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ACQUISITION OF TRAFFIC RELATED LANGUAGE THROUGH CONTEMPORARY SCIENTIFIC AND TECHNICAL PUBLICATIONS

ABSTRACT

Like teachers of subject related languages in general also the teachers of traffic related language are faced with the challenges of contemporary, technologically fast developing society. In modern information times students are much better informed through satellite TV, Internet and numerous publications. On the other hand, getting hold of all this information is no easy task for teachers. If they want to be interesting and make students attend their classes, they must even be ahead of time or at least be the first to pass on fresh information. Here a question arises about the current role of language textbooks in tertiary education. Writing of a good textbook requires at least a year or two, considering the time from its conception to publication. However, by that time it is no longer up-to-date. One of the solutions to the problem is presentation of current articles found by students in various contemporary scientific and technical publications. The present paper gives recommendations, based on long experience, how to acquire traffic-related language with such presentations in class.

KEY WORDS

traffic-related language, presentations, scientific and technical articles, scripts, student-centred approach

1. INTRODUCTION

How to motivate students has always been one of the key questions that language teachers ask themselves. No syllabus, however well prepared, has ever been able to respond to this question successfully. In view of fast developing science and technology the course syllabus, being prepared at least a year beforehand, nowadays can never incorporate updated topics. The result is that more and more teachers have been introducing so called paper presentations in class. This activity has also other advantages. Apart from being student-centred it represents an excellent way of bringing together subject matter and language [1]. Students are encouraged to read various scientific and technical journals and then present their reading in

class, i. e. students prepare their own papers on the basis of articles taken from journals and then report them orally in class. Our recommendation, based on long experience, is to dedicate about 15-20 % of the traffic-related language syllabus to such activities on condition that students have had at least 8 years of English as a foreign language prior to their enrolment in higher education.

Preparing students for presentations in class has proved to be most challenging for the teachers on the one hand and on the other hand, most useful and encouraging for students. Why is it challenging for the teachers? However simple it may seem prior to starting doing it, you find out very soon that its implementation in practice is far from being so. Why is it useful for students? Through careful preparation they learn a lot not only about the subject matter but also about how to perform in public. As they have to perform it independently, they cannot afford to be unprepared. Why is it very encouraging for the students? They gain self-confidence. And to help them gain confidence we must not be sparing of praise particularly after their first presentation.

Following are our instructions to students how to prepare and present their papers.

2. SOME TIPS FOR SUCCESSFUL PAPER PRESENTATION

I. Preparing the paper

1. Find *interesting*, up-to-date English texts (from the *Containerisation International* [2], *International Journal of Logistics, Cargo Systems, 100A1* ...) and photocopy them!

The key word *interesting* presumes that if the text is interesting for the speaker, it will probably also be interesting for the listeners. As Powell points out "enthusiasm is infectious" [3].

2. Read the text until you are sure you have understood the *main points*. Consult the available dictionaries in the library to be able to clarify the main points. Do not bother about *redundant details*!

The key collocation *redundant details* stresses that the speaker should not report every detail. Human mind is very poor. We forget details, particularly a great number of data. And what we cannot keep in mind we naturally dislike.

3. Use the *marker pen* to colour only the context covering the main points, which have been clarified!

The speaker should focus only on the main points.

4. Transform the selected text from written to oral; i. e. write a *script* – put it into the language that you will later be able to use when reporting.

Some students find it rather difficult. It is important to practice more examples. When transforming the text from written to oral the resulting *script* is further shortened or concentrated.

5. Repeat the modified text until you are sure you have mastered it!

6. Write *key words* together with unavoidable data on a separate sheet of paper! Select those key words that best signal the context!

A good selection of key words is important, as they must disclose the context at first glance. But if the preparation is good there is no difficulty at all.

The final comment to students is: *Good preparation* is very important, otherwise you won't be able to present your paper successfully!!!

3. THE TEACHER'S ROLE

I. During preparation

1. Planning presentations.

Time available might be a problem. It is therefore necessary to draw a schedule for presentations depending on the number of students in class. For example with 20 students and 90 periods available per academic year the presentation would take about 20 minutes together with the follow-up discussion, i. e. 2 presentations can be effected per period. Thus it takes all together 10 periods [4].

2. Giving students all instructions, recommendation as well as practical examples.

We always introduce key to phonetic symbols and their practising. It takes us only one period. If students are able to read symbols, it helps them a lot to pro-

TOLL TROUBLE

(script – transformed written text for oral presentation)

Last year, the Panama Canal Authority (ACP) decided to *increase* its *tolls* by 13.5%. This caused *angry protests* (*outcry*) by shippers (exporters of goods) around the world. They disagreed (argued) because there is *less trade and business activity* (*recession*) in the world after September 11.

The *average cost* of transit through the canal for a *panamax vessel* (the vessel with the width not exceeding canal width) is now US\$157,000, and a major user, such as *Maersk Sealand*, would have to pay about \$4 million only for the canal *toll*.

Maersk Sealand is currently the heaviest user of the Panama Canal in terms of container vessels, and their *managing director* comments that it would have been better to *increase the toll gradually* over a period of years.

On the other hand, there are those, particularly ACP *in favour* of the toll increase. They argue (state by giving clear reasons) that:

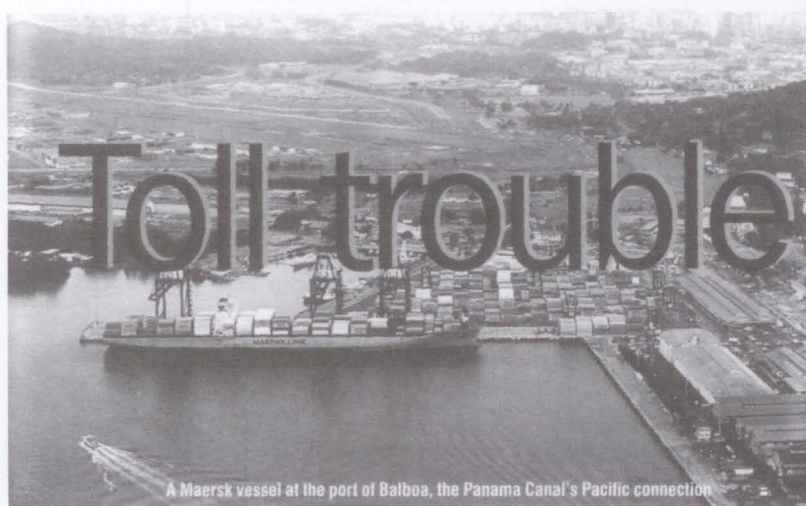
- a *pool* (amount of money collected for common needs) should be built of extra cash that will allow to *improve existing channels* and possibly build a third channel to provide passage for *post-panamax vessels* (vessels that now cannot pass the canal), especially container vessels of 10,000 TEU (twenty-foot equivalent unit) and beyond;
- for emergency situations, such as those caused by the extra security needs resulting from September 11 and the increased fear of *terrorist attacks*;
- for the problems caused by *climate changes*. In 1997, the 'El Nino' phenomenon was one of the worst in Panama's history. *Lake water levels* were so *low* that even after the extended dry season. The low water levels affected the maximum cargo loads that canal users could carry.

When, in December 1999, the Republic of Panama *took over* full and sole responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the canal, it did so knowing that it did not have the *huge financial resources* of the US Government to deal with modernisation and emergency issues.

Modernisation and expansion, especially the *dredging* (deepening water by removing mud, stones etc. from the bottom) and *widening* of the Gaillard Cut, is a priority if the Panama Canal is to *fight off competition* from alternatives, such as the Suez Canal, the Cape of Good Hope and the Cape Horn.

Another *alternative* is the Panama Canal Railway Company (PCRC) *service*, which links Balboa, on the Pacific side, with Colon, on the Caribbean side. Maersk Sealand is already a regular user of this link.

ACP is currently carrying out studies on several *expansion plans* - including one for a third set of *locks* (sections of canal with a gate at either end).



A Maersk vessel at the port of Balboa, the Panama Canal's Pacific connection

The increase in tolls for vessels transiting the Panama Canal has not pleased shippers and shipping lines. But there are some voices - and not all of them work for the Panama Canal Authority - who believe the increases are overdue and fair. **Robert Ward**, who was recently in Panama, reports.

Early last year, the Panama Canal Authority (ACP) decided that it would increase its tolls by 13.5%. Although this was the first increase since 1998, there was still a universal outcry. After concerted pressure and lobbying by several shippers' groups - including the European Shippers' Council - the ACP agreed to defer some of the increases until this year. It was argued that the timing of the increases was wrong, given that the US and other economies appeared to be sliding towards recession and business confidence was at an all-time low following the September 11 attacks.

Additionally, some emerging economies, such as Chile's, are dependent on the Panama Canal. Arturo Sierra, the president of the Chilean Shipowners' Association (ANA) based in Valparaiso, was up in arms about the effect the increases would have on Chile's important export flows. Chilean ocean carriers CSAV and CCNI help make their country the fourth-largest volume user of the canal.

The average cost of transit for a panamax vessel is now US\$157,000, and a major user, such as Maersk Sealand, will have around \$4 million added to its canal transit bill this year because of the current round of increases. Maersk Sealand is currently the heaviest user of the Panama Canal in terms of container vessels, followed by NYK, Evergreen and MOL. Hans Stig Moller, managing director of Maersk Panama SA, commented: 'I think these are major increases during these financially difficult times, and to phase in this substantial increase over a period of years would have been better.' After listening to all arguments against the toll increase, the ACP eventually agreed to implement a 9% rise (\$10 per container) in October 2002 and to delay a second phase increase - of 4.5% (\$5 per container) - until May 2003.

Most ocean carriers have been quick to follow suit. Valentine D Lynch Jr, manager of the ACP's Pricing and Tolls Unit, laid out

several reasons why canal transit tolls should increase.

They include the need to build a pool of extra cash that will allow the ACP to improve existing channels and possibly build a third channel to cater for post-panamax vessels, especially container vessels of 10,000TEU and beyond. The same pool of cash could also be used for emergency situations, such as those caused by the extra security needs resulting from September 11 and the increased fear of terrorist attacks, as well as problems caused by climate changes.

In 1997, the 'El Nino' phenomenon was one of the worst in Panama's history. Lake water levels were so low that even after the extended dry season, the canal authority was forced to impose draught restrictions, affecting the maximum cargo loads that canal users could carry.

In terms of security, the ACP's workload has increased as much because of potential 'local' threats as the more general problem of Al Qaeda. Chilean intelligence sources claim that the Colombian guerrilla movement, FARC, has taken control of vast tracts of Panamanian land to the south of the canal and could try and blackmail canal users with a bombing campaign. ACP security and environment director Juan Hector Diaz denied such a threat existed. However, security does need to be stepped up. The ACP is already carrying out more risk assessments of dangerous cargo and more rigorous vessel inspections.

When, in December 1999, the Republic of Panama took over full and sole responsibility for the operation and maintenance of the canal, it did so knowing that it did not have the huge financial resources of the US Government to deal with modernisation and emergency issues.

Hence, another reason for introducing price increases is to help build up reserves, according to Lynch.

CARRIER

Modernisation and expansion, especially the dredging and widening of the Gaillard Cut, are a priority if the Panama Canal is to fight off competition from alternatives, such as the Suez Canal, the Cape of Good Hope, Cape Horn and the US landbridge.

Another alternative is the Panama Canal Railway Company (PCRC) service, which links Balboa, on the Pacific side, with Colon, on the Caribbean side. Maersk Sealand is a major user of this link, accounting for more than 80% of all containers moved by the PCRC.

Lynch, and other ACP employees this writer spoke to, plus several neutral observers, agreed that the Panama Canal had been under-pricing itself for many years. However, Lynch emphasised the need for a more flexible pricing structure that reflected the complexity and sophistication of modern day shipping.

This has partly been brought about by the revolution in container shipping and the development of regular liner services. Lynch outlined a historical account of the pricing policy of the canal, suggesting that the introduction of the container in the 1970s changed everything: 'The "one-price-fits-all" concept doesn't fit so well any more, and we need to modify our "single-rate" tolls system, which in its current format does not always meet the diverse needs of our client base. In the past 40 years, liner shipping has revolutionised the transportation industry, mainly by use of the container.'

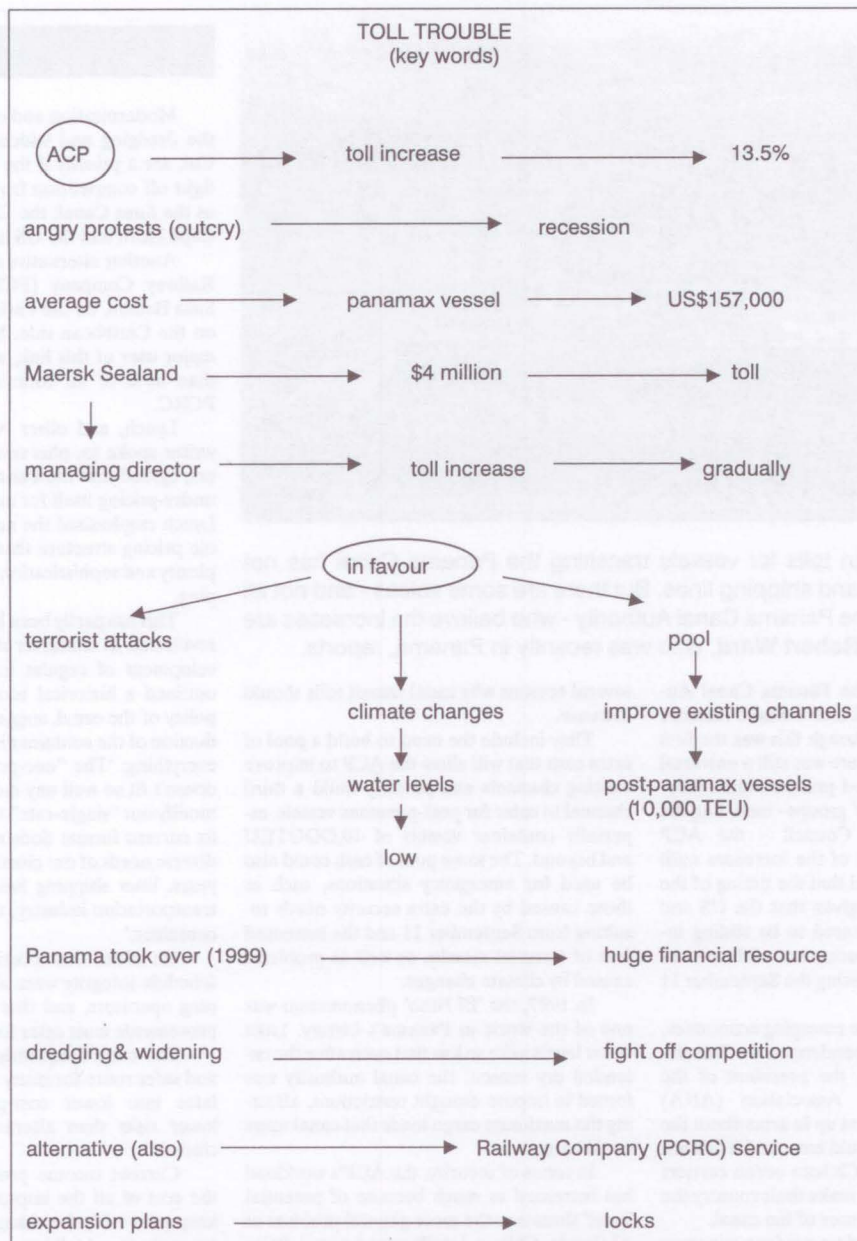
He added that security, voyage time and schedule integrity were all vital to liner shipping operators, and that Panama Canal improvements must cater for that.

The canal frequently provides a shorter and safer route for many trades, which translates into lower cost-per-tonne-mile and lower risks than alternatives,' Lynch concluded.

Current income probably cannot meet the cost of all the improvements needed to keep pace with the changing shipping industry, and several toll increases over the next 10 to 20 years might be necessary. The ACP is currently carrying out studies on several expansion plans - including one for a third set of locks - which could cost anywhere from \$1 billion up to \$8 billion.

Pedro Morales, of the ACP, said: 'We have to maximise our revenues to make the necessary improvements. The pricing of tolls will eventually equal the value of the service provided. We are close to reaching our capacity, so further expansion can only come when we have the money to pay for it. The Panama Canal needs investment for this.'

For the most part, this need is recognised by users. For example, Moller told CI: 'If [the ACP] intends to invest much of the money in further dredging projects and future expansion, then it makes the price increases more excusable.'



nounce new words correctly when they consult their dictionaries. We also warn students about the final test paper, which will include mistakes and vocabulary from presentations. It additionally guarantees their attendance.

3. Giving advice for the text selection if necessary.
Our experience is that they need advice very rarely.

4. Preparing for individual presentations.
Students are requested to hand over their papers (original text, script and key words) a few days prior to their presentations. Why?

4.1. We have to see if enough effort has been made for preparation.

We have to prepare ourselves as well:

- to help in case of possible standstills;
- to help developing discussion /questions at the end/;

- to avoid embarrassment - as students may take us by surprise regarding new terminology found in articles, although we frequently warn them that we cannot know everything.

II. During presentations

1. Encouraging students.

Providing relaxed atmosphere is of utmost importance. Telling a joke would be very convenient. An adequate setting such as sitting round the table is recommended.

2. Recording mistakes

This is what we find most difficult. At the beginning we tried to record the whole presentation on tape. It did not work as the students were strained and

could not relax. Then we tried to record everything in writing. It was impossible to take notes on pronunciation, the use of tenses and syntax at the same time. Now we do not insist on recording every mistake, but just a few more important ones.

One possible solution to this issue is assigning students to do the recording task. However, we have not tried that yet. It might be useful to select a group of students to pay attention to pronunciation, another group to take notes on tenses etc. And then ask them to report at the end.

3. Helping when it comes to a standstill

III. After presentations

1. Commenting on presentations.

Students usually hesitate to give judgement about their colleagues. If you ask them they would either say nothing or if you insist to hear their opinion they would simply say OK.

We find that it is very important how the presentation is commented at the end. We always first point out whatever we find positive about the presentation, and only then, what we find negative. In our opinion the final criticism should never be too severe but always encouraging.

2. Discussing the recorded mistakes.

At the end, when pointing out mistakes, we repeat or write them on board as they were pronounced during presentation or written in the paper and the class has to guess what is wrong. Thus, the students remember them better and have time to take notes.

3. Marking/grading presentations.

4. Writing a list of all mistakes recorded.

5. Preparing test papers.

4. INSTEAD OF CONCLUSION

Recalling our beginnings when students had no key words in front of them, and when they were not well prepared, they rushed through the text reading it so fast that nobody could follow them.

The reasons were clear:

- to get to the end of the awful task as soon as possible;
- to disguise somehow their errors of pronunciation as well as other mistakes;
- not to give the chance of being interrupted.

Compared to our initial experience with paper presentations, we can manage to prepare our students much better today, though to admit frankly, not all students are able to use key words during their presentations. According to our personal statistics there are 10 to 15% of such students. They still prefer reading

their papers first and only then discussing them. They are the students who have always had difficulties with foreign languages. However, I consider 10-15 % a low percentage.

And finally, what we find to be a very important benefit of these presentations for the teacher? He/She is obliged to read technical articles from various journals. And believe us, we would never have read so many articles had we not been obliged to.

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POVZETEK

USVAJANJE JEZIKA TEHNOLOGIJE PROMETA SKOZI SODOBNE ZNANSTVENE IN TEHNIČNE PUBLIKCIJE

Tako kot učitelji jezika stroke na splošno, se tudi učitelji jezika v tehnologiji prometa srečujemo z novimi izzivi sodobne, tehnološko hitro razvijajoče se družbe. V novi informacijski družbi so študentje prek satelitskih televizijskih programov, interneta in številnih novih publikacij vedno bolje informirani. To pa postavlja učitelje pred popolnoma novo, izredno zahtevno nalogo. Če želijo biti zanimivi in pritegniti študente v predavalnice, morajo celo prehitovati čas, ali pa vsaj prvi posredovati sveže informacije. Pri tem se postavlja vprašanje, kakšno vlogo naj imajo učbeniki tujega jezika v terciarnem izobraževanju. Namreč, za pripravo dobrega učbenika je od njegove zasnove do izida potrebno vsaj leto ali dve, tedaj pa s tematskega vidika učbenik že ni več aktualen. Ena od rešitev tega problema je zagotovo predstavitev sodobnih tem iz člankov, ki jih študentje najdejo v različnih znanstvenih in strokovnih revijah. Pričujoči članek, na osnovi dolgoletnih izkušenj, priporoča, kako usvojiti jezik tehnologije prometa s pomočjo omenjenih predstavitev v razredu.

KLJUČNE BESEDE

jezik tehnologije prometa, prezentacije, znanstveni in tehnični članki, zapis govornih besed, na študenta osredinjeno.

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