Using video clips to teach interactive strategies

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This video project uses Near Peer Role Modeling (NPRMing) combined with video clips to model exemplary interactive strategies. With permission, authentic unscripted video clips are taken from student conversations. This paper explains and gives examples of how to use the clips in activities or as strategy reviews in Oral Communication classes. A brief explanation of the theory of language learning strategies, learning through interaction, and NPRMing is also outlined.

このビデオプロジェクトは、模範的な相互間ストラテジーを提示するために、ニアピアロールモデリング(Near Peer Role Modeling, NPRMing)とビデオクリップを用いている。それらのビデオクリップは学生の許可を得て、台本もなく発話されたままの学生の会話から、取り出されたものである。本稿は教室活動の中で取り出したビデオクリップをどのように用いるか、また、口頭表現クラスにおいてそれらのビデオクリップをストラテジー・リビューとしてどのように使用するかについて、説明をすると共に例を挙げるものである。加えて、言語学習ストラテジーの理論、インターアクションと学習の理論、そしてこのプロジェクトの背後にあるニアピアロールモデリング(NPRMing)の理論を手短に概観する。

ORAL COMMUNICATION courses in Japanese universities often include teaching interactive strategies to students. These strategies that are found in text books are often gambits or expressions that help students to negotiate or have better control of their conversations. They can be relatively basic, such as using follow-up questions, or require more advanced speaking skills, such as checking what your partner knows. Teaching these strategies can be problematic; the strategies are hard to introduce in a contextualized relevant manner, students do not grasp the importance, and there is a limited amount of time in a lesson to spend on these strategies. The video project introduced in this paper offers an effective technique for teachers to introduce, model, and have students practice interactive strategies. Authentic student conversations from class are filmed and edited for exemplary clips of conversation strategies. These clips are then used to model and teach other students. This paper explains the background and theory of using peers to model examples to other peers, the process of making the video, and some examples of exercises to teach strategies from the clips in the classroom.

Theory

Strategies

Interactive strategies are the gambits, phrases, and expressions used by learners during classroom guided conversations. The ability to be able to use these strategies can help support student conversations. In Swain's definition of communicative competence (Canale & Swain, 1980) she explains about the role and importance of this use of strategies. "Strategic competence is made up of verbal and non-verbal communication strategies that may be called into action to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to performance variables or to insufficient grammatical competence" (p.30).

Although the importance of strategies for learner acquisition is well documented, a clear categorization of these strategies is hard to find. According to the Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching & Applied Linguistics (2010), strategies are "procedures used in learning, thinking, etc. which serve as a way of reaching a goal" (p. 515). Similarly, in the business or sports world, a strategy is an action undertaken by people to improve their chances at success. Considering this broad definition, strategies instruction in language pedagogy may be general, such as an approach to teaching such as the Communicative Approach, or more specific, such as actions or techniques, for example, the phrases used to ask your partner how to spell something. Strategies, as previously defined by Longman, are defined as a conscious plan or action that the learner is *aware* they are doing in order to improve their ability. However, I would like to include the distinction that if the learner is able to internalize and use the strategy naturally without thinking about it, then it becomes a skill or competence.

Cohen (1996) attempted to classify and further define strategies with his *Hierarchy of Strategies*. Cohen divided strategies into two groups, *Second Language Learning* (SLL) and *Second Language Use Strategies* (SLUS). The distinction between the two

groups is that in SLL, learners are improving their knowledge *in* a target language and in SLUS, learners are *employing* the language that they have in their current interlanguage. An example of SLL is having students write down problematic verb conjugations in a notebook. The students could use their own specific strategies, such as making grouping verbs by specific actions or organizing them alphabetically. An example of a SLUS strategy is a retrieval strategy where students learn to recall a word or item from memory. Japanese language learners often employ retrieval strategies in order to remember the written stroke order of *Kanji*.

In this project, I have chosen the term *interactive strategies* because it combines the idea of having students improve their awareness and understanding of the language (SLL) and also has them use the language in authentic exchanges (SLU).

Learning through interaction

The second theoretical idea behind the video project is learning through interaction. A relevant factor in this project is the fact that most university students in Japan have studied English for academic purposes and test taking and not with a goal of improving their communicative ability. As a former high school teacher in Japan, I was witness to the endless hours students spent working through complex decontextualized sentences the teachers had adapted from textbooks. The grammar translation method and teacher-fronted classes often leave students afraid, unable, or even occasionally hungry for authentic interactions in English. Giving students the chance for output and the realization that they can improve in new areas by interacting with each other brings into focus the importance of learning through interaction.

Lightbown and Spada (2006) claim that, when students learn from interacting with each other, they are "are compelled to

'negotiate for meaning', that is, to express and clarify their intentions, thoughts, opinions, etc., in a way that permits them to arrive at mutual understanding" (p.150). They further explain that students learn words and grammatical structures by negotiating meaning.

Sato and Lyster (2007) compared learning opportunities that occur during learner-NS interactions and learner-learner interactions. Surprisingly, they found that "interactional moves hypothesized to facilitate L2 development" (p. 137) might be found more in learner-learner interaction.

Near-peer role modeling

The final part of the theory behind this project is near-peer role modeling. According to Murphey and Arao (2001), Near-Peer Role Models (NPRMs) are "peers who are close to one's social, professional, and/or age level, and whom one may respect and admire" (p. 2). Using these peers or role models to interact with relatively novice language learners can have a positive and motivating effect. Lantolf and Thorne (2006) looked at learners who interacted (in this case writing) with NPRMs and found that they provided more "proximal and obtainable proficiency goal(s)" (p. 256) than native speakers.

Also relevant to using peers to model language is Vygotsky's *zone of proximal development* (ZPD). Taken from Sociocultural Theory, a learner's ZPD is defined as "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86). In effect, by using clips of exemplary use of interactive strategies that were created by peers, such strategies are likely to be more easily understood and therefore effective because they are in the learners' ZPD.

Video Project

Procedure

The video project explained in this paper draws on the three ideas previously explained, using strategies, learning through interaction, and NPRMing. As coordinator of first year and second year Oral Communication courses in the School of Contemporary International Studies at the university where I teach, the curriculum instructs teachers to have students speak in guided conversations for 30 minutes or more per class. This emphasis on output is supported not only by a textbook which provides topics and vocabulary, but also by interactive strategies that help students to be able to negotiate and learn from each other. The video project has been an effective way to present and teach these strategies to students. Students in first year classes watch clips taken from their peers in second-year classes. The clips can be used to supplement interactive strategies being taught in the textbook or they can be used to review strategies in the middle or end of the semester. The collection and classification of clips is an ongoing process that also requires the permission of students.

The project began with making a comprehensive list of strategies arranged in order of difficulty. I determined the level of difficulty from the language in the strategies. Simple language used in strategies like follow-up questions came first; more difficult questions followed in order. Next, I started filming student conversations. Student conversations were filmed periodically as part of classroom discussion time of weekly topics or as assessments for review of previous topics. Students were randomly paired but with a different partner for each new recording. Topics were taken from the textbook but students were encouraged to ask for or give their opinions on the topic. In class, preparation for recordings included recursive pair work with multiple partners so that students had several chances to talk about their ideas and also get feedback from multiple partners.

The final part of the process required spending time looking through the videos for clips of students using strategies. I determined strategies to be exemplary if they were similar to the language I was looking for. Later, I used these clips to teach specific strategies or for review.

Examples of activities using video clips

Example 1: Using follow-up questions

Follow-up questions are simple to teach and easily adapted by students in to their conversations. They are usually already aware of what follow-up questions are but may not have a clear understanding of how to use them. The goal of having students use follow-up questions is to keep their conversations going by forcing them to listen to the answer of the partner and then formulate a question based on the answer.

The first step is to elicit the five W-and-one-H questions from the students. Next, I play the video clip for the students and have them try to notice the use of these question words. Note that I do not hand out their paper with the cloze exercise until they have watched and listened to the video one time. After handing out a cloze exercise that has the five W-and-one-H questions omitted from the conversation, I have them watch again and fill in the blanks on their paper. After the students check their answers or possibly watch the video a third time depending on the level of the class, they compare answers with a partner and then quickly review.

Finally, I finish the activity by having students use the language that they have just looked at. My instructions for this activity were to talk to a partner about their weekend using follow-up questions to make the conversation more interesting.

Video Clip 1: Using Follow-up Questions

Follow-up questions are important to make a conversation interesting and keep it going. The 5-W's-and-an-H question words are used:

_____   _____   _____

_____   _____   _____

Listen to the following conversation between two students. Fill in the blanks using the question words you hear.

Kaori: Hi

Rina: Hi.

Kaori: How's Golden Week?

Rina: My Golden Week is very interesting.

Kaori: Interesting? _____ did you go?

Rina: I went to Mie prefecture.

Kaori: _____ did you do?

Rina: I went to Ise Shrine and Okageyoko-cho

Kaori: _____ Okageyoko-cho?

Rina: Okageyoko-cho has many shops…

Kaori: Oh…food?

Rina: Food shops.

Kaoir: _____ did you eat?

Rina: I ate *Korokke* and *Akafuku*.

Kaori: Ah, it's very delicious!

Rina: Yes! It's famous.

Kaori: My favorite... my favorite food. _____ with?

Rina: I went there with my boyfriend.

Kaori: Boyfriend? _____ did you go… there?

Rina: We went by car.

Speaking Activity: Ask your partner about his or her weekend. Listen carefully to your partner's answers and ask follow-up questions to get more information.

Figure 1. Example worksheet 1

Example 2: Asking for meaning/Giving meaning and showing you understand

Video Clip 2 is an example of a combination of more than one strategy. It is also a good example of how related strategies occur in conversations. I chose this example as it is significantly more difficult than Video Clip 1 in order to represent both a simple and a difficult example.

To begin this activity, I first explain that when they don't understand what their partner is saying, it is important to ask the partner for clarification. It is also important for students to show their partner that they understand so they can continue on with the conversation. Next, before giving them the handout, I instruct them to watch the video and try to notice how the student on the right (boy) explains the word to the student on the left (girl). After playing it one time, I give them the handout and play the video again. The activity I used for this video was three comprehension questions in order to look at the language the students were using in the clip. The second question, "The

boy does two things to help explain what *signature* means. What does he do?" was a particularly good example of a student trying to give meaning. The girl doesn't recall the meaning of *signature* so the boy, instead of quickly resorting to L1, makes a gesture that appears to be a person using a *hanko* or name stamp. Finally he does say "sign" and the girl realizes he is talking about the word *signature*.
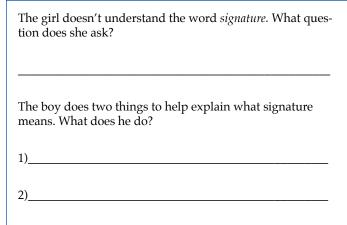

Figure 2. Scene of student B gesturing taken from video clip.

Video Clip 2: Asking for meaning/Giving meaning and showing you understand

Asking for or giving meaning is important so that you know what your partner is talking about. It is also important to show your partner that you understand.

Activity: Watch the video and answer the questions.

The girl doesn't understand the word *signature.* What question does she ask?

_____

The boy does two things to help explain what signature means. What does he do?

1)_____

2)_____

What does the girl say to show that she understands?

Speaking Activity: Look up three words you don't know in the dictionary. Partners take turns using new words in sentences and using new strategies to gain understanding.

Figure 3. Example worksheet 2

Discussion

After compiling video clips and creating activities for several classes over the past year, I have found the idea of showing exemplary interactive strategies to other students to be an effective way of teaching strategies for several reasons. Students are more likely to be able to understand the language in the clips because it is closer to their own ability. By using exemplary clips, the language is ideally still in most students' ZPD but pushing the boundaries. In other words, it is still understandable and provides comprehensible input which is a necessary component of

the development of a learner's interlanguage (Donato, 1994).

Another reason for the effectiveness is that the clips are unscripted and "in the moment." Students are given a realistic situation to observe *other students learning from each other.* It is hard to assess the impact of this but students are clearly engaged and interested in the videos.

Finally, it provides a visual alternative to listening to a CD from the textbook. Many universities in Japan have excellent facilities for using videos in the classroom and this idea provides a way to exploit a common challenge for teachers, "how can I best use this equipment in my classroom?"

Although I have not administered pre- or post-test research on this project, I think there is evidence that suggests it is effective. Students are more actively using conversation strategies after they have done this activity. This can be observed in class and on recordings taken after this project. In most classes, it seems as though the students have realized that interacting with these strategies can help their ability to communicate with each other.

Student comments also showed evidence of the effectiveness of this project. Typical student reactions included that they are interested by the videos and they want to be in the next set of videos. This shows that the cycle of NPRMing is working. Students are drawn into the videos by their peers, are exposed to real examples, and are motivated to improve and produce their own utterances.

Finally, there is evidence that can be seen on tape to prove the effectiveness. After having watched many hours of tape, I have noticed considerable evidence of students attempting to use new strategies. Furthermore, when their attempt is not accurate enough to convey meaning, there is often evidence of their partner using another strategy to assist or even scaffold. Instances of this were more common during the past year since using this video project.

Conclusion

Conversation strategies are a necessary component of oral communication courses in Japanese universities. A challenge for teachers is how to present them effectively without wasting valuable class time. This video project provides a way to introduce the strategies using authentic English that is understandable and interesting to students. Although the project requires an initial investment of time and effort to get started, including getting permission from students and possibly administration, the long-term benefits have proven that this project is worthwhile.

Future research on this project could be focused on proving evidence of students' improvement in using interactive strategies. This could be done by filming student conversations at the beginning of the semester. From these videos, researchers could check for students' use of target strategies. This data could be later compared with data taken from a similar post-test to check if students have improved their ability to use interactive strategies. In addition, these pre- and post-tests could be implemented into the project so that teachers could have a better idea of the level of their particular students. This approach would make the video project more effective.

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