Pedagogical gains with word-for-word scripts in oral presentations

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For the last four years I have been the course co-ordinator for a PhD-course “Presenting research for different audiences,” in which the participants are examined through two oral presentations to different imaginary audiences, that of academic peers and that of interested laymen. To make the students aware of the importance of language choices in this context, I ask them to write word-for-word scripts for both presentations. At the beginning, the main reason was to help me to better understand the various research fields and topics chosen and to give me insight into both the process and the product before the examination. This teacher-centered pedagogical approach has, however, proved to be a learning situation conductive of language development in the PhD-students; through these word-for-word scripts, the rhetorical function of language is made prominent in an unexpected way.

My current research project “Narratives in research communication: the story as an academic argument” draws on the empirical material collected for four years in form of word-for-word scripts, both for the scientific and popular presentations for each student in the course. The aim of the project is to make visible and explore the narratives of scientific argument. I found that the student’s awareness of the different audiences is more prominent in their language choices if they are asked to compose word-for-word scripts than otherwise.

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