Teaching oral presentations at work: Bridging the gap between textbooks and workplaces

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Abstract

The ability to deliver successful oral presentations is often considered an important and enviable asset both personally and professionally. Yet the ways in which oral presentations for professional purposes are taught are far from being understood. Specifically, very few studies have examined the teaching of workplace oral presentations in textbooks and the extent to which textbook prescription, presentation and practice mirror actual communicative needs. In an attempt to compare how oral presentations are taught in textbooks and realised in workplaces, this study investigates the coverage of oral presentations in teaching materials designed respectively by three commercial publishers and the government of Hong Kong for a senior secondary module on learning English through workplace communication. First, it compares the nature and frequency of English-language presentations in such textbooks and in Hong Kong's business world. Second, it determines whether and the extent to which the challenges identified and discussed by Hong Kong professionals in giving oral presentations in authentic business workplaces are addressed by such textbooks. Findings from this study can provide practitioners with concrete guidance on textbook selection. They will also better inform ESP teachers of the actual communicative needs at work and help bridge the gap between textbooks and workplaces.

Keywords

business English; material design; oral presentation; textbook; professional communication

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1. Introduction

The ability to give successful oral presentations has long been considered an important and enviable asset. From great orators in ancient Greece to keynote speakers in contemporary TED talks, those who are exceptionally gifted in delivering speeches in public can leave a mark in history or at least garner millions of views online on video-sharing platforms. Yet the power to impress and mesmerise through speech making is arguably not confined only to the gifted ones. The plethora of self-instructional books on public speaking and presentation giving, some of which constitute timeless classics (e.g. Carnegie, 1915) or modern-day best sellers (e.g. Gallo, 2014), suggests that these highly successful speakers may be emulated and such a valuable skill learned and applied to a multitude of personal and professional settings. With the incessant and possibly inherent need to express oneself now increasingly satiated by technological affordances such as the social media and the rise of freelancers and entrepreneurs such as bloggers, influencers and Youtubers in the digital age, the importance of giving oral presentations as a 21st century skill for personal expression is perhaps greater than ever.

Despite the paramount attention that speech or presentation making receives in the media and on the bookshelf, there has been little scholarly research into oral presentations in real-world workplaces, especially in international settings where business English as a lingua franca (BELF) is broadly practised. In the academic field of English for Specific Purposes (ESP), considerably much less emphasis has been placed on oral presentation when compared with other spoken genres in the business world such as meeting or interview, let alone the well-researched written genres such as email or report. A notable exception is the ground-breaking work by Evans (2013), who provided rare insights into the perceptions and realisations of oral presentations by professionals working in the business sector in Hong Kong through the triangulation of qualitative and quantitative data with multiple research instruments.

Inspired by and following this pioneering research in Evans (2013), the impetus of the current study is to bridge the gap between textbooks and workplaces regarding how oral presentations are taught and presented in pedagogic materials, and perceived and realised in actual organisations. Taking the empirical results generated from authentic business workplaces in Evans (2013) as the baseline, the present study focuses on the examination of oral presentations in English textbooks specifically designed for teaching workplace communication in secondary schools. The aim of the study is twofold: First, it compares the nature and frequency of English-language presentations in Hong Kong's business world and in Hong Kong secondary school textbooks for professional workplace communication. Second, it determines whether and the extent to which the challenges identified and discussed by Hong Kong professionals in giving oral presentations in authentic business workplaces are addressed by such textbooks.

2. Research on oral presentations

While there is certainly no lack of real-world examples of or instructional materials on oral presentation from which to draw inspiration or seek guidance, there has been a scarcity of relevant scholarly studies, leading to Evans's (2013, p. 196) remark that "research into oral presentations is at present somewhat limited and fragmentary", which still holds true today. Further, this somewhat limited and fragmentary body of research has largely focused on oral presentations in the academic context, rather than in the professional or business settings.

Academic work on oral presentations can be broadly classified into two types based on the level of students involved. On the one hand, much of this less than substantial volume of research has been dedicated to oral presentations made by university students at the bachelor's or master's level. In these undergraduate and postgraduate taught degree programmes, oral presentations are typically a key form of assessment to evaluate students' disciplinary knowledge. As such, studies in this area have examined the relationship between students' presentation performance and possible associated external factors, including the language used (Hincks, 2010), learner strategies (Chou, 2011) and personality traits (Kelsen & Liang, 2019). While these studies have often been conducted in the English as a second or foreign language (ESL or EFL) setting in the tradition of English for academic purposes (EAP) and thus are relevant to second or foreign language learners, oral presentations in these studies have been utilised as a means to an end, a pedagogic tool to appraise as a type of university coursework rather than a professional activity in itself which warrants attention. On the other hand, an increasingly number of studies in the last two decades has centred on oral presentations given by research students and academics. These include thesis defences (Recski, 2005), university lectures (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2005) and conference presentations (Fernández Polo, 2018; Hood & Forey, 2005). In these speech events, oral presentations are more likely to be conceived as a professional activity that novice and experienced practitioners in the academia engage in to construct or maintain a workplace identity. Accordingly, these oral presentations have been investigated for their internal characteristics including their linguistic features such as the function and frequency of first and second-person pronouns (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2005; Fernández Polo, 2018) and the expression of modal certainty (Recksi, 2005), and the use of interpersonal and interactional strategies such as asides, self-deprecation, alignment and humour (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2005; Hood & Forey, 2005). While findings from these studies have enhanced our understanding of academic presentation as a professional genre family in the university setting, their relevance and applicability to oral presentations in other professional settings is doubtful, owing to the significant differences in such variables as purpose, length and audience.

In other non-academic professional arenas, little empirical research has been conducted on oral presentations. A small number of studies, however, has straddled the interface between academia and industry to investigate the link between the occupational training received and the professional needs required in Anglophone contexts. In engineering, for instance, Dannels (2003) examined the teaching and learning of design presentations in university engineering design courses and identified considerable academic and workplace contradictions in relation to audience, identity and structure. Specifically, real-world design presentations in the engineering profession demand a multidisciplinary audience, an industry-specific workplace identity and a

problem-oriented approach to structuring presentations. In the academic training students receive, however, such demands are not always met (Dannels, 2003). Students are instead expected to be able to negotiate between the real and simulated identities in order to thrive in making such industry-specific oral presentations in the university setting (Dannels, 2009). In health care, Lingard, Schryer, Garwood and Spafford (2003) investigated student oral case presentations in a hospital during inpatient medicine rounds and found tension between the medical school and the actual workplace in the conceptions and objectives of such presentations. Medical students perceived case presentation as "an educational and evaluative genre" (Lingard et al., 2003, p. 615), whereas health care providers use it to construct shared knowledge and achieve multiple rhetorical purposes in real-world encounters with patients and colleagues. Career-specific training on oral presentations, therefore, does not always seem to provide adequate or suitable preparation for future professionals. Research into workplace needs has also indicated that the importance of making oral presentations in English as a communicative event varies from industry to industry and from place to place. For engineers in Malaysia, for example, making oral presentations in English was considered a very important communicative event for daily tasks in the workplace (Kassim & Ali, 2010). For computer specialists in Japan, by contrast, this hardly constituted a daily task (Kaneko, Rozycki & Orr, 2009). While these studies have only focused on one particular industry, professional role or location, they have shown that oral presentation is hardly a homogenous entity and have varied conventions and expectations in different professional and geographical settings where English functions as a lingua franca involving stakeholders from diverse backgrounds across national and cultural boundaries.

Like in the professional settings, very few studies of business presentations based on real-world data are available. An exception is Crawford Camiciottoli (2010), which examined the use of discourse connectives in transcripts of earnings presentations made by company executives delivered via teleconferences in the financial domain. Her study has pointed to the growing importance of the use of digital technologies in delivering presentations in the business world. Apart from empirical research into how business presentations are actually realised, surveys conducted with practitioners regarding their business needs can also offer useful information on real-world demands of workplace presentations. Based on their questionnaire results from business graduate employees in Australia, Crosling and Ward (2002) found that oral presentations were not a significant component of spoken workplace communication. In the BELF context of Thailand, however, Hiranburana (2017) found that employees in a range of major business sectors gave oral presentations in English fairly frequently. Locally in Hong Kong, Chan (2014) found that formal oral presentations was perceived to be instrumental in business success yet challenging by professionals, as they require persuasive and attention-keeping skills. Based on "one of the most ambitious sampling exercises ever undertaken in ESP", Evans (2013, p. 205) surveyed the views of business professionals in Hong Kong's major service industries through four research methods: two large-scale questionnaire surveys; semi-structured interviews; case studies and analyses of spoken business discourse. His study provided important insights into the nature and frequency of English-language presentations in authentic workplaces and the specific challenges that professionals face when planning, structuring and delivering presentations in a BELF context in general, and specifically in Hong Kong. Since little research

work thus far has been conducted on how oral presentations are actually taught in textbooks, let alone in a BELF context, Evans (2013) is considered the most relevant and taken as the baseline study to compare with the analysis of oral presentations in textbooks in the present study.

3. Design of the study

As described in the introduction earlier, the present study seeks to narrow the gap between textbooks and workplaces by comparing how oral presentations are perceived and realised in authentic workplaces and how they are taught and presented in English textbooks specifically designed for professional communication. In this connection, empirical results generated from major service industries in Hong Kong as reported in Evans (2013) are explicitly compared with findings derived from teaching materials collected and analysed for the present study. To facilitate direct comparison with Evans (2013), the two research questions addressed in this study are as follows:

- What is the nature and frequency of English-language oral presentations in Hong Kong's secondary school textbooks specifically designed for professional communication, as compared with the nature and frequency of such presentations in Hong Kong's business workplaces?
- Are the challenges identified by professionals in Hong Kong's business workplaces addressed in such textbooks? If yes, to what extent are the challenges addressed?

To answer these two research questions, teaching materials specially designed for an elective module entitled "Learning English through workplace communication" in the senior secondary English language curriculum in Hong Kong have been collected and analysed. The reason for focusing on these teaching materials is that the module has the explicit aims of introducing adolescent learners "to different text types related to the workplace" and equipping learners with the ability to "perform a series of communication tasks that simulate real work situations" in their three years of senior secondary education (Curriculum Development Council & Hong Kong Examinations & Assessment Authority, 2007, p. 46). In order to achieve the stated learning objectives of helping learners to "apply the knowledge and skills they have learned in their production of workplace-related texts" and to "carry out workplace-related activities through providing them with opportunities to practise and demonstrate their language and communication skills in simulated tasks" (Curriculum Development Council & Hong Kong Examinations & Assessment Authority, 2007, p. 46-47), the module is expected to be highly practical in nature. Compared with general English coursebooks, pedagogic resources dedicated to this module are clearly more workplace-oriented. Compared with subjects and courses at other levels offered by individual educational institutes and universities, this elective module for three years available to the hundreds of thousands of senior secondary school learners is bound to have a higher intake and thus be potentially more impactful to future professionals. Given the relevance of the module to the Hong Kong workplaces and the number of learners involved, teaching and learning materials for the module are considered suitable as data for the present study.

In total, four pedagogic resources were gathered and examined, including a resource package prepared by the Education Bureau (EDB thereafter, the equivalent of the Ministry or Department of Education in the Hong Kong context) to support the module's implementation, and three coursebooks produced by three commercial publishers. The resource package is a document which consists mainly of handouts for students and notes for teachers. To allow for direct comparison with the three coursebooks which are intended for students only, only the components for learners from the resource package were included. For the sake of brevity and consistency, all the four resources will be referred to as textbooks in the remainder of the chapter. Details of the four textbooks examined in the present study are presented in Table 1.

Publisher	Author(s)	Year of publication	Total number of pages
EDB	Brooke, M.	2009	98
Longman	Kingsley, P.	2010	73
Oxford	Pilgrim, J.	2009	126
Pilot	Esser, D. & Chan, G.	2010	128

Table 1. Textbooks examined in the present study

As observed in Table 1, the four textbooks were respectively produced by the government of Hong Kong and three commercial publishers, two of which are international publishing houses with a local office (Longman and Oxford) while the remaining one is a local publisher with decades of experience publishing coursebooks for secondary schools (Pilot). All the textbooks were tailor-made for the module described and published either in the year 2009 or 2010. As Evans (2013) collected his data from business professionals in 2008 and 2009, the publication years of the textbooks roughly coincide with the data collection period in Evans (2013). This means that not only are the textbooks largely comparable among themselves in terms of their production timeframe, a synchronous comparison between textbook prescriptions and workplace practices is also made possible.

Four stages were involved in the data analytic process. First, the four textbooks were manually examined by three researchers to identify and classify all the genres present, including those which may not be workplace-related. Second, each genre identified was coded according to the following three dimensions: the medium of the genre as spoken or written; the total number of pages related to the genre in the textbook concerned; and the numbers of pages related to the genre dedicated respectively to teaching input, activities and samples. Crosschecking was conducted by the researchers to identify any inconsistencies in coding, which were in turn discussed and resolved to achieve inter-rater reliability. These two stages offer an overall picture of the range of genres covered in the textbooks and the frequency and relative proportion of oral presentations, if any, when compared with other genres. In the third stage, the parts specifically related to oral presentations in the textbooks were studied in detail with special reference to the

nature of such presentations when compared with findings from Evans (2013). In the last stage, the challenges identified by real-world professionals in giving presentations as reported in Evans (2013) were checked against the contents concerning oral presentations in the textbooks to see if such issues had been adequately addressed. This combined qualitative and quantitative research methodological approach incorporating frequency, content and textual analyses offers multiple perspectives on the data and ensures that direct comparison with findings from Evans (2013) can be made. For more detail of the first and second stage of data analysis concerning the overall examination of all the genres found in the textbooks, see Lam, Cheng and Kong (2014).

4. Findings

This section is organised in relation to the two research questions. It first examines the nature and frequency of English-language oral presentations in Hong Kong's secondary school textbooks for professional communication, as compared with the nature and frequency of such presentations in Hong Kong's business workplaces. It then investigates whether and the extent to which the challenges identified by professionals in Hong Kong's business workplaces are addressed in such textbooks.

4.1   *The nature and frequency of oral presentations in textbooks*

In the four textbooks, a total of 25 professional and 8 non-professional genres have been identified. Of the former, there are 17 written genres and 8 spoken genres. The total numbers of pages covering written and spoken professional genres in the four textbooks are respectively 175 and 90. In other words, the coverage of professional written genres is almost double that of spoken genres. This proportion of written to spoken professional genres in textbooks is consistent with empirical findings from real-world workplaces which show that written English is perceived to be more important than spoken English in the professional world in Hong Kong (Evans, 2010). Of the 8 spoken professional genres covered, the top five in descending order are business phone calls, handling complaints, business meetings, business presentations, and making complaints (Lam, Cheng & Kong, 2014). This ranking again bears some similarity to the most frequent activities involving spoken English at work, which are, in descending order, formal meetings, conferences, seminars, presentations, and telephoning (Evans, 2010). In both textbooks and workplaces, business presentation is therefore the fourth most frequent spoken professional genre.

It should, however, be noted that oral presentation also features in two textbooks as a non-professional genre without any specific relevance to business communication. This coverage on general oral presentation is included as well in the analysis since the textbooks do not always discriminate clearly its coverage on general and business oral presentations. Of the 8 non-professional genres covered, there are 6 written genres and 2 spoken genres, including personal email and quiz. The total numbers of pages covering written and spoken non-professional genres in the four textbooks are respectively 21 and 19. In total, oral presentation, whether business by nature or otherwise, features in 32 out of 305 textbook pages covering 33 professional and non-

professional genres. This amounts to approximately 10% of all the genres covered. Table 2 details the distribution of the numbers of pages specifically on oral presentation according to their content type in the four textbooks examined.

	Total	Teaching input	Activities	Samples
EDB	9	1	5	3
Longman	5	1	3	1
Oxford	10	2	7	1
Pilot	8	3	4	1
Total	32 (100%)	7 (21.9%)	19 (59.3%)	6 (18.8%)

Table 2. Number of pages concerning oral presentation by content type in the textbooks studied

As one of the most prominently featured spoken genres in the textbooks examined, oral presentation occupies 32 pages in total. Apart from Longman whose 5-page coverage is comparatively much smaller, the other publishers have a fairly similar quantity of coverage of oral presentation, ranging from 8 to 10 pages (i.e. 6 to 9 percent of the total number of pages). On closer inspection, however, it has been noted that more than half of these pages in the four textbooks are dedicated to activities which consist of minimal instructions but plenty of space for putting down ideas for oral presentation. The teaching input associated with how to actually plan or give oral presentations in a workplace is rather meagre in number, with two textbooks only offering one page of such explicit teaching support. As such, while these textbooks may function as a basic teaching tool for generally offering ideas and creating opportunities for practice, they fall short of filling teachers' knowledge gap specifically on the actual planning or delivery of oral presentations in the workplace. They also fail to save teachers' time and effort in preparing written instructions and explanations on workplace oral presentations. Similarly, very few samples of oral presentation are given. On the whole, there are only five samples in six pages with only one sample each in three of the four textbooks. When provided, such samples, in the form of transcripts, are very short and heavily scripted. The lengths of these transcripts are from 96 to 406 words, with an average of 257 words per transcript. As such, these samples of oral presentation only last for approximately two to three minutes. Their duration is thus much shorter than the ones actually encountered in authentic workplaces (Evans, 2013). In many cases, this often means that the introductory and conclusive stages are just as long (or short) as the middle part of the oral presentation when the key contents are expressed. In terms of quantity, then, it is doubtful whether oral presentation is indeed adequately represented in these textbooks.

With regard to the nature of oral presentations in the four textbooks, it has been observed that their purpose, level of explicitness and format differ from those of authentic business presentations in Hong Kong's workplaces. In relation to purpose, as pointed out by Evans (2013, p. 200) through his in-depth interviews with professionals in Hong Kong working across a range of industries, workplace presentations "often involve the routine, practical and perhaps rather

prosaic matter of reporting, updating and coordinating", rather than "to persuade a sceptical audience". In the four textbooks, however, oral presentations serving the purposes of reporting, updating and coordinating are not found. Neither is there teaching input nor activities specifically associated with these purposes. Instead, much attention has been given to how to persuade an audience. The textbooks published by the EDB, Oxford and Pilot all include, to varying degrees, the idea of persuasion in their coverage of presentations. For instance, expressions such as "we strongly believe…" and "we are convinced…" are provided as examples of language to convince the audience (Brooke, 2009, S26). Strategies such as getting the audience to identify with the presenter and complimenting the audience are suggested as ways to persuade an audience (Pilgrim, 2009). When learners are asked to give oral presentations in the textbooks, the most common task is to introduce a company or a product that learners create. In one of the textbooks, the task is explicitly linked to the discussion of what a sales presentation is, its structure and examples of language realising different components of its structure. In the remaining three textbooks, there is no explanation on the purposes or functions of oral presentations. Of the five samples provided, four are sales pitches of either a fictional company or a product whose detail is naturally unknown to the audience. This heavy emphasis on persuasion as a key purpose of oral presentation and on sales presentation as a major, if not the only, type of presentation is consistent with the popular notion in the self-instructional literature that oral presentations are persuasive and on occasion even motivational with the function of influencing or inspiring people with something new (e.g. Carnegie, 1915; Gallo, 2014). In the actual workplaces in Hong Kong based on Evans (2013), however, oral presentations often seem more mundane and regular in nature, with a much stronger focus on building on existing workplace knowledge and simply reporting progress and bringing the audience up to the date with information that they are already acquainted with.

This idea about using existing workplace knowledge as a basis for presenting is related to the level of explicitness, which constitutes another difference in relation to the nature of oral presentations between textbooks and workplaces. In the professional workplaces, oral presentations often involve "knowledge that the speaker and audience bring to the presentation" (Evans 2013, p. 201). Prior knowledge include but is not confined to background information about and interpersonal relationship between the speaker and audience, and the organisational culture(s) involved. Such presentations are thus often brief, focused, and to the point, with frequent use of contextually-dependent language features such as deixis, ellipsis and person pronouns (Crawford Camiciottoli, 2005; Fernández Polo, 2018). Much shared information is simply left unsaid but assumed to be understood. In the textbooks, although the sample presentations given are only a couple of minutes long, much of the content is dedicated to giving contextual details such as introducing the speaker and other participants as well as the purpose and topic of the presentation (Brooke, 2009; Esser & Chan, 2010). Specific language examples are also given to teach learners how to introduce themselves and their colleagues. The reliance on prior knowledge in the workplace and the use of contextually-dependent language, by contrast, do not receive any pedagogic treatment. Importantly, such prior knowledge in the authentic workplaces is often established via interconnections between the oral presentation with other business texts in the same or in different languages, including through previous regular

presentations on the same topic or other related business events or text types in the discourse chain forming an intricate web of intertextuality (Nickerson & Planken 2016; Warren 2013). Oral presentations are also found embedded in other important forms of business communication such as meetings (Warren, 2014). In the textbooks, by contrast, most teaching input, activities and samples provide only minimal background information or involve imaginary decontextualized scenarios. In the rare cases when evidence of intertextuality is found, the texts involved often differ markedly from the business world. In the tasks designed for oral presentations, for example, learners are asked to prepare a talk based on a scrapbook or a storyboard on workplace ethical dilemma which they create (Esser & Chan, 2010; Pilgrim, 2009). As such, these tasks may not make clear to the learners the relationship between oral presentations and other professional text types in the authentic workplaces.

A final point to be made here about the nature of oral presentations in the textbooks concerns mode and format. In the professional workplaces, presentations are often made in the context of telephone or video conferences (Evans, 2013). These technological affordances bring additional challenges to the presenters not encountered in face-to-face settings. In the case of the former, these include the absence of facial expressions and eye contact in presenting, the difficulty of understanding audience members based on their voice only when anticipating questions, and the stronger need to rely on linguistic and intonational clues such as lexical or structural choices to indicate formality or clearer diction to get the message across or hit the right tone. Even in the case of the latter where participants can see each other, technical issues may arise due to physical or technological constraints, such as lagging or freezing in video calls, the difficulty of monitoring audience reaction at a distance, and the inability to know what happens outside the screen. In the four textbooks, however, no discussion of oral presentation is given beyond the face-to-face context. There is no mention of oral presentation mediated by telephone, video or other kinds of technological affordance. While solving technical problems may not be of great pedagogic interest to English textbooks for professional communication, the use of language associated with the acknowledgement and handling of such problems is still highly relevant to learners. Yet there is no description or discussion of the similarities and differences between oral presentations in different modes and the possible challenges involved when conducting presentations in non-face-to-face modes. Interestingly, many of the oral presentations in the textbooks are collaborative rather than individual and often involve asking learners to discuss and decide the division of labour first before presenting different aspects of a topic in turn in a group. Although pedagogically speaking, group presentation is frequently used to enhance the efficiency of teaching and learning in the classroom and has been found to improve students' speaking ability in an EAP context (Chou, 2011), it has rarely been, if at all, observed in workplace research concerning oral presentations, including in industries such as engineering which is characterised by teamwork on a daily basis (Darling & Dannels, 2003). Even if presenting in groups is indeed practised in authentic workplaces, it is perhaps more likely that the division of labour is either assigned by a supervisor or determined by one's job duties. This considerable weight placed on face-to-face group presentations therefore may not reflect the actual modes and formats in which oral presentations occur in workplaces (e.g. Darling & Dannels, 2003; Evans, 2013).

4.2 The coverage of real-world challenges concerning oral presentations in textbooks

To facilitate comparison between findings observed in textbooks and workplaces, this sub-section is organised according to the original headings in Evans (2013) which highlight the four aspects of presenting in English that professionals in Hong Kong find particularly challenging.

4.2.1 Planning presentations

According to Evans (2013), engaging the audience's interest is considered by Hong Kong professionals to be the single most challenging aspect of using English at work. Interviews and case studies of these professionals have revealed that this challenge may be overcome in the planning stage and to a certain extent the delivery stage of presentation by providing relevant content to the audience, using simple words and getting the timing of the presentation right. In the textbooks examined, however, little effort is made to teach students how to attract or keep the attention of their audience. When such advice is available, it is often given in a rather haphazard and general manner. In one textbook which asks students in a task to determine if statements related to giving oral presentations are true or false, the two examples "talk very quickly to keep everyone interested" and "repeat or clarify your point if [the audience] seem to have difficulty in understanding" given may be regarded as relevant (Brooke, 2009, S21). In another textbook which provides a section on the dos and don'ts of sales presentations, it is suggested that presentations should not be too long and that presenters should not repeat himself or herself regardless of the importance of the content (Pilgrim, 2009). Without any further explanation on what or when not to repeat, this latter advice on repetition seems to be contrary to the one described earlier in the other textbook, which recommends repetition or clarification when audience has difficulty understanding. Jokes are recommended as "humour will keep listeners interested" (Pilgrim, 2009, p. 116). No further explanation, specific example or invitation to discussion, however, is given beyond such advice. Importantly, on many occasions in the textbooks, there is no mention of who the audience are in the tasks or samples given. At times, the audience are either implicitly assumed or explicitly expressed to be the classmates in the context of a lesson. Only on very rare occasions is a workplace-related audience such as "a potential employer" (Brooke, 2009) or "the Board of Directors" (Esser & Chan, 2010) specified. It is therefore rather hard to contextualise the oral presentations in the textbooks in most cases with an imaginary audience with no relevance to the professional world. Although one textbook does raise the point that learners should consider the audience and their "level of knowledge and needs" when planning a presentation (Esser & Chan, 2010, p. 91), more explicit instructions and teaching input regarding factors such as audience type (e.g. external vs. internal) and how that may affect the purpose of presentation as observed in real-world presentations (see Evans, 2013) are badly needed to better support an audience analysis and subsequent discussion.

4.2.2 Structuring presentations

Another aspect of challenge that presenters face in the authentic workplaces concerns the organisation of presentation. Two issues have been identified as particularly testing by Evans (2013, p. 203), including the "handling of audience's questions" and "making smooth transitions from point to point". The first issue is taxing to presenters not only because the question and answer (Q&A) session of a presentation is more unpredictable and requires impromptu responses but also because it sometimes involves understanding unfamiliar English accents. In the textbooks examined, however, little guidance is specifically on the Q&A session of a presentation and, if available, it does not exactly address the issue of how to handle questions or unfamiliar accents. In one textbook, a handful of examples of language are given on how to invite or refer to questions (Brooke, 2009). Another textbook simply gives the general advice "do encourage questions" and provides an example utterance for the purpose (Pilgrim, 2009, p. 116). One textbook specifically provides three examples of language under the heading "dealing with questions", but all of them make use of the delay tactic which simply postpones handling later (Esser & Chan, 2010, p. 94). As such, no helpful strategies have been offered on how to directly address audience's questions such as acknowledging their value, checking understanding and responding concisely. Neither is there any mention of accents, let alone any solution to tackle problems concerning questions posed in unfamiliar English accents, which are common in multinational workplaces and worthy of attention in the local context (Evans, 2013). Regarding the second issue of signalling transitions, presenters in authentic workplaces find it hard to move seamlessly and fluently from one page of a presentation to another with visual aids (Evans, 2013). Of the four textbooks examined, only one provides a vaguely relevant example of how to refer to a visual aid by the expression "so, as you can see…" (Brooke, 2009, S59). Instead, ample attention is given to how to structure a presentation and to signal macro-level transitions between introduction, body and closing. For instance, examples of language are provided on changing the subject, sequencing, summarising and concluding (Brooke, 2009), or outlining the structure, finishing one subject, moving to a new topic, and closing (Esser & Chan, 2010). In TED talks which involve presenters facing a large number of audience for the first time, such language functions are found to be associated with a number of obligatory moves such as topic introduction and development (Chang & Huang, 2015). In real-world business presentations especially those for internal audience, however, there is hardly any need to signpost these macro-level transitions as oral presentations tend to be short without a sophisticated overall structure (Evans, 2013). This substantial coverage on structuring presentations at the macro level in the textbooks seems particularly odd, given the fact that all presentations featured are only a couple of minutes long and that much of the content is dedicated to explaining how the talks are organised.

4.2.3 Verbal and non-verbal communication

According to Evans (2013, p. 203), one major challenge which troubles workplace presenters, particularly those who are locally educated, is to speak in a natural style of speech in English which does not sound "bookish". Interviews and case studies with business professionals in Hong Kong have indicated that in verbal communication, overcoming this challenge may involve making fairly informal lexical and syntactic choices appropriate to the situation, using

appropriate stress and intonation, and not reading out a script in a flat tone. In non-verbal communication, this may involve the maintenance of eye contact (Evans, 2013). In the textbooks examined, some suggestions are made regarding verbal and non-verbal communication. In one textbook, learners are advised not to "read a speech word for word from a sheet of paper" or "read from the screen with her / his back to the audience" (Brooke, 2009, S21). In addition to keeping eye contact, learners are given guidance on other aspects of non-verbal communication such as movement and gesture, including not to "walk around quite a lot" or "put her / his hands in her / his pockets to avoid unnecessary use of hands" (Brooke, 2009, S21). Another textbook asks learners to consider and compare different memory aids such as handouts and notecards and decide which one is appropriate for the task assigned (Esser & Chan, 2010). In the checklists or evaluation forms provided for assessing presentation performance in the textbooks, aspects of verbal and non-verbal communication are often included as assessment criteria, which closely match the relevant items Evans (2013) include in his questionnaire for workplace presentation needs. One textbook, for instance, includes the two items "the speaker used his / her voice effectively" and "the speaker used body language effectively" in its performance feedback checklist (Kingsley, 2010, p. 49). Similarly, another textbook includes the two items "the presenter spoke clearly" and "the presenter used effective hand gestures" in its peer evaluation form (Esser & Chan, 2010, p. 52). It is, however, unclear what is deemed effective or clear by these textbooks as there is no explanation given or discussion invited. The most concrete guidance is perhaps found in a self-evaluation form for individual presentations, in which learners are asked to assess their own performance by a number of items listed under "communication strategies", including "I spoke loudly enough for everyone to hear", "I spoke without depending heavily on my notes", "I varied my intonation and talked at the right speed" and "I explained my ideas using the right words" (Esser & Chan, 2010, p. 95). What is "the right speed" or "the right words", nevertheless, is context-dependent and requires more support or discussion, rather than simply relying on learners themselves for their sound judgement without prior input or training.

4.2.4 Visual aids and support materials

The last aspect of challenge to be compared here involves the role and use of visual aids and support materials in oral presentation. Many professionals in Hong Kong business workplaces find it demanding to integrate visual aids such as PowerPoint slides smoothly into the flow of presentation (Evans, 2013). Opinions are rather mixed regarding whether visual aids, or the presenter, should play a central role in presentation. Some professionals prefer dense, complicated slides which do most of the talking for the presenters, whereas others opt for a less "slide-centred" approach which rely on the presenter's verbal and non-verbal presenter skills (Evans, 2013, p. 204). Compared with the other three aspects of challenge discussed earlier, the textbooks examined provide relatively more detailed information in this area. Two textbooks, in particular, devote a section to the creation and use of visual aids. One textbook offers explicit teaching input on the strengths and weaknesses of different visual aids such as handouts, flip charts and PowerPoint slides as well as general guidelines on using visual aids concerning font size and style, background colour and text readability (Kingsley, 2010). In another textbook, a

matching task asks learners to link different types of visual aids to their characteristics (Pilgrim, 2009). Discussion activities are also provided for learners to consider which visual aid to use for particular topics or purposes, followed by hands-on activities involving the actual design of visual aids for presentation. When presenting statistics, for instance, it is suggested that "[b]ar and pie charts are particularly effective and easy to understand" (Pilgrim, 2009, p. 119). Contrary to the "slide-centred" approach adopted by some respondents in Evans (2013), these two textbooks with a more detailed discussion on visual aids both warn against textually dense materials and advocate the inclusion of key points only in the visuals instead. In the remaining two textbooks, however, coverage on visual aid is extremely limited. One only recommends against using "complex, detailed visual aids" in its task concerning true or false statements (Brooke, 2009, S21), while the other merely asks learners in a task to decide what visual aids to use and how to present information generally without any teaching input or discussion opportunity (Esser & Chan, 2010). In this respect, at least in some of the textbooks examined, more support in the form of both teaching input and activities promoting further consideration and discussion of real-world scenarios is observed. The topics covered are relevant to the real-world concerns of business professionals, with specific and practical guidelines given on the design and integration of visual aids and oral presentations.

5. Discussion

At first glance, the quantity of coverage of oral presentation when compared with that of other professional genres in the textbooks and with its real-world frequency in the business context may seem fairly adequate. On closer inspection, however, it has been revealed that a large proportion of the relevant pages is dedicated to tasks with minimal instructions or support on how they can be effectively used but a generous amount of space. The number of pages featuring actual teaching input or samples of oral presentation is small. Further, discrepancies have been identified between textbooks and workplaces in the nature of oral presentations. In real-world workplaces, as evidenced by the empirical research reviewed earlier on a number of academic, business and professional settings (e.g. Crawford Camiciottoli 2005, 2010; Dannels, 2003; Lingard et al., 2003), oral presentations are far from homogenous. There are different types serving a range of purposes and audiences, which in turn have dissimilar linguistic expectations. Such distinctions, however, are not made in the textbooks. Only one business type, namely sales presentation, which unfortunately does not seem the most commonly found in the real-world local professional contexts, is covered in some detail by one textbook. Equally importantly, no clear distinction is made either between oral presentation as a pedagogic tool in the textbooks and as a professional activity in the workplace. This conflation of oral presentation as "a tool for learning" or "a product that demonstrates learning" (Dannels, 2003, p. 140) and as a professional activity in the real-world workplaces may confuse learners, affect their perception of an ideal presentation (Lingard et al., 2003), and prevent them from learning about the markedly diverse functions and conventions of actual business or professional presentations. For instance, students may expect presentations in the workplace to be free of interruptions or questions given their classroom experience while in reality they are not the case. While it is understandable that textbooks cannot cover or feature all the genres of oral presentation encountered in the business

and professional contexts, web-links to the ample online resources of real-world examples in the forms of video and transcript available can be provided. In the case where authentic presentations are considered too lengthy or "context-specific to be adapted for classroom instruction" (Chang & Huang, 2015, p. 30), discussion activities encouraging learners to consider, discuss and compare different types of oral presentation in a range of workplaces should be given to raise learners' awareness of the variation of oral presentation and the possible associated factors such as audience, duration and industrial or organisational culture affecting its preparation.

A closely-related issue which concerns the quality of coverage of oral presentation in the textbooks centres on the decontextualisation of teaching and learning, which is a problem well-documented in previous studies evaluating textbooks (e.g. Lam, Cheng & Kong, 2014). More often than not, there is no specification of the particular sociocultural or workplace context in which the language features are introduced or the activity is situated. The audience of oral presentation is either unstated, irrelevant to the professional world or too general to be considered as a realistic contextual variable. Many of the real-world complexities and decisions that professional presenters have to face and make in reality are left unattended. These include the discourse chains and processes involved in the preparation and delivery of oral presentation and the selection and use of technological affordances in presenting. These aspects are further compounded by the intercultural, multinational setting in which oral presentations commonly take place in a BELF context. Intertextual links between oral presentations with other texts and resources such as business emails, meetings and presentation visual aids, for instance, are often established in more than one language. In Hong Kong, business presentations are sometimes delivered in Cantonese rather than English. Even so, they are typically accompanied by English slides and handouts (Evans, 2016). In Thai workplaces, it has also been noted that presentation slides are mostly in English but also supplemented with Thai (Hiranburana, 2017). Given that business and professional activities are increasingly mediated by digital technologies and/or conducted in the virtual environment, the dimension of multimedia literacy should be incorporated into the curriculum of professional communication (Nickerson & Planken, 2016). Instead of simply focusing on traditional face-to-face oral presentations with an occasional group format which is uncommon in the workplaces, textbooks can make better use of the digital resources already readily available online to introduce students to other formats and presentation aids to prepare them for presenting with the help of new media and affordances. Practical advice can also be given to highlight the intercultural and multinational nature of oral presentations in a BELF workplace. This includes guidance on topics such as understanding unfamiliar accents, enhancing cultural awareness and sensitivity through language use, introducing possible taboo topics and cultural variation in non-verbal communication, or even taking into account the time difference in virtual oral presentations involving different time zones. Consideration of such issues will make the textbooks more realistic, contextualised and in tune with the actual demands of workplace presentations.

In relation to the workplace challenges that professionals encounter concerning oral presentation, the textbooks examined fare best in preparing learners for its visual aspects including the

discussion, comparison and evaluation of different visual aids. These are, however, not tied in with the range of old and new modes and formats of oral presentation that learners may participate in. While the organisational aspect of oral presentation is covered in some detail in the textbooks, the structuring guidance given appears more relevant to longer professional monologues such as thesis defences (Recski, 2005) or TED talks (Chang & Huang, 2015) with a number of moves and steps which require signposts for orienting audience, rather than the short routine internal business oral reports commonly found in Hong Kong workplaces (Evans, 2013). Similarly, there is room for improvement for the teaching support provided in the area of verbal and non-verbal communication. More explicit advice is needed on what is considered effective, appropriate or right in the delivery of oral presentation. Of course such consideration is often context-dependent and requires teachers' in-class intervention, but more thoughtful activities can be designed and included in textbooks to promote discussion and reflection opportunities. A more pressing issue, however, is the general lack of teaching focus on the interpersonal and interactional aspects of oral presentation. Dimensions such as engaging audience's interest or handling audience's questions, which are deemed among the most significant and demanding challenges by practitioners in authentic business settings, are hardly given any due attention. This lacuna is consistent with findings from an earlier study which has shown that two areas of interpersonal meanings, namely showing empathy and solidarity, and showing and building shared knowledge, are given a scanty treatment in the textbooks (Cheng, Lam, & Kong, 2019). The strong but largely irrelevant focus on the textual organisation of oral presentation, combined with a general negligence in its interpersonal and interactional aspects, means that the textbooks examined fall short of addressing the challenges that business professionals face.

6. Conclusion

This chapter has examined how oral presentations are taught and presented in four textbooks and compared the findings with those from relevant previous studies, particularly the empirical research by Evans (2013) concerning the perceptions and realisations of oral presentations in actual workplaces. Discrepancies have been identified between textbooks and workplaces both in the nature and frequency of oral presentations. Regrettably, the challenges faced by Hong Kong professionals in giving oral presentations have not been adequately addressed. Given the specific and focused nature of the comparison, it is inevitable that findings from the present study are not completely generalisable to other BELF contexts. The methods adopted, however, are directly transferable and allow cross-cultural comparison to be made. The results generated and the recommendations made, at the same time, can be readily applied to material design and curriculum development for business workplace training. Further research can examine real-world presentations in different modes and formats in a variety of professional and business settings, in addition to the surveys of professionals, to offer a more comprehensive perspective. In the pedagogic setting, studies can be carried out to investigate how textbooks are actually used in the classroom. More comparison of this kind will further our understanding of the disparity between pedagogy and professional practice, which will in turn enable us to truly bridge the gap between textbooks and workplaces.

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