

Oral Presentation: Discovering the Past, Predicting the Future

Jason Williams

jasonwilliamsjp +at+ yahoo.co.jp

Notre Dame Seishin University (Okayama, Japan)

Introduction

The past and the future are common topics in all types of language classes--from grammar to discussion and from beginner to advanced. The following is an oral presentation assignment requiring students to research about the past, make predictions about the future, and then give a presentation to the class as a whole. It is designed for adult and university classes but can also be used at the high school level.

Procedure

1. Depending on the make up of your class, decide whether students will do the assignment individually, in pairs or in groups (see *Variations*).
2. Decide which years in the past students are to research. This can be decided by each student/group or the teacher can set the criteria. I usually have each student/group randomly choose a number between 10 and 100 (e.g., 37) and then subtract that number from the current year in order to get the year for the assignment: $2007 - 37 = 1970$.
3. Tell students which aspects of their assigned year they have to research. I usually have them focus on the following: world news events, news events from their home country, world and home country culture, famous people who were born and died that year, and things that did and did not exist at that time. I also have them include any interesting and miscellaneous information they may find during their research such as prices, pop culture, sporting events, popular baby names, etc.
4. Inform students of resources they can use to do their research and explain how to use them. These include encyclopedias, almanacs and newspaper archives commonly found in school and public libraries. Also, Internet sites such as *Google*, *Infoplease* and *Wikipedia* are very helpful as students can research simply by typing their assigned year into the search box.
5. Using the same criteria as **Step 2**, decide which years in the future students will make predictions about. The key is to have the year in the past and the year in the future equidistant from the current year. In my case, I have students add the number they selected to the current year: $2007 + 37 = 2044$. This gives the presentation a sense of balance: *37 years ago...* and *37 years from now...*
6. As in **Step 3**, tell the students which aspects of the future they have to predict. Remind the students that they have to use their imaginations and there is no need for them to try and research or be accurate. As with the past, I usually have them focus on the following: world news events, news events from their home country, world and home country culture. I also have them think about what things will and will no longer exist at that time. They may also include any miscellaneous predictions they care to make about such things as prices, pop culture, sporting events, popular baby names, etc.

Notes

- Make it clear to students that they should focus on well known events, items and people that most of their classmates will recognize. They should also be able to explain the significance of events, items and people from their home countries that may not be well known to their classmates.
- Encourage students to find or create pictures, newspapers, photographs, videos, music recordings, and so on to use as

aids and props for their presentations.

- Depending on student level, it may be beneficial to provide students with a template or sentence stems as a guide for the presentation.
- It may also be helpful to give examples or even a model presentation to students in order to show the kinds of information and grammar structures you want the presentations to contain:

In 1970:

- The Vietnam War **was being fought** by the United States, South Vietnam and North Vietnam.
- The Concorde **made** its first flight and Apollo 13 almost **became** lost.
- The Beatles **broke up**. John Lennon and Paul McCartney **had met** in 1957.
- Brazil **won** the World Cup for the third time. They **have won** it five times.
- The first Earth Day **was celebrated**.
- The world population **was** about 3.7 billion; it **has been getting** larger every year.
- Singer Mariah Carey and tennis player Andre Agassi **were born**.
- Former President of France Charles de Gaulle and guitarist Jimi Hendrix **died**.
- **They had** very big computers, music records and black-and-white televisions.
- **They did not** have cellular phones, the Internet, remote controls and DVDs.

In 2044:

- On July 20, on the 75th anniversary of the moon landing, the first humans **are going to** land on Mars.
- North and South Korea **will have reunited**.
- **I think** moon trips **will** be common for vacation.
- **I imagine** there **will** be a world-wide professional baseball league.
- Because of global warming, the Winter Olympics **might** take place at the North Pole.
- **I'm afraid** pandas may become extinct.
- **I hope** cancer **will be cured**.
- **I predict** that the grandchildren of The Beatles **will** form a new band called The Beatles II.
- **They will have** flying cars, robot nurses and 3-D photographs.
- **They will not have** wall telephones, glasses and books made from paper.

Variations

The variety of ways to decide on which years to use and to determine the pairing or grouping of students is endless. Below are some of the methods I have used.

1. Assign students to groups according to their student numbers. Students whose numbers end in a "9" research and present about a year in the 1990s; students whose numbers end in an "8" research and present about a year in the 1980s and so on. To determine their future year, have them subtract the past year from the current year and then add the answer to the current year in order. This works well larger classes.
2. Use a *When X was my age in 19XX...* format. A student selects a person (e.g., mother) and researches and presents about the year that person was the same age the student is now: *I am 18 years old now. When my mother was 18 years old in 19XX...* This also allows students to take a more personal angle with the presentation: *When my mother was 18 years old she...*A similar format can be used for the future: *I am XX years old now. When my son is my age in 20XX...or My grandfather is XX years old now. When I am my grandfather's age in 20XX...*
3. Link the year that is being researched to a culturally significant age. In Japan, for example, a *Coming of Age* ceremony is held the year someone turns 20. Have students research and present about the year they (or their parents or grandparents) turned 20 and predict about the year they (or their children or grandchildren) will turn 20. This approach works well for classes, such as those at a university, where most students are the same age.
4. Have students research about the year they were born and predict about the year they will die. This can also be done for any significant personal event: graduations, marriage, birth of children, etc. This is more suitable to a mixed-age class with students working as individuals instead of in groups.

Conclusion

This project can be both informative and entertaining for students and teachers. In the part of the presentations dealing with the past, students have remarked about learning new things, shared their personal experiences with classmates, remembered things they have forgotten and discovered new things about people close to them. In the part of the presentation focusing on the future, students reveal their hopes and fears about the future as well as make very creative and, occasionally, very accurate predictions. The presentations are rich sources of information and wonderful catalysts for class discussion.

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