides, transparencies, and electronic/multimedia devices. There are advantages and disadvantages to each of these visual aids. For example, whiteboards are more suitable for informal meetings, overhead transparencies, and flip charts may be inexpensive, but they are not very well seen in a large room. Multimedia, models and simulators typically have a very high impact, but these can be quite expensive and require special equipment for display.

PowerPoint is one of the most commonly used visual aids that enhance a presentation. Careful design of PowerPoint slides is of critical importance to the success of a presentation. The visuals used here can be either textual or graphic, such as charts, graphs or drawings. The choice depends on the presentation goals. Graphics can increase an audience's understanding by providing a visual explanation of how something works or looks. Text is better to use when presenting stages of a process, and giving the main features of a written document.

Simons [7] points out two serious mistakes made by presenters using PowerPoint. Firstly, the amount of the text on the slides is too big. The audience gets absorbed in reading and is forced out of active listening mode. In addition, such aspects, as number of graphics, typeface and font size, use of color, animation and sounds, and general design principles, need to be also taken into consideration.

Secondly, presenters sometimes deliver PowerPoint presentations in a dark room where the audience can barely see the speaker. Effective presenters need to be in some light so that eye contact, facial expressions, and gestures are visible to the audience. These non-verbal expressions make the presentation more interesting and add clarity to the presentation.

Besides, presenters often make a mistake of reading from the slides. Visual aids should supplement the presentation, but should not become the presentation itself. Therefore, a visual aid should not include the script of the presenter's speech. Instead, it could include an outline of the main points to help the audience keep track of what the presenter's discussed and what they plan to discuss next [8, p. 27].

**Conclusions.** The stage of planning, analyzing the audience and selecting visual aids for a technical presentation with the account of all cross-cultural aspects is of great importance. To be competitive in their future professions students need to acquire the skills of technical writing and of making an effective technical presentation. They also need to develop their expertise in the field for which they are writing.

The graduates of the Ukrainian technical universities possessing such skills will be especially valuable because they will be able to use the tools of technical communication to create manuals and give presentations for products created by Ukrainian companies and make them useful in other countries and vice versa. The merger of technical communication with translation in Ukraine offers a future-oriented perspective of its development.

**Perspectives for further research.** During the last two decades the field of technical communication has been developing very fast and the range of the technical communication methods and its terminological apparatus have been significantly enlarged. These new forms, strategies and skills of technical writing and stages of delivering presentations require further investigation.

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**Царьова Світлана. Розвиток ефективних навичок проведення презентацій у курсі технічної комунікації.** У статті висвітлено потребу введення курсу технічної комунікації в навчальні програми університетів із підготовки перекладачів науково-технічної літератури. Основна мета цього курсу – розвинути у студентів навички технічних письменників, які дадуть їм можливість здійснювати успішну комунікацію в різних сферах технічної діяльності, включаючи підготовку, написання науково-технічних матеріалів та проведення технічних презентацій.

У статті обговорено основні стратегії планування та підготовки технічної презентації, такі як постановка мети, аналіз типів аудиторії та їх потреб, а також вибір візуальних засобів для покращення розуміння технічних матеріалів. Проаналізовано деякі аспекти структурування та проведення технічної презентації в умовах крос-культурної комунікації в разі спілкування з багатонаціональною аудиторією. Схарактеризовано і вербальні особливості комунікації, і вибір мовних засобів та термінології, і невербальні засоби, такі, як мова жестів та інші невербальні знаки.

**Ключові слова:** технічна комунікація, технічні письменники, презентації, крос-культурна комунікація, візуальні засоби, невербальна комунікація.

**Царева Светлана. Развитие эффективных навыков проведения презентаций в курсе технической коммуникации.** В статье рассматривается необходимость введения курса технической коммуникации в учебные программы университетов по подготовке переводчиков научно-технической литературы. Основной целью данного курса является развитие у студентов навыков технических писателей, которые позволят им осуществлять успешную коммуникацию в различных областях технической деятельности, включая написание научно-технических материалов и проведение презентаций.

В статье обсуждаются основные стратегии планирования и подготовки презентаций, такие как постановка цели, анализ типов аудитории и их потребностей, а также выбор визуальных средств для улучшения понимания технических материалов. Анализируются некоторые аспекты структурирования и проведения технической презентации в условиях кросс-культурной коммуникации в случае общения с многонациональной аудиторией. Рассматриваются как вербальные особенности коммуникации, такие как выбор языковых средств и терминологии, так и невербальные средства, включающие язык тела и жестов, и другие невербальные знаки.

**Ключевые слова:** техническая коммуникация, технические писатели, презентации, кросс-культурная коммуникация, визуальные средства, невербальная коммуникация.

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**Оксана Шкамарда**

### **Структура англомовної комунікативної ситуації Інтернет-форуму**

У статті аналізуються структурні компоненти англомовної комунікативної ситуації Інтернет-форуму. Матеріалом дослідження стали тексти повідомлень американського Інтернет-форуму «Share Your Thoughts: Connect with Like-Minded People». У роботі висвітлено основні характеристики комунікації в мережі, досліджено жанрову систему Інтернет-дискурсу та встановлено місце і роль форуму в цій системі. У статті окреслено структуру комунікативної ситуації Інтернет-форуму та проаналізовано лексичні, стилістичні й граматичні особливості текстів повідомлень англомовних Інтернет-форумів.

**Ключові слова:** Інтернет-комунікація, Інтернет-форум, комунікативна ситуація, адресант, адресат, повідомлення.