

# A multimodal approach to business presentations for the tourism industry: learning communication skills in a master's programme

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## Abstract

Successful communication is based on language, although most messages are delivered through a large number of modes apart from words in order to implement meaning. This is paramount in the business world, as messages have to be clear and simple, so that customers from all over the world can get all the information they might need. In our study, we analyse 28 presentations in which students have to persuade a group of North American business executives to use a hotel as a possible destination for wealthy foreigners visiting Spain. In this simulation, these executives organise trips to Barcelona, and they look for a 5-star hotel to stay in. To prepare the presentation, students have a whole week to gather information, and then 8/10 minutes to deliver the presentation. Five elements are analysed to study the type of multimodal resources used by students to perform these presentations. These are: a) gaze; b) gestures; c) movements; d) intonation, pace and rhythm; and e) visuals. Some pedagogical remarks will be suggested.

**Keywords:** multimodality, business communication, tourism industry, business presentations, persuasion.

## Resumen

*Un enfoque multimodal a las presentaciones para la industria del turismo: el aprendizaje de las habilidades comunicativas en un programa de máster*

El éxito del proceso comunicativo se basa en el lenguaje, si bien muchos mensajes son expresados mediante la utilización de diversos modos que

acompañan a las palabras para incrementar su significado. Este hecho es clave en el mundo de los negocios, puesto que los mensajes deben ser sencillos y directos, de manera que los clientes de todo el mundo puedan obtener la información que necesitan. Este estudio analiza un total de 28 presentaciones mediante las cuales los estudiantes deben persuadir a un grupo de ejecutivos norteamericanos para que utilicen un hotel como posible destino para turistas acaudalados que visitan España. En esta simulación, los ejecutivos organizan viajes a Barcelona y están buscando un hotel de cinco estrellas en el que sus clientes puedan alojarse. Para preparar la presentación, los estudiantes cuentan con una semana para recopilar información y 8-10 minutos para llevarla a cabo en el aula. Analizamos el uso de cinco recursos multimodales: a) mirada/contacto visual; b) gestualidad; c) movimientos; d) entonación, cadencia y ritmo; y e) recursos visuales. El artículo concluye con algunas sugerencias pedagógicas.

**Palabras clave:** multimodalidad, comunicación comercial, industria turística, presentaciones comerciales, persuasión.

## 1. Introduction

Communicating a message is not a simple activity. Many aspects take part while sharing ideas, concepts and feelings with someone, especially when this is carried out in a professional setting. Legal-political, technical, and socio-cultural frameworks have an influence in the way people communicate a message professionally, though there is always a linguistic framework that has to be considered (Gunnarson, 2009; Schnurr, 2013). While many speakers are convinced that words are all that really matters, others know that the way that information is offered is at least as important as the words themselves (Mehrabian, 2008; Cical, Smith & Bush, 2012; Querol-Julián & Fortanet, 2012; Evans, 2013; Palmer-Silveira, 2015). Professional communication involves many types of information exchanges within a workplace context, including not only written and oral transactions, but also visual and digital communication processes. It includes physical and psychological signals that can be inferred by the receiver. As a result, companies need universities to train future professionals with people-related skills, so that they can really communicate both inside and outside the company and persuade customers to use their products or services (Amutha, 2010; Palmer-Silveira, 2017; Valeiras-Jurado, Ruiz-Madrid & Jacobs, 2018). Persuasive language implies different semiotic resources to be effective, such as words, gestures and intonation (Poggi & Pelachaud, 2008). Additionally, Jurin et al. (2010) also consider that there might be cultural expectations that may affect the way

that message is conveyed and understood by senders and receivers. Words are important, but most professionals also rely on how you say them.

In recent years, some studies have shown that successful communication is delivered throughout a large number of modes apart from words in order to convey meaning (body language, gestures, facial expressions, pace and rhythm, images, colours, numbers, etc.) (Kress & van Leeuwen, 1996, 2001; Poyatos, 2002; Scollon & Scollon, 2003; Norris, 2004, 2013; O'Halloran, 2005; van Leeuwen, 2005; Jewitt, 2009; Kress, 2009; Crawford Camiciottoli, 2015; Valeiras-Jurado, 2017; Bernad-Mechó, 2018). If this can be seen in general communication, it is even more relevant in the business world, as messages have to be clear and simple, so that customers from all over the world can get all the information they might need. Additionally, presentations have to clarify contents, being simple and direct: as Duarte (2013) points out, when dealing with business presentations, the enemy of persuasion is obscurity.

Considering this need, my aim is to present a Multimodal Discourse Analysis (MDA) approach to business presentations among future professionals enrolled in a master's degree programme. I will analyse different semiotic modes contributing to the communicative purpose of this genre (Kress & van Leeuwen, 2001; Jewitt, 2009; Kress, 2009; O'Halloran, 2011; Valeiras-Jurado & Ruiz-Madrid, 2015), and observe how the combination of these modes may enhance the effectiveness of our students' presentations.

## **2. Multimodal resources in business presentations**

Business presentations are multimodal. Professionals often use as many resources as possible in order to send out a message to their audience, including props, displays, and visual images. Linguistic, paralinguistic and kinesic features are often combined to persuade customers (Valeiras-Jurado & Ruiz-Madrid, 2015). The way professionals should dress, move, look at their audience and even walk has also been studied (Campbell, Mothersbaugh, Brammer & Taylor, 2001; Gurung, Kempen, Klemm, Senn & Wysocki, 2014). Rehearsals often involve observing how all those aspects can be used in order to improve students' expressive abilities. Every single aspect that could enhance that communicative purpose has to be considered before offering a final presentation (Palmer-Silveira, 2002; 2004). If this is the case when introducing any product or service, this is often enhanced when dealing with

the tourism industry, as companies tend to base their marketing plans on feelings and emotions, trying to sell the most relevant features by touching the heart of the prospective customer. Using English, the international language of business, is important for the tourism industry as a means to communicate, negotiate, and execute transactions with tourists by tourism employees (Prachanant, 2012). This is something that the business people working for these firms know, and they try to get as close to their customers as possible while carrying out their promotional presentations (Pink, 2012).

Gaze is an important element when delivering business presentations in front of an audience. Eye contact is a crucial factor in order to convey a message, an aspect studied by development scientists from infancy onwards (Brooks & Meltzoff, 2005). In fact, the ability to achieve shared visual attention facilitates word learning (Bloom, 2002; Hanna & Brennan, 2007). It allows sender(s) and receiver(s) to engage in a close relationship, becoming an important cue for the development of social activity (Pittenger, Miller & Mott, 2004; Bailly, Raidt & Elisei, 2010).

Prior studies have focused on the role of gestures and head shakes in business presentations (Morgan, 2001; Biehl-Missal, 2011). Gestures appear to help convey a message to the audience, and they are often natural ways of including emotion in any communicative expression (McNeill, 1992; Ekman, 2003). The brain contains mechanisms to process facial expressions and emotions (Calder, Rhodes, Johnson & Haxby, 2011) and facial cues give information on the speaker's involvement (Roth, 2002; Sueyoshi & Hardison, 2005). Some authors have observed that projecting emotion with one's face helps to send out the real purpose of the talk (Kendon, 2004). Nevertheless, the communicative role of gestures is somewhat controversial, and it is often debated whether speakers actually intend gestural information for their addressees, and whether addressees attend to and integrate the gestural information (Gullberg & Kita, 2009). When dealing with business presentations, gestures become visual-spatial phenomena, allowing the sender to increase the emotional aspects of the message delivered and, as result, helping the receivers to better understand (and later retrieve) the most relevant aspects of the talk.

Deictic gestures, often used by presenters, are gestures made during communication to point at objects or persons. Jorge et al. (2013: 63) point out, when defining deictic gestures, that there are two different types of objectives:

indicative acts of directing-to guide the addressee to an object, while placing-for acts place an object for the addressee's attention. Commonly used presentation software tools, such as PowerPoint and Keynote, offer ample support for placing-for gestures, e.g. slide transitions, progressive disclosure of list items and animations. Such presentation tools, however, do not generally offer adequate support for the directing-to indicative act (i.e. pointing gestures).

Although gestures reveal information about the communicative purpose of the presenters, the way they move in front of the audience also supports that aim. Our ability to communicate relies heavily on decoding messages provided by body postures (de Gelder, van den Stuck, Meeren, Sinke, Kret & Tamietto, 2010; Kret, Pichon, Grézes & de Gelder, 2011; Kret, Stekelenburg, Roelofs & de Gelder, 2013). Starting from an open position, placing themselves in the centre of the stage, with arms separated from the body, most speakers need to move freely on stage to get closer to their audience, something that allows them to send out the message in a more relaxed way (Grayson-Riegel & Dowling, 2017). Natural movements often indicate that the presenter is in control, whereas breaking that rhythm is often used to get the audience's attention for a specific purpose. Moving to the sides of the stage or even invading the comfort zone of those people sitting in the front row can help the presenter to get more attention from some members of the audience.

There has been a burgeoning interest in the role of intonation in the communicative effect of the message. For example, intonation can be used to present parts of the message as already agreed upon as opposed to open to discussion (Brazil, 1997). It is the way we utter a message a relevant element to transmit feelings and emotions, and presenters use pace and rhythm to stress concepts and ideas. At the simplest level, the pace is equivalent to the tempo used by the presenter to send out a message. The presenter decides when the tempo is slow or quick, keeping a specific pace. However, presenters often play with different paces, with different tempos, using some elements (i.e. speeding up concepts or ideas, using silences, repeating a concept twice) in order to get the attention of the audience. They create a specific rhythm for the presentation by combining different paces, depending on the specific objective they look for in every single part of the talk. The person listening clearly realises that something is being stressed as one's judgment of speed is affected by the preceding experience. The way a presenter varies the tempo strongly affects the perception of pace.

Nowadays, digital presentation systems use rich media to offer information visualisation in business sessions, as the visual semiotic is playing a key role in conveying messages (Diani, 2015). It is hard to understand business presentations these days without the use of a computer-projector setup (Zelazny, 2006). Some aspects have to be considered when using this type of devices. First, the slide display needs to be large enough to be seen from every single angle of the room. Secondly, presenters should pay attention to the position of both beamer, without covering the images displayed, and placing themselves where the audience could see their gestures, gaze, and other forms of paralanguage (Tan, Gelg, Samadani, Robinson, Culbertson & Apostolopoulos, 2010). In any case, no business presentation can avoid the use of this type of device these days, as visual communication is necessary to convey a message appropriately. Reynolds (2008) pointed out that the images appearing on the screen should be emotive, without “hurting the audience’s eyes”. Thus, as people cannot read and write well at the same time, presenters should try to avoid displays filled with lots of text.

Based on these concepts, this research will examine the way prospective professionals use a multimodal approach in order to set business presentations as compulsory task in a master’s degree programme. Different elements will be observed (gaze, gestures, movements, voice and visuals) in an attempt to see whether their use can contribute to the communicative success of the task.

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1. Context and participants

In this study I analyse a corpus of 28 presentations developed in the course SAR005 “Business Presentations and Persuasive Language”, currently taught as a compulsory subject of the professional itinerary of the Master’s Programme in English Language for International Trade at Universitat Jaume I (Castellón, Spain) during the 2016/17 and 2017/18 academic years. This subject has been taught since this Master’s programme was established, back in 2005.

The 28 students completing the activity were 21 female and 7 male, and ages ranging from 22 to 36, the average being 25.62 years of age at the time of the experiment. Most of them (17 subjects) had previously completed University degrees in both linguistics and translation, whereas 11 students

came from other backgrounds (Business Administration, Economics, Tourism, Chemistry, Communication, and Geography). In all cases, students should have a B2 (or equivalent) level in English language in order to join the master's programme. Students without that initial level could not take part in these classes. We could describe the population of this study as a 'fairly international' group, as they come from different countries (in these two recent years, participants have come from Spain, Croatia, Argentina, Romania, Moldova, Hungary, Ecuador, Ukraine, Ghana, and Morocco).

In all 28 cases we are dealing with highly committed students who had decided to take our classes in order to find better professional prospects. Most of them attended introductory sessions where the master's coordinator explained the dynamics of the master's programme, letting them know well in advance that they would have to engage in practical activities along the year. Presentations were frequent tasks and students prepared themselves to act professionally. In all the cases our subjects had already performed two previous presentations, and feedback had already been offered to them related to those two initial activities. Only those students who had attended all previous sessions on this subject are included in this study; those who had missed (for different reasons) any of the preceding sessions are not considered in this analysis. Students knew that all the activities had to be completed successfully in order to get a pass mark.

### **3.2. The corpus**

Students had to perform a presentation in which they must persuade a group of North American business executives to use a hotel as a possible destination for wealthy foreigners visiting Spain. In this simulation, these business people organised trips to Barcelona, and they knew that prices would not be a problem for their prospective customers, looking for a luxurious hotel to stay in. The place was a real 5-star hotel (Mandarin Oriental), placed in the centre of Barcelona (Passeig de Gràcia). The sense of exclusiveness made the difference for those attending our presentation, members of companies that were looking for a combination of glamour and style that could be of interest for their prospective final customers. To prepare the presentation, students had a whole week to get as much information as possible about the hotel. Then, they had 8/10 minutes to deliver the presentation.

The subjects of study had been compelled to find as much information about the hotel as possible, but trying to be selective and keeping in mind the interests of the members of the audience that would attend their presentation. They had also been guided to offer a clear layout at the beginning of their presentations, and a nice set of concluding remarks in its final part, focusing on the objective of the talk. They knew beforehand that the success of this activity would be based on how they managed to engage their audience into understanding that the best possibility for their customers would be to stay at the hotel they were to endorse. PowerPoint presentations (or similar programs) are recommended to offer images and pictures of the hotel. All presentations included time for questions at the end, although we are going to just focus on all the parts previously prepared by the students, leaving questions aside.

### 3.3. The corpus

During the activity, speakers were video-recorded with an HD camera, in order to later analyse the kind of multimodal elements they used while introducing the hotel to their audience. All the students granted us permission to record their presentations. Five elements have been analysed in order to study the type of multimodal resources used by students to perform these presentations. These were a) gaze; b) gestures; c) movements; d) intonation, pace and rhythm; and e) visuals. Next we describe how these elements have been studied and coded in this analysis.

Gaze: Students should look constantly at their audience in order to get direct rapport with them. As they also use visuals to convey their message, and the screen is just behind them, they sometimes turn their back to the audience, losing eye contact as a result. In order to analyse eye contact, I have paid attention to six different possibilities:

- EA (eye contact with the audience): The presenter keeps eye contact, being considered the basic position regarding gaze.
- ES (presenter looks at the screen): The presenter occasionally has a quick look at the screen, to be sure the message appearing there can be observed by the audience. It is often a short and fast movement, quickly returning to the EA position.
- EN (presenter looks at notes): The presenter checks, on cards or sheets, the different concepts and ideas to be presented. In some



cases, the presenter can even read aloud those notes, losing eye contact for a long time.

- EU (presenter looks up): The presenter tries to remember ideas or concepts and looks up, trying to visualise the information. By doing so the presenter loses eye contact with the audience, offering an image of forgetfulness and lack of security.
- ED (presenter looks down): The presenter becomes nervous and is unable to keep eye contact with the audience, looking at the floor.
- EF (presenter focuses on one member of the audience): In order to feel more relaxed, the presenter starts talking to a specific member of the audience, avoiding eye contact with other people attending the session.

Gestures: Presenters often use gestures in order to clarify concepts. I will concentrate on two different types of gestures: first, on facial cues (including head movements) and, later on the use of hands to convey a message, with special attention to deictic gestures. Regarding facial cues and head movements, they reinforce concepts appearing in the presentation. Random head movements often show some lack of control during the communicative process. Some head movements that might appear in our corpus are the following:

- HA (head agreement/“ducking”): The presenter swiftly moves his/her head up and down, trying to reinforce the positive aspects of the point commented on.
- HD (head disagreement): The presenter swiftly moves his/her head left and right, trying to reinforce the negative aspects of the point commented on.
- HT (head tilting): The presenter bends his/her head slightly to either side to show his/her interest in aspects commented on by a member of the audience. This is often the case in the discussion session at the end of the presentation.
- HC (hand on chin): Quite similar to the HA movement, though this time accompanied by placing the hand on the chin of the speaker while swiftly showing agreement. It implies reasoning in a positive

way, and it is often used while accepting questions or objections from a member of the audience in the discussion session.

Additionally, the use of hands in order to emphasise ideas or concepts can be summarised in these movements:

- CF (closed fists): Presenters close their hands to show strength, highlighting the relevance of the concept introduced.
- OH (open hands): Presenters show the palm of their hands to represent the truth, using this as a clarifying movement.
- PF (pointing finger): Presenters use this deictic movement to stress a relevant concept, something they do not want the audience to miss, becoming an emphatic movement.
- EF (enumerating fingers): Presenters use three or four fingers to indicate in how many parts their message is divided, adding them as long as they enumerate all the concepts they want to introduce in their talk.

Movements: The way speakers use space in order to communicate has also been analysed. There are three main possibilities, ranging from a totally static position to movement:

- SP (static position): Presenters do not move during the talk, staying in the same spot used to start the presentation.
- SW (slow walker): Presenters walk slowly, paying attention to the audience, in many cases moving slowly from one side of the stage to the other (SWS: slow walker – side to side). In other instances, presenters walk back and forth, moving from the screen to the front rows (SWF: slow walker – back and forth).
- AA (active attitude): Presenters move along freely, getting closer to the audience, keeping as much eye contact as possible. They move quickly from one side of the classroom to the other (AAS: active attitude – side to side) or back and forth, from the screen to the front rows (AAF: active attitude – back and forth).

Intonation, pace and rhythm: In order to analyse the kind of presentations students have performed, according to the way they have orally stressed

concepts and ideas, a general structure has been devised, based on the predominance of the pace followed and the combination of paces making up the specific rhythm of the presentation. It is assumed that only well prepared presenters may be able to decide when to change the rhythm they have chosen:

- QP (quiet pace): Presenters opt for speaking slowly and clearly, stressing concepts throughout the talk. This tends to be based on the interest to clarify the different parts of the talk, though it is also quite common when the speakers are not in control of all the different concepts they want to present (in some cases due to lack of rehearsals).
- MP (medium pace): Presenters decide to offer information to their audience maintaining the same speed they use in real life, trying to be as natural as possible.
- RP (rapid pace): Out of nervousness, presenters may unconsciously increase the speed of the talk. Concepts are then delivered to the audience with little time for them to grasp all the benefits of the product/service endorsed.

While all paces are valid, it is the alternation of different paces that creates the personal rhythm helping presenters to convey their message appropriately. The range of possible alternatives is this:

- SR (steady rhythm): Maintaining a steady pace throughout the presentation, presenters disregard the option of getting closer to their audience by surprising them with a different pace.
- MR+ (modified rhythm, based on increasing the pace): Presentation based on a basically quiet pace, increased on purpose when the presenter tries to emphasise a specific concept or idea.
- MR- (modified rhythm, based on decreasing the pace): Presentation based on a rapid pace, slowing down when the presenter tries to emphasise a specific concept or idea.

Additionally, in order to stress some ideas, presenters often use some oral devices that help them to put their message across:

- US (using silences): Presenters try to get the attention of the audience by including time lapses for listeners to think of the

concepts already introduced or to create an aura of suspense related to the concept that is about to be introduced. Silence is a powerful device.

- RC (repeating concepts): A concept is repeated twice (or even three times) to stress its importance. These repetitions are quite typical in some areas of oral discourse (e.g. political messages).
- SC (speeding up concepts): In some cases, in slow or medium pace presentations, speakers introduce a concept quite rapidly, in some cases trying to avoid giving more explanations about it. It is often used as a way to disguise parts of the message that might not be too beneficial for the company endorsing the product/service, although in some cases it is not done on purpose, as the presenters simply try to focus on other concepts that they might be better prepared to talk about, and they try to save time to do so.

Visuals: Presenters often use visual devices to deliver their messages. My analysis considers the kind of visual devices used and their frequencies. As all the students opted for using the Microsoft PowerPoint presentation software, I will focus on certain elements that may enhance the presenter's communicative purpose:

- HD (Use of high definition photographs): Students use mainly high quality pictures to show the most appealing qualities of the hotel.
- VE (Use of embedded video excerpts): Subjects have opted for including a short video to support the image of the firm.
- GR (Use of tables, charts or other similar graphic resources): presenters show these resources to state facts and figures about different aspects of the hotel.
- LT (Use of text - long text): Subjects fill their displays with long sentences and quotations, forcing the audience to read directly from the screen.
- ST (Use of text - concepts and simple phrases): Presenters display simple concepts (most frequently one word) to their audience, and then they build up their message based on that concept on screen.

I have also observed what resources are most often used in the introduction of the session, during its main body, and when making the concluding remarks. In what follows I will analyse the length and structure of the 28 presentations and then the use of each of the different modes.

## 4. Results

### 4.1. Length and structure

The corpus presentations have been divided into three different sections, following the instructions offered by their lecturer: all presentations have an introduction, in which the students greet the audience, establish the layout of the session and tell a brief story (in 16 instances) to engage listeners into the topic. Next they explain the most relevant features of the hotel, with the aid of the PowerPoint software. In all performances images outweigh text, due to the nature of the service offered. Finally, students close their presentations with a brief set of concluding remarks, a few ideas to be remembered by the audience, except in two cases (18ES and 18LT), in which the students, too nervous, simply thank the public for its attention. Table 1 displays the corpus analysed and the time spent by presenters on each of the three parts of the talk.

Student	Total length	Length of the introduction	Length of the main body	Length of the concluding remarks
17AB (F)	6.50	1.04 (0-1.04)	4.45 (1.04-5.49)	1.01 (5.49-6.50)
17AL (M)	8.25	1.07 (0-1.07)	6.00 (1.07-7.07)	1.18 (7.07-8.25)
17CD (F)	9.58 (including a short video)	0.52 (0-0.52)	8.17 (0.52-9.09)	0.49 (9.09-9.58)
17CS (F)	6.17	1.51 (0-1.51)	3.51 (1.51-5.42)	0.35 (5.42-6.17)
17JA (F)	8.00 (including a short video)	1.11 (0-1.11)	6.21 (1.11-7.32)	0.28 (7.32-8.00)
17JG (M)	8.49	1.31 (0-1.31)	6.57 (1.31-8.28)	0.21 (8.28-8.49)
17JJ (M)	4.15	1.32 (0-1.32)	2.03 (1.32-3.35)	0.40 (3.35-4.15)
17LB (F)	7.00	2.09 (0-2.09)	3.52 (2.09-6.01)	0.59 (6.01-7.00)
17MO (M)	5.14	0.44 (0-0.44)	4.18 (0.44-5.02)	0.12 (5.02-5.14)
17MS (F)	7.08 (including a short video)	1.20 (0-1.20)	5.27 (1.20-6.47)	0.21 (6.47-7.08)
17MB (F)	10.39	0.58 (0-0.58)	8.37 (0.58-9.35)	1.04 (9.35-10.39)
17MA (F)	11.32	1.22 (0-1.22)	8.45 (1.22-10.07)	1.25 (10.07-11.32)

17RR (F)	9.20	1.24 (0-1.24)	5.54 (1.24-7.18)	2.02 (7.18-9.20)
17TA (F)	7.40 (including a short video)	1.35 (0-1.35)	4.59 (1.35-6.34)	1.06 (6.34-7.40)
18AB (F)	5.20	1.15 (0-1.15)	3.32 (1.15-4.47)	0.33 (4.47-5.20)
18BE (M)	7.52	2.10 (0-2.10)	5.08 (2.10-7.18)	0.34 (7.18-7.52)
18BG (M)	5.28	0.28 (0-0.28)	4.35 (0.28-5.03)	0.25 (5.03-5.28)
18CB (F)	5.31	0.56 (0-0.56)	4.14 (0.56-5.10)	0.21 (5.10-5.31)
18ES (M)	5.19	0.24 (0-0.24)	4.49 (0.24-5.13)	0.06 (5.13-5.19)
18IA (F)	5.21	0.23 (0-0.23)	4.42 (0.23-5.05)	0.16 (5.05-5.21)
18IM (F)	10.00	0.50 (0-0.50)	7.47 (0.50-8.37)	1.23 (8.37-10.00)
18LT (F)	10.10 (including incidental music)	0.36 (0-0.36)	9.28 (0.36-10.04)	0.06 (10.04-10-10)
18MS (F)	7.08 (including a short video)	1.52 (0-1.52)	4.50 (1.52-6.42)	0.26 (6.42-7.08)
18MB (F)	6.50	0.26 (0-0.26)	5.10 (0.26-6.36)	1.14 (6.36-6.50)
18MF (F)	5.31	0.50 (0-0.50)	4.22 (0.50-5.12)	0.19 (5.12-5.31)
18PA (F)	6.25	0.16 (0-0.16)	5.46 (0.16-6.02)	0.23 (6.02-6.25)
18PM (F)	8.19 (including a short video)	0.52 (0-0.52)	7.07 (0.52-7.59)	0.20 (7.59-8.19)
18TB (F)	7.20 (including props and incidental music)	0.45 (0-0.45)	4.19 (0.45-5.04)	2.16 (5.04-7.20)
<b>Total</b>	<b>207.41 minutes</b>	<b>30.43 minutes recorded</b>	<b>155.55 minutes recorded</b>	<b>21.03 minutes recorded</b>

Table 1. Length of the presentations

We may notice that the overall length of the presentation varies, despite the clear instructions requesting a minimum duration of 8-10 minutes. It was quite hard for students to meet those time requirements, and in many cases they spoke too fast. Presentations in general fell short of the minimum time demanded: a total of 207.41 minutes was recorded, with an average time of 7.24 minutes per presentation. In fact, only eight subjects stuck to the established length. Additionally, some students introduced brief excerpts of video recordings to offer a more attractive image of the hotel, but their attempt resulted in reducing the time they spent on explaining the hotel features in their own words.

Considering delivery times, results show that the length of introductions equals 30.43 minutes, averaging 1.05 minutes per presentation, whereas the final remarks add up to 21.03 minutes, with an average of 45.1 seconds per talk. The main body of the presentation yields an average of 5.36 minutes (adding up to a total of 155.55 minutes). Thus, 14.79% of the total amount of time is devoted to introducing the session, 75.07% to establishing the main ideas and 10.14% to providing concluding remarks.

Use of modes in the students' presentations	Total usage among the 28 students analysed	Percentage of use
EA - Eye contact with the audience	28	100%
ES - Presenter looks at the screen(s)	8	28.57%
EN - Presenter looks at notes	1	3.57%
EU - Presenter looks up	14	50%
ED - Presenter looks down	3	10.71%
EA - Eye contact with one specific member of the audience	25	89.28%
HA - Head agreement (ducking)	23	82.15%
HD - Head disagreement	13	46.43%
HT - Head tilting	1	3.57%
HC - Hand on chin	0	0%
CF - Closed fists	4	14.28%
OH - Open hands	28	100%
PF - Pointing finger	18	64.28%
EF - Enumerating fingers	5	17.86%
SP - Static position	3	10.71%
SW - Slow walker	16	57.14%
AA - active attitude	9	32.15%
QP - Quiet pace	11	39.29%
MP - Medium pace	14	50%
RP - Rapid pace	3	10.71%
SR - Steady rhythm	23	82.15%
MR+ - Modified rhythm, increasing the pace	4	14.28%
MR- - Modified rhythm, decreasing the pace	1	3.57%
US - Use of silence	2	7.14%
RC - Repeating concepts	8	28.57%
SC - Speeding up concepts	9	32.15%
HD - High-definition pictures on screen	28	100%
VE - Embedded video excerpts on screen	6	21.42%
GR - Use of graphs, charts and tables on screen	0	0%
LT - Use of long texts on screen	0	0%
ST - Use of short concepts and ideas on screen	28	100%

Table 2. Use of different modes in the presentations

Regarding eye contact, it can be confirmed that students are well aware of the need to get in touch with their audience, and the EA position is by far the most used. However, there are many instances in which eye contact turns into a problem for the presenters and they look at the screen (ES) probably too often. All the students look at the screen, at one time or another, to make sure that the visuals are implementing the communicative aim of the presentation. However, eight students do so clearly too often (more than ten

times throughout their presentations), and in three specific cases (17CD, 17JG and 18IA) this becomes extremely problematic, as they rarely maintain eye contact after the introductory section: instead, they look at the main screen or at the computer monitor (see Figure 1). While most people do it as a short, fast movement, quickly returning to the EA position, these three students tell their messages regardless of their audiences.



Figure 1. Example of ES position

As for the analysis of the use of written notes (EN position), there is just one student who takes a look at her notes during the performance, and she does it just once, trying to focus on some concepts she does not want to miss out (Figure 2). Rather more problematic is the EU position, with 14 students looking up, at least once during their presentations, in an attempt to remember a concept or word that does not come to their minds (Figure 3). It becomes a fairly natural movement that, if repeated too often, gives a negative image of forgetfulness that jeopardises the rhythm of the presentation, which is to be prevented. One student (18IA) did it 11 times during her presentation (lasting 5.21 minutes), offering an image of insecurity. Fortunately, the ED position, in which presenters look at the floor showing their difficulty to keep eye contact with the audience, was not detected in many of the instances. The ED position was used by three students only, and in all three cases they regained normality after a couple of seconds, looking up again to the audience.





Figure 2. Example of EN position



Figure 3. Example of EU position

On the whole, it was the use of the EF position, in which the speaker focuses on one member of the audience, that captured my attention more vividly. During their presentations, 25 students (89.28% of speakers), probably without noticing, focused on few concrete members of the audience, thus avoiding eye contact with the other attendants. In general they tended to gaze at classmates they felt close to, which they realised only when told by the teacher. This feature was also noticed in the analysis of the

physical position of presenters, who placed their bodies facing those classmates, seemingly out of a feeling of affection and friendship. In other cases, nonetheless, we may interpret this signal as nervousness and lack of communication abilities. In some instances, this “almost conversational” situation lasts for as long as 40 seconds.

Concerning gestures, I paid attention to head movements, by far the most frequently used, especially HA, a short movement moving the head up and down to show agreement. It is often seen in 23 of the presentations compiled (82.14% of samples). It implies positivity and presenters employ it to show conviction and strength. Nevertheless, HD (i.e. moving the head from left to right or vice versa) is also seen in 13 presentations (46.43%), generally when introducing negative facts or mishaps that customers would have had to face in the past and that the hotel would have had to solve for them as guests. As I did not analyse the discussion sessions after the presentations, I have found just one example of HT (student 17AB), though in this case it seems to be a meaningless movement, probably due to the pressure the presenter was feeling. I was not able to find the HC movement in the corpus, though it was quite frequent in the discussion sessions following the presentations.

Hands are also used to increase the communicative competence of presenters, emphasising the ideas introduced. Regarding the use of closed fists (CF) or open hands (OH), the second movement is clearly more abundant. Most subjects opted for an open position (just in front of the audience, arms separated from the body and open hands showing their palms) to start their presentations (Figure 4). Whereas CF can only be seen in four presentations (and just at very specific moments), OH is the rule and the majority of presenters use it to clarify ideas. We must bear in mind that, in this case, presenters use an open hand, as the other is holding the wireless presentation remote clicker. All the subjects analysed show that OH position during their presentations most of the time, and they move those hands up and down, especially when introducing emphasisers (such as ‘more’, ‘higher’ and the like). Additionally, it must be pointed out that the PF movement is also quite usual, since 18 students (64.28%) highlight ideas by means of this deictic resource (Figure 5). A final finding is that in five presentations (17.86%), the EF movement is resorted to in order to enumerate the ideas that will be introduced later on in the session (Figure 6).



Figure 4. Example of OH



Figure 5. Example of PF



Figure 6. Example of EF

Gestures are often accompanied by movement. Students do not often stay in the same position during the whole presentation but move physically closer to the audience. Only two students (17CD and 18IA) did stay in the same position (SP) during the whole presentation, and another one (17JJ) just moved once. Most presenters opted for moving while speaking, and most of them (16 cases, 57.14% of the corpus) are basically slow walkers (SW) who mind the audience, although they may focus on few people, as commented above. There is a clear prevalence (14 instances) of SWS (slow walker – side to side), in contrast to only two cases of SWF (slow walker – back and forth). Nine students can be described as having an active attitude (AA), moving more freely and getting very close to those attendants sitting in the front row. Their movements are quick and eye contact becomes a basic ingredient in their presentations. All nine cases show how the students move from one side of the classroom to the other (AAS), stopping when they want to reinforce an idea.

With regard to the way the product was orally presented, we can label most presentations as QP (11 cases) and MP (14 cases), as speakers opted for speaking slowly and clearly, stressing concepts throughout the talk, and avoiding any rush. There are just three examples where the students chose an RP approach, being students who also speak quite rapidly in their everyday. Results suggest that the speakers' personalities affect their performances (a timid student will often offer an SP presentation, whereas their most vivacious counterparts will probably perform RP talks).

Unfortunately, no speaker played with different rhythms in these presentations (23 cases of SR), and only five examples were found in which the presenters tried to modify the rhythm. In four instances, students altered the slow/medium rhythm of their presentations, increasing the speed to emphasise some specific concepts or ideas. Additionally, one RP presenter (18BE) also changed the rhythm of his presentation by slowing down the pace.

This same student tried to use silence (US) in order to play with his audience, an element also used by another presenter (18MS). These are the only two examples in which this resource can be easily perceived and is successfully used. Much more frequently-used resources are the repetition of ideas (RC, seen in eight samples) and the quick introduction of concepts without any background information about them (SC, 9 cases), although the reason for the omission is a mere attempt to save time and comply with the 8/10-minute time constraint of the activity.

As to the use of visuals, all subjects used Microsoft PowerPoint as visual support. There were no examples of GR or LT, as students know in advance that one of the greatest cognitive problems at presentations is information overload. Concepts are short and clear in all samples (ST) and are supported by a good number of high definition images (HD) (Figure 7). Thus, no major differences were observed in this respect.



Figure 7. Example of HD

One further finding related with the use of visuals is the inclusion of video excerpts. Not all computers support the same type of video software and problems may arise because of this. Six speakers decided to use videos and all of them encountered difficulties: quite a few seconds were lost (up to 30 in one of the performances).

Finally, one example of props use deserves some special attention: the appeal of the audience's sensory perceptions by student 18TB. She included incidental music accompanying the presentation (a resource also used by another speaker, 18LT) and sprayed the classroom with herbal freshener, replicating the scent of the hotel premises (Figure 8). Additionally, she brought some scraps of fabrics (silk, cotton and linen) and asked the audience to close their eyes and feel them (Figure 9). Such sensory resources seemed to work well to sustain interest and introduce novelty right at the presentation closure.



Figure 8. Example of use of sensory perceptions (scent).



Figure 9. Example of use of sensory perceptions (fabrics).

## 5. Discussion and pedagogical remarks

Presentations are made up of an ensemble of different modes, as the results compiled in this study evince. Any presenter should be familiarised with all the different modes, media and strategies that can help her/him to communicate efficiently, and this aspect is underlined in the training of master's degree students to present products or services to a specific audience. This study has focused on the use of gaze, gestures, movements, pace and visuals in a particular type of disciplinary presentation, and findings

have shown that students are well aware that communicating orally entails much more than just transmitting ideas or concepts aloud.

Results show the capital importance of two elements (gestures, and pace/rhythm) in oral communication. Other elements (i.e. gaze, visuals, and movements) have also proved to be relevant as content enhancers and deserve further study.

Students work hard to maintain eye contact with their audience, but they often gaze at concrete listeners, generally those they feel comfortable with, which weakens the communicative process because some members of the audience may feel ignored. This error calls for specific training, in order to be avoided, or at least, minimised. Likewise, the use of visuals impels presenters to check the images projected, thereby losing eye contact with the audience for too long, and thus weakening the communicative process: visual interaction with the audience is also diminished when concentrating either on the computer screen or on the wall screen at the back of the room.

Head gestures are used by most speakers to emphasise positive and negative aspects in their presentations. They tend to start their talks in an open position (open arms separated from the body, with open hands), though other positions can also be observed, mainly the use of fingers to point at the audience or at the screen, or even to count different aspects of the service endorsed. Performances reveal the need for explicit training of hand gestures as emphatic devices, as well as for warning against their overuse, which may jeopardise the intended communicative effect on the audience.

Presenters preferred movement over statism in their delivery styles, but they often invaded the audience's space when showing them a product. In this sense, too, there is a need for specific instruction, so that speakers can use proxemics and kinesic resources to their convenience and without harming communication.

Slow or medium pace was the generalised choice, and the speakers' personalities seemed to influence delivery styles. In these respects, other issues that should be dealt with in specific lecture training syllabi are the use of gestures and body movements to modify speech rhythm, and the use of silence and intonation.

Findings also evince that presentations without any visual support are very scarce. PowerPoint slideshows (or similar systems) were massively used by the students under study, who tended to write too much information on their

slides. Apart from visuals, the use of sensory elements (scents, music, props) may also help presenters appeal to the audience's emotions, although only a pair of students tried to do so.

Despite its contextual limitations, this study may inspire further research; for example, comparisons between student and professional presentations, discipline-bound presentation strategies, or ethnographic surveys that account for presenters' choice motivations on watching their recorded performances. Multimodality applied to business presentations can enhance the communicative competence of present and future professionals, and further efforts should be devoted to increasing their speaking skills through the interplay of different modes.

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