

Integrated C 2020, Designing a Special Online English Course for International Horticulture Students:

A Short Report on a New Model for Lunchtime Japanese Food Presentations

国際園芸農学科の学生の為の「2020年度 Integrated C」で 行う特別オンライン英語授業:

ランチ・タイム日本料理プレゼンテーションの新しいモデルの報告

Shari Joy BERMAN*

バーマン シャーリー ジョイ

Abstract

Since the inception of the Integrated English courses, a three-semester series required for International Horticulture majors, the author has engaged students in Japanese cooking projects. In the past, students in the author's cohorts had the opportunity to make group presentations that allowed the audience to hear about the history of specific dishes and production of key food industries in Japan. Listeners also had the chance to see actual cooking demonstrations and were rewarded with a taste of the finished product. A number of international students attended the presentations making the Q&A more like something seen in real-life presentations. During a time of online-only classes, with the exception of the enticing aroma and taste, the author was able to replicate the project within a highly experiential framework. The 2020 version, described here in detail, gave the group, all former students, a challenging and memorable online international forum in which they were able to shine despite the constraints of the day.

Keywords: Online classes, remote learning, experiential learning, cooking projects, projects

Introduction

Remote classes are the hallmark of 2020's "new normal." The idea behind a revised syllabus for the April semester was to be able to offer students in Hirosaki University's Integrated C course the same opportunities that had been afforded to members of the class in years past (Berman, et al., 2019); (Berman & Tada, 2018a-c) using the modalities and resources of the present. Although my evidence is purely empirical, under the circumstances, the results were both positive and satisfying. Despite the constraints of distance, the students were able to benefit from a new version of an experiential learning model and complete a complex assignment in which they gave multifaceted presentations on Japanese food to an international online audience.

Four years ago, Hirosaki University began to offer a series of Liberal Arts courses called Integrated English A, B, and C. These courses were commissioned by the Faculty of Agriculture and Life Science as a three-semester

* Graduate School of Medicine, Hirosaki University
弘前大学医学研究科

requirement for their International Horticulture majors. As they are offered through Liberal Arts, and most departments of the university provide little else after freshman English, there are occasionally students with other majors in these courses. While there is a curriculum in place that emphasizes the study of various English dialects and business/career language, since the inception of the Integrated English courses, I have been working to ensure that these International Horticulture majors have a rich variety of exposure to the world of food and plants in English. Just hearing the term “International Horticulture” does not paint an adequate picture of this major in the Faculty of Agriculture and Life Science. Students go on to work in a wide variety of fields, many connected to the food industry. Among the majors are some more connected to livestock and animal husbandry than horticulture.

Students in my Integrated A and C classes were involved in Japanese Food Presentations, and in Integrated B, during the second semester of the 2019 school year, students made a different sort of food presentation, this time a soup or beverage based on a plant-based diet. For each of those early projects, Megumi Tada created a parallel version with extra support in her lower level required freshman English classes. I often took on the role of speech and presentation coach with Tada’s students to help them achieve their goals of attaining some of the confidence and showmanship of the Integrated students. The Integrated students, most of whom will work in the food production industry in the future, appeared clearly more motivated than Tada’s English class students and were mostly one or two years ahead in their academic levels. The first group of Integrated students did the standard project as sophomores and then did it again as juniors, a year later, focusing on specific food industries. The original plan for spring 2020, was to make the usual small group presentations for an international audience in the English Lounge alternating with the other instructor of Integrated C, Joshua Solomon. Everyone had to switch gears with the advent of the COVID 19 crisis.

Reinterpreting the course online without sacrificing the core project

I began the semester with tremendous advantages. I already knew all the students. There were 16 from my former Integrated B class, all juniors during the 2020 academic year, and one senior who had failed Integrated C the past school year due to excessive absence and lack of effort. Starting a very unusual school year with 17 people I had worked with before meant that I was able to have four informal meetings, twice a day on two different days to coincide with students’ pre-semester schedules. I was also able to create a Moodle course page (Berman, et al. 2020 April 20-August 20), with students posting before the official start of class.

The basic construct that I had established in 2017 was for a group of 4–5 students to brainstorm and decide upon a dish, usually from an assigned food group, create, edit and post a recipe; work together to make a group PechaKucha (Klein & Dytham, 2017) presentation with 12–15 timed slides introducing the dish, its history, and similar dishes; create promotional advertising for both electronic and poster dissemination; prepare a one-minute memorized speech talking about a childhood memory or relationship with the food; have all scripts checked for English accuracy in the English Lounge; meet and procure the ingredients to cook; give the slide presentation, demonstrate cooking the dish, pass the dish out for tasting, and relate their personal story in front of an international audience in the English Lounge. The question was how to do this in a social-distanced fashion.

After surveying the students, it was clear that they did not want to get together in groups, even in their small 4–5-person squads. The project was then redefined as follows. Each person would make a short, individual PechaKucha slide presentation about some aspect of an industry from among soy, rice, chicken/egg, and root vegetables. They would also prepare the individual speech and arrange to have a video made of their making a dish that they could introduce to an international audience.

Each student was put into a subchannel (squad) with wildcat names that I had assigned—Jaguars, Pumas, Leopards and Cheetahs. Squad members were then subdivided with one party being Mr./Ms. North, South,

East, or West (NSEW). The repeating student was North 2. The subdivisions played a simple role in organizing the beginning of each class. Standard beginning of class activities included one student giving an impromptu monologue on an assigned topic such as their favorite childhood treat or an interesting trip they took. Another student would note all new vocabulary for the entire session and upload it to Moodle. The third would summarize the group meeting for the whole group after the small group meeting and upload a summary of the entire session, and the fourth would lead any small group discussions and do a Moodle upload later describing a personal strategy for improving English.

For the new iteration of the cooking project, the division of the industries was made by direction/position in each group. In other words, all of the Mr./Ms. Norths presented different dishes from the same food industry. Therefore, they met with their direction group in a second subchannel, labeled North, South, East and West, to discuss how to divide up the history and the list of typical dishes made with the ingredient, and to make sure that each person was cooking something different within the category. That is to say, when they showcased the rice industry, one student made a type of rice dumpling, for example, while another did a version of fried rice. Each person working on this industry gave preview presentations to their wildcat group, whose job it was to encourage them and give feedback.

April class meetings were held exclusively on Zoom, but every subsequent class used three different configurations and two different modalities. After establishing the wildcat and direction groups as eight subchannels on Teams, each person belonged to two subchannels for in-class work, which was mostly conducted within a whole class Zoom session. Specifically, all classes began with a full class meeting on Zoom. Students would sign in on Zoom and attend the instructor's introduction each week. They would then disengage (mute) both their microphones and their video and go into either a wildcat or a direction meeting on Teams, depending on the instructions they were given. They had easy access to continue presentation planning outside of class on Teams using the NSEW subchannels.

The only reason that they may have met with another student in person was for the actual filming of the cooking demonstration. They were asked to help one another as the "cameraperson," but one woman, living in an all-female dormitory, found herself in an all-male group, so she arranged for one of her housemates to be her cameraperson. The new format for the presentation included the speaker's individual short PechaKucha, which quickly scrolled through a few points about the industry and dishes similar to the one being cooked. It was followed by the 1-minute speech as a voiceover of the last two slides, which were 30, instead of 20 seconds each, giving the audience the recipe, followed by some pictures of the dish in professional settings. In the last segment, the cooking video was shown to an international audience on Zoom. On the first presentation day, there were one or two people who thought they should narrate a silent video, but that understanding of the presentation was corrected quickly for the remaining three presentation groups.

The good news was that it was easy to get friends from other time zones to come and ask questions in English. The speed with which they spoke, not to mention their questions, proved quite eye-opening for the students. Many of the international visitors were unfamiliar with some of the specific food presented, especially regional cuisine. The revising of scripts proved to be a major undertaking. Without the usual access to the English Lounge, in a face-to-face setting, I found myself face to face with 51 scripts to check—1) the PechaKucha, 2) the longer, individual speech at the end of the slides, and 3) the script for the cooking demonstration video. I also had to take on the promotion; I was quite pleased with faculty support and I did something else that was probably unprecedented. I promised the freshmen in my second semester Medical English class some extra credit that they could earn months before their class actually started if they joined the audience for one of the four presentation sessions and gave feedback on a survey site. I divided the 113 people in that class into four groups of about 28 students. Some of

them had to come to a session other than the one assigned, but compliance was over 95%.

We had been practicing our Zoom/Teams arrangement for weeks, so the transition from their last minute NSEW consultation at the end of their class (11:50 a.m.) to the start of the presentation (12:00 p.m.) was particularly smooth. As mentioned previously, we all started our class on Zoom (10:20), and they had an initial wildcat meeting followed by classwork on Zoom and ending with a NSEW meeting on Teams with the other people speaking about the same industry. The weeks after they had finished presenting, the NSEW groups that were not presenting that day spent time debriefing, after having presented, or thinking of advice to pass on when they met with other students in their wildcat groups. Whenever I wanted all students to come back to Zoom, since the call was live, all I had to do was unmute my microphone on Zoom and my voice was heard by all regardless of what subchannel they were working in.

A feature of this project, since the beginning, was that students were being asked to devote their lunch periods to the project or to watching another groups' project. While they were still giving up their lunch periods, this time, students did not have to go anywhere to do so. Thanks to remote classes, I didn't have to worry about the stress of having people who were under pressure to run to a third period class in the Agriculture Building after lunch. Having taught in that faculty and brought equipment and classroom items back and forth, I know that it can take up to 12 minutes to get from the English Lounge to some of the classrooms toward the back of their building. With Zoom/Teams, they were already in front of their screen and ready for a 3rd Period class. Just as with the live lunch period presentations, we invited people to actually eat their lunch during the presentations, which presented no interruption, as most of the students had their videos off and were on mute. Of course, the only missing bits were the lovely smell of someone cooking a Japanese delicacy and the little taste of the finished product that everyone used to get.

We invited the audience to follow the Zoom meeting link and come to the session just before noon. The class would move back over to Zoom and the specific NSEW group that was speaking that week would give their presentations. In an early organizational meeting, one group of wildcats decided they wanted to use N, S, W, E, as our presentation order. As they had shown initiative in this decision, I chose this is the final order. The first week, all the Norths spoke on Japanese dishes using root vegetables, for example, and the last to speak was the East group, so we did not follow the traditional NSEW order.

Each week, the four (or five) students, in the progression that they had determined, would each show their slides, give their talk, show their video, and entertain questions. With a few exceptions here and there, i.e., one or two cases where it was smoother for the student to be given permission to be the one to use the Zoom "share screen" function, presentation material was usually shared through my equipment. I retrieved the final revision of their PowerPoint slides from Moodle and their video presentation from Teams and, as a group, we were able to offer these presentations proudly with very few glitches. There were a couple of students who might have spoken a bit more loudly or with more energy, but as a group the students of this cohort of Integrated C 2020 were highly impressive.

Other class activities

During non-presentation sessions, students learned about food measurement, read articles about the food industry, in both Japanese and English, or consulted food-related URLs and discussed them. They gave other short speeches and watched a US culinary competition program. The show we streamed was about a group of competing young chefs cooking for former Olympic athletes. There was a feeling of life imitating art in that the competing chefs the class was watching were making traditional Japanese kaiseki-style dishes to win a ticket to the already defunct (at the time of our viewing) 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Students were also gifted the first test print of a TOEIC® book for which I was the first author, with the caveat that, in addition to working on the exercises with the online audio, they were to listen to the printed practice the passages online and see if they could find the few typographical errors that existed in the first printing. As a final quiz, they were given a short version of the final TOEIC®-style test that is available to teachers of the book only. They only were given listening questions and had an extra challenge in that I did not print the question with the listening as it appears on a real TOEIC® test, for which I adjusted scores about 15%. Even with that handicap, there was one student who got a perfect score, and, with the adjustment, most students were able to answer with marks of close to 80%.

Conclusion

As the only students at Hirosaki University who are required to take five semesters of English, I wanted these International Horticulture majors to have a meaningful experience that related to their industry of choice in their last course. They write very candidly in their Reflection Reports sent to me through Moodle. Some of the students who had hidden in the back of the class in their Integrated B class had felt more engaged and actually more responsible to perform well online. As I reviewed their accounts, I was pleased to find that I was not the only one who noticed an uptick in cooperation and performance, as well as a more positive attitude toward class activities.

References

- Berman, S. J., Kobayashi H., Hayasaka M. (2020) TOP TIPS FOR THE TOEIC L&R Seibido Co., LTD.
- Berman, et al. (2019) Lunch Hour Japanese Food Presentations: Lessons Learned from Audience Feedback and Reflection. *CROSSROADS, Journal for Educational Research*, Faculty of Education, Hirosaki University. 23, 73–81.
- Berman, S. J., & Tada, M. (2018a). A Brief Account of Student Investment and Reflection in Active Learning Projects Presented to Multicultural Audiences in the English Lounge: “Japanese Food Our Way!” and “This is Japanese Cooking!”. *Hirosaki University Journal of Liberal Arts and Practices*. 2, 47–60
- Berman, S. J., & Tada, M. (2018b). Multifaceted Active Learning through Lunch Hour Japanese Food Presentations: Procedures, Outcomes, and Lessons Learned. *The Tohoku English Language Education Society Journal*. 38, 157–166.
- Berman, S. J., & Tada, M. (2018c). Keeping it real: a student-centered cooking project. *Hawaii International Conference on Education 2018 Proceedings*. <http://hiceducation.org/conference-proceedings/>
- Klein, A. & Dytham, M. (2017). About FAQ. In PechaKucha 20 seconds x 20 images. <https://www.pechakucha.com/about>