Revolutionising Poster Presentations through Digital Technology

Jaime SELWOOD
Institute for Foreign Language Research and Education
Hiroshima University

Over the years academic language conferences have offered would-be presenters an option of presentation formats. These usually take the guise of an oral presentation, a workshop, a symposium or a poster presentation. Each type of presentation is usually geared towards focusing on a particular element of research that is best showcased by one of the presentation formats. Oral presentations are often based on theoretical work, whilst symposiums highlight collaborative research and workshops focus on practical learning materials and tools. Poster presentations are often given more leeway by academic language conferences in relation to what research content is included by the presenter. This has both advantages and disadvantages, as it allows for wider topics of research to be presented, but at the same time usually results in poster presentations being of a lower status in comparison to other presentation mediums.

This paper will attempt to provide a counter to the notion that posters are inferior to other presentation formats at academic conferences. It will also provide guidance on how poster presentations can embrace modern mobile technology, so as to radically revolutionise how poster presentations are delivered.

BACKGROUND

Click on any academic conference website and there will usually be guidelines for prospective presenters as to what is required for a presentation at that conference. Oral presentation information is almost always primarily focused on time constraints – the overall time provided for a presentation and then perhaps a break-down of how presenters should use their allotted time. Those that overshoot the time allowed for the presentation are usually warned of cut short presentations and frustrated audience members. For poster presentations, time constraints are usually not a major factor; in fact there is usually little in the way of specific guidelines for poster presentations (Table 1). This suggests that poster presentations are valued less in comparison with oral presentations or symposiums. The guidelines in Table 1 come from three major academic conferences in regard to poster and oral presentations.

In the three examples given in Table 1, detailed information is provided for oral presentations, but information for poster presentations is light on detail. Why do conference organisers appear to neglect posters, or at best deem them to be inferior to oral presentations? In most cases, including the three cited below, a presenter must submit an abstract to a peer-evaluated process before being allowed to present at a conference and must usually also follow the same guidelines as those issued for oral presentations. Indeed, the common practice is for the presenter to complete an online submission process and merely select which type of presentation they wish to conduct.

TABLE 1. Guidelines for Presentations

Conference	Oral Presentation	Poster Presentation
CALICO 2020	These presentations are theory-driven and address quantitative/ qualitative studies of language technology, application of technology for classroom use, or any of a range of language technology uses/ applications for language acquisition. 30 minutes in length.	All presenters in a large room presenting while attendees may approach to discuss topics individually.
JALTCALL 2019	Include empirical studies, theoretical discussion, evaluative studies of courseware in use, discussion of policies or strategies at an institutional, assessment of the potential of technological advances in the delivery of language learning materials. Length: 25 minutes presentation + 5 minutes questions	For describing a work in progress, a theory in development, or a new process or idea.
EuroCALL 2018	30-minute presentations / 20 minutes presenting / 5 minutes for questions / 5 minutes for room changes. Three types of papers may be given: Research: papers focusing on a clearly specified research topic supported by a rationale, and a literature review. Research & Development: papers focusing on the development of pedagogies, programmes and technology-rich projects. Reflective Practice: practice-oriented papers dealing with the integration of technologies in different contexts and for different purposes.	Posters should be clear, easy to read and attractively laid out.

As can clearly be seen in Image 1 the presenter writes a proposed abstract and then selects which type of presentation they prefer. The abstract itself has a one-fits-all approach, yet a poster presentation is not the same as an oral presentation. The conference organisers clearly feel they are different as the guidelines in Table 1 indicate that a far more rigorous evaluation procedure is applied to oral presentations than to poster ones.

A further indicator that poster presentations are sometimes considered to be inferior is the common practice adopted by many academic conferences to offer abstracts rejected as oral presentations as poster

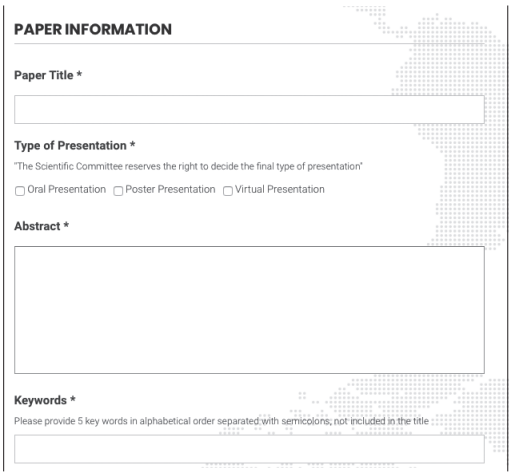

IMAGE 1. Example of an Online Submission Form

presentations (MacIntosh-Murray 2007). This seems problematic, unless a poster presentation is deemed to be of less value than an oral presentation. If the abstract submission guide, as shown in Image 1, is exactly the same for both oral presentations and poster presentations, why does a process exist to offer those deemed of insufficient value as an oral presentation a poster presentation slot? The reverse procedure is not common practice, i.e. a poster presentation submission being 'updated' to an oral presentation, which reinforces the inferiority of poster presentations.

Yet there is also a fundamental truth that cannot be shied away from – poster presentations have failed to keep up with advances in digital technology, specifically mobile technology. The format for a poster presentation has largely remained untouched in the last fifty years. Perhaps the two most significant developments have been firstly, the use of coloured printing and secondly, cloth as a printing material. Yet in comparison, oral presentations have replaced overhead projectors, laminated sheets and photocopied handouts with slide-shows, audio-visual elements, hyperlinks, and often with the option of downloading a PDF version of the presentation. The Digital Age has produced substantial changes in the way people access and process information, and whilst technology should never be implemented merely as a gimmick, poster presentations need to evolve if they are to persuade conference organisers that they are of equal worth as a presentation (Lyddon & Selwood, 2017). This paper will therefore offer a potential path in which poster presentations can utilise mobile digital technology so as to render them more effective, and hopefully improve their profile within academic conferences.

POSTER PRESENTATIONS

Poster presentations are a common sight around academic conferences; usually one room or area will be set aside, and numerous posters will be hung up for attendees to wander around and, if they so wish, to engage with presenters. These types of presentations offer a more personal and individualistic medium to divulge information in comparison with an oral presentation or a symposium. A good poster presentation will include interesting research displayed in a colourful and engaging manner. Indeed, poster presentations are not confined purely to academic conferences; they are also used both as a teaching and learning tool as well as an integral part of professional meetings.

The Weaknesses of Paper-only Poster Presentations

Poster presentations are a great format in which to impart information, particularly in a personal manner, often one-to-one. Yet there are three residual problems that have restricted poster presentations from evolving and crucially keeping in line with developments in technology, specifically mobile technology. Firstly, the format of the poster presentation remains largely the same as fifty years ago, secondly the poster presentation is often treated as if it is a second-class type of presentation and thirdly, it has failed to incorporate mobile technology as a necessary component.

The traditional format of a poster is still one that largely uses a paper, or in recent years perhaps a cloth, medium for printing and display. It is almost the third decade of the 21st Century, yet the vast majority of posters are static displays that offer little engagement with the audience. A further, often seen error, is for posters to have too much text, usually in small fonts devoid of much in the way of headlines, boxes, graphs, photographs and other visual aids. Furthermore, in *Ten Rules for a Good Poster Presentation* (Erren &

Bourne, 2007) Rule Number 7 is - "Layout and format are critical." At first, this seems like sage advice, yet the guide argues that blank spaces, arrows, numbering and slides help to guide the presenter. But this seems to be making a basic mistake that a poster presentation is similar to an oral presentation. In that medium a presenter controls what the audience sees and when. However, a poster is different, allowing the audience to approach information in the way they prefer. If this is not the case, how is the poster really that different from an oral presentation?

The second basic weakness that seems imbedded in modern academic poster presentations is that a rejected proposal for an oral presentation is often deemed acceptable for a poster presentation. Why are substandard abstracts offered posters as platitudes to those abstracts conference-organisers deem to have failed to make the required grade of an oral presentation, symposium or workshop? In reality posters form their own, separate genre of academic presentation and need to be both viewed and judged as such. To put it another way, the mode, medium and style of a presentation should be appropriate to the intended communicative purpose, it must be 'apt' to the situation (Kress, 2010). A separate rubric assessment process should be used by conference evaluators when judging poster presentation submissions. This is because there is in reality a level of 'guess work' in any evaluation of criteria that lies at the heart of assessing whether a poster presentation is of the required standard (Mohammed et al., 2018). Adjudicators can assess the academic quality of the presentation research, but they cannot forsee whether the design of the poster will be well thought out, appealing, and able to adequately explain the research to a required standard.

The final weakness is that poster presentations have failed to embrace modern technology and still remain largely rooted in a 20th Century mindset. Naturally, a poster needs to be designed towards appealing to the audience – an effective poster needs to be engaging, a visual communication tool that will draw an audience into a conversation or to assist in conveying the main points of the presentation easily to a number of people (Hess, Tosney & Liegel, 2009). Furthermore, it needs to include data such as graphs, charts, diagrams and photographs that provide just enough support to provide an audience with enough information to compute its context, analysis and findings. Some oral presentations include audio, video, weblinks and even real-time polling because they have kept pace with the advancement in technology. Yet, how many modern poster presentations provide the audience with such digital components, or the opportunity to explore some aspects of the data in the presentation in their own time. Many modern poster presentations contain a digital version of the poster, usually posted on a webpage, that allows the audience to access it later after the presentation slot has finished. Yet, almost always this is merely an online version of the printed poster that had been displayed during the conference.

Key Features of Poster Presentations

In an earlier section of this paper, the genre of a poster presentation was explored and the limitations that exist were highlighted. Yet there are also practical concerns that must be addressed when analysing the future development of poster presentations as a digital concept: Firstly, how the information is delivered on the poster; secondly, the nature of the intended interaction; and finally, the role of the audience.

Firstly, oral presentations, symposiums and even to some degree workshops, are characterised by being a medium where the presenter is actively in control of the sequence of information being delivered and the audience members, passive, can only influence the sequence during a question and answer slot at the end of

a presentation. This is a largely top-down communicative interaction, aside from a brief question and answer section. This is not a criticism of this approach; it is a useful presentation format in which to deliver information to a group of people (Bourne, 2007). Yet poster presentations are in fact the opposite of such presentations, they are not top-down, but bottom-up. Not one-to-many, but one-to-one. Not controlled by the presenter, but often initiated by the audience who approach the poster in their own time and of their own volition. Therefore, there is a visual selling point to a poster that is not a factor in an oral presentation. An audience member cannot see the slides of an oral presentation in advance and decide whether it is appealing. That is not the case with a poster presentation.

Secondly, important consideration must be given to the nature of the intended interaction between the poster presenter and the audience. In oral presentations, the flow of information is controlled by the presenters, who decide the order and indeed the importance given to each aspect of data. For example, they can focus on one slide longer than another, but this is somewhat reversed in a poster presentation as the information is displayed all at once. This can, on a well-designed poster, drastically reduce the part of the presenter in the presentation. It also can, crucially, turn a poster presentation into bottom-up rather than a top-down presentation. A well-designed poster should of course be logical and well organised; importantly, it should also encourage comments from the audience in any order and at whatever pace they wish to engage with the presentation.

Thirdly, poster presentations are almost always conducted in large rooms or designated areas at a conference venue, unlike an oral presentation given in a room, the audience are not constrained by time. In other words, they are not a 'captive' audience, but one able to stay at one presentation for as long, or even as briefly, as they wish. The transient nature of a poster presentation requires that the actual poster must be designed in such a way that it can elicit engagement.

So, how does a digital poster address the concerns listed above and evolve poster presentation sessions to fully engage with current digital mobile technologies?

E-Posters

Electronic or e-posters have been around since the turn of the 21st Century. Indeed, an early study into their effectiveness in comparison to traditional formats of poster presentations was carried out in 2001 (Powell-Tuck, Leach & MacCready, 2001), which found that they offered an enhanced experience for the audience. Yet, how electronic or digital these posters were is somewhat open to question. In the 2001 study, an electronic poster was merely a webpage where audience members sat at computer workstations and accessed it through a webpage. Indeed, the so called 'evolution of e-posters' into the second decade of the 21st Century does not seem to have progressed much beyond these early ones (D'Angelo, 2012). This remains the biggest hurdle to overcome before poster presentations are valued as an equal presentation genre with oral presentations or symposiums.

The major change in the development of electronic posters since the start of the 21st Century is the name, just as the term 'audioblog' was superseded by 'podcast', e-posters have become known as 'digital posters'. But aside from the name, what has actually changed? How is a digital poster now different from an e-poster? Technically, an e-poster was based on a simple production process using common presentation programme software such as PowerPoint or Keynote (Rushton, Malone & Middleton, 2015), where slides

were then printed onto paper and then displayed at an academic conference. In some cases, either prior to the presentation beginning or after it had ended, the poster might be uploaded to a central online gallery so as to be perused in more depth by those unable to attend the presentation. The previous explanation still largely holds true for digital posters; perhaps the only advancement has been developments in the mobile Internet that has allowed the audience to access the digital version of the poster on a mobile device at the same time as they view the printed poster. Yet, even this hardly constitutes the poster presentation being electronic or digital. It is similar to an online version of a newspaper; the information is the same as in the printed form. All that has changed is that the newspaper can be read online and through a smartphone, tablet or computer.

The positives that a poster presentation brings to an academic presentation is that the graphical design, physical appearance and ability for the audience to interact and talk with the presenter is a powerful medium in which to promote knowledge (Rowe, 2013). If a digital poster is truly to evolve from its embryonic e-poster format to a truly digital one, it needs to thoroughly engage the viewer by combining interactive aspects, the graphical appeal of a printed poster and the opportunities afforded by digital technology, particularly mobile technology. If a digital poster is going to evolve into something more, a genre that rises from its second-class status and becomes a truly separate and equal presentation medium, then it must radically move away from merely including technology to fully embracing it.

A 19-page guide published by Belfast Queens' University on how to produce an effective presentation poster advocates that an academic poster should be akin to a short story about a piece of academic work or research. Its content should highlight a few major points, with the structure of the poster resembling that of a report in that it should have a clear beginning, middle and end, and include a title, introduction, methods, results, discussion, conclusion and references (Diffin, 2017). Yet this guide, although consisting of some worthy advice, just reinforces the notion that poster presentations are re-packaged oral presentations and would be akin to an editor proposing that a short story author resubmit their contribution as a poem in order to take up less space in a literary magazine (Lyddon & Selwood, 2017).

For digital posters to become more effective they need to be identified as a separate presentation genre in their own right, embrace digital mobile technology, yet retain their communicative purpose of presenting research to the audience. So, how best can they achieve these goals?

DIGITAL POSTER PRESENTATIONS

To respond firstly to the question at the end of the previous section, the answer is not evolution but revolution. Poster presentations have fallen too far behind in their use of technology and have largely been allowed to accept their second-class status. To fully gain equality, they must leave behind much of their traditional format and fully utilise the mobile technology that is already in existence. There are three main areas which must be addressed: firstly, how the poster is initially created; secondly, an interactive element needs to be imbedded; and thirdly, the presentation display must significantly change focus.

Firstly, digital posters must shed the idea of being created for a paper or cloth medium. Most high-quality poster presentations will use some type of conventional electronic document such as a PDF which is then transferred onto paper or cloth. By creating the poster first as a webpage this would allow the poster to be accessed by the audience through a device, usually a mobile device, such as a smartphone or tablet, and instantaneously make the presentation more accessible. Once the poster presentation is on the mobile device

the audience can then access imbedded links contained within the webpage using an image tool such as ThingLink, LumaOne or iStaging. These links could include anything from linking text, audio, videos, charts, graphs and surveys either as a rollover or as fixed background. Significantly, by using image tool software, these links can be accessed without leaving the poster presentation webpage.

The advances in mobile digital technology are crucial to the future development of digital poster presentations. Yet, the idea of imbedding content into a form of electronic poster has been suggested before. Powell-Tuck, Leach & MacCready (2001) and Rowe & Ilic (2009) conducted research that incorporated interactive elements into a static poster presentation. However, both studies were limited by the technology of the time, as the digital materials included with those e-posters could only be accessed by a single-use laptop. The rapid expansion of the mobile Internet has revolutionised how digital data is accessed. As of September 2019, there is a global mobile Internet population of 4 billion users which accounts for 51.65% of the total worldwide online traffic (Clement, 2019). The huge numbers of smartphones and tablets available, especially at academic conferences, means that the issues that limited electronic posters of the 2000s are no longer relevant in the 2020s.

Secondly, all poster presentations should incorporate at least one Quick Response, or QR Code. There should be at least one QR code that allows the audience to scan it and then easily access the webpage where the digital poster is contained. A recent development in the last decade for poster presentations is to include a webpage address where a copy of the poster, usually a PDF, can be accessed online. This seems cumbersome in the 2020s; QR Codes are to be found on almost everything from street signs, public transport schedules, clothes and even alcoholic drinks. QR Codes are also increasingly becoming used in language learning across a wide range of online mobile tools (Liu, Tan, & Chu, 2010). A QR Code would also provide an opportunity for conference attendees to access the digital poster before the poster session begins, as the requirements at most academic conferences is to hang the posters on the morning that the poster session is scheduled. This would allow participants to decide which posters they wished to visit, what questions they would like to ask and what details they would want more information about. In essence it flips the poster presentation around.

If presenters wished, they could also include other QR Codes in their poster which would lead attendees to other imbedded content. Such content could include surveys or general comments that attendees could complete anonymously, which could provide vital feedback especially from those attendees who were unable to speak in person to the presenter. An additional option for presenters would be to allow, depending on which image tool software was used for the digital poster, to clone and modify the poster. This not only creates a more personal interaction for the attendee but also could provide further useful feedback.

Thirdly, until academic conferences provide large, touch screen devices that can be allotted to every poster presentation, the digital poster will still need a paper or cloth twin. In 2001 when e-posters were still in their infancy, the project undertaken at the BAPEN Congress (Powell-Tuck, Leach & MacCready, 2001) concluded that “e-posters should be used in tandem with traditional posters to improve the delivery of original communications.” Rushton, Malone and Middleton (2015) also found that digital posters have “a useful framework with which to engage”. Both these conclusions, separated by14 years, focus on a crucial aspect of the digital poster that should not be abandoned in the future, that being that there should still be a physical manifestation of the poster. There needs to be a printed form of the poster, but it should act like a trailer to a

movie – it should provide an overview of the information and act as an enticement for people to view the online poster. It should not be an exact replica of the online, digital, interactive poster. In other words, it needs to be a digital dizygotic twin rather than an identical twin. This is illustrated in Image 2 and Image 3:

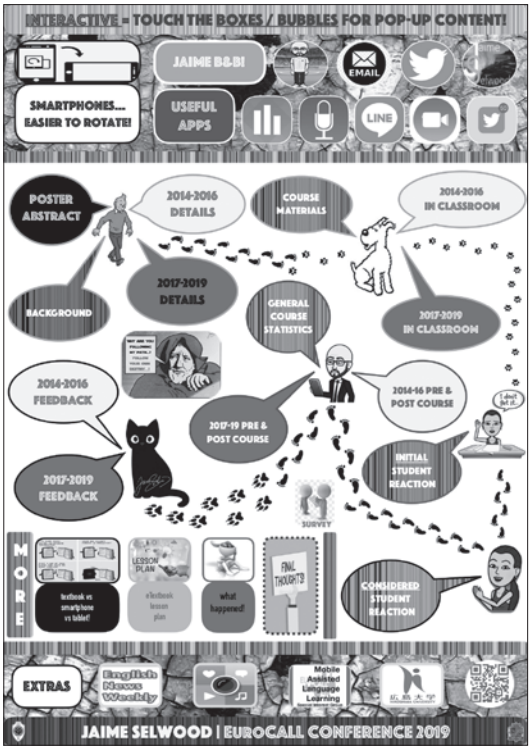

IMAGE 2. Conference Printed Poster **IMAGE 3. Online Digital Interactive Poster**

IMAGE 4. QR Code for Access to Online Poster

Image 2 is a copy of a printed poster the author created for the EuroCALL 2019 language-learning conference that was at held at the Catholic University of Louvain-la-Neuve in Belgium in August 2019. It was created using a conventional electronic document – a PDF – and then printed onto an A0 sized cloth that was displayed during the poster presentation session at the conference. Image 3, however, is the digital version of the poster; it is different from the printed version as it contains interactive elements that can be accessed via a mobile device such as a smartphone or tablet or even through a laptop or desktop computer. The poster on the left is designed merely as a teaser to the digital poster; it needs to contain enough relevant information to entice prospective attendees, and also contains a truncated version of the digital poster. Image 4 shows the QR code has also been provided, so any interested readers may access the digital version for

themselves. This illustrates another strength of using such technology as a digital poster – it can provide a lasting legacy that a traditional poster cannot. Paper posters are often left behind at conferences, usually to be thrown away. They are therefore easily forgotten no matter how interesting they are – a digital poster not only remains online, it can be altered, improved or even evolve.

CONCLUSION

The opportunities for digital posters with an interactive element to revolutionise academic conferences already exist and are not hard to create. Significantly, image software tools are available and not prohibitively expensive, especially for those with an academic email address, as reductions are usually offered for those in academia. Creating a digital poster is in reality not much different from putting together slides for an oral presentation or workshop. An online digital poster also creates a permanent footprint, but uniquely one that can also be changed – either slightly or radically depending on the desires of the presenter and the research displayed on the poster. The developments in mobile technology also afford vast opportunities through the ability to flip the presentation and allow the audience greater autonomy by using hand-held devices to delve deep with a poster presentation. It also allows for a personalisation of the presentation by the attendee in the way they can decide which information, and which order they wish to access – this is impossible through an oral presentation with its fixed presentation style.

Yet, issues still remain, none more so than the seemingly pervasive view that poster presentations are not equal to oral presentations, so that often academic conferences will offer a rejected oral presentation submitter a 'second crack of the presentation whip' by offering a poster presentation slot. Only by continuing to press the advantages and uniqueness of digital posters can parity with oral presentations be achieved.

Finally, to raise the professional profile of posters, digital posters cannot be mere replicas of the printed form. They must be designed in such a way, and through utilising the vast array of online materials such as video, audio, weblinks, charts and graphs, that reflects that advantages afforded by digital technology. A poster presentation will in most all likelihood need a physical format to attract casual audience members at a conference, but there also must be a separation between what is contained within the printed format and what can be accessed through the digital one.

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ABSTRACT

Revolutionsing Poster Presentations through Digital Technology

Jaime SELWOOD
Institute for Foreign Language Research and Education
Hiroshima University

Poster presentations are often relegated to a second-class status both as a presentation tool at academic conferences and as a learning device within a classroom. As the 21st Century enters its third decade and digital technological advances continue to enhance how the world interacts, it seems outdated that poster presentations are still largely confined to a static method of delivery, such as through a paper or cloth medium. To improve their profile at conferences, it is time poster presentations evolved from the constraints of their traditional material format and embraced mobile digital technology. This would allow poster presentations to fully enter the digital mobile age by utilising interactive technology that creates a more immersive presentation style. This paper will explain why the current paper or cloth-only poster delivery method has become outdated and no longer relevant for the modern digital world. Additionally, it will outline key considerations that should be included in any digital poster design to ensure effective presentation results that correspond effectively to the digital medium.

要　約

教室外でのデジタルテクノロジーを活用したポスター発表活動

ジェイミ・セルウッド
広島大学外国語教育研究センター

ポスターによるプレゼンテーションは，学術会議におけるプレゼンテーションのツールとしても，また教室での学習機器としても，格下の扱いを受ける場合が少なくない。21 世紀が第三の 10 年間を迎え，デジタル技術の発展が世界中のコミュニケーションを深化させ続けている今日，ポスターによるプレゼンテーションが，依然として紙や布という媒体を使い，おしなべて静的な表現手法に留まっているのは時代遅れのように見える。会議でのプロファイルを向上させるために，ポスターによるプレゼンテーションが，旧来の素材フォーマットによる制約から脱却し，モバイルのデジタル技術を駆使する時代が到来している。より聴衆を引きつけるプレゼンテーション・スタイルを作り出す，インタラクティブな技術を利用することで，ポスターによるプレゼンテーションはデジタルモバイルの時代に突入できることだろう。本論文では，紙または布のみを用いる現在のポスターの表現方法が，どうして時代遅れとなり，現代のデジタル世界とのつながりを失ってしまったかを明らかにする。また，プレゼンテーションの成果が，デジタル媒体に有効に対応し効果的なものとなるために，デジタルポスターのデザインに含むべき重要な検討事項を概説する。