

Strategic Interaction

THEME:	SOCIAL ACTIVITIES & CULTURAL PRACTICES			
LANGUAGE:	ANY			
STANDARD(S):	COMMUNICATION	CULTURES	COMPARISONS	
	1.1	2.1	4.1	4.2

Time Frame:

Depending upon the scenarios chosen, the number of groups, and the time frame of individual classrooms, strategic interaction may take one class session (if approximately 90 minutes long) or two 50-minute sessions, with rehearsal and performance lasting one session and debriefing another.

Materials Needed:

- Copies of separate cards describing Role A & B for various scenarios
- “Play” telephones (if available)
- An audio cassette recorder and blank tape or a video camera and blank video tape.

[Note: other props may be necessary depending upon the scenarios.]

Description of Task:

Strategic interaction (DiPietro, 1987) is an expanded version of a role-play involving cooperative learning techniques and conflict-based scenarios so as to generate more language from participants. It involves three basic phases (Rehearsal, Performance, Debriefing) that place learners into three distinct kinds of classroom activities (small group work, paired presentations in front of the class, and whole class discussion). Prior to the activity, the teacher should choose or develop several conflict-based scenarios having two roles (A & B) and develop a series of cards having a description (in English) of either Role A or B to be distributed to small groups. In a large class of 30 students, for example, there may be 3 separate scenarios, one for each of two small groups having 5 students each. Scenarios need to contain 4 essential elements: strategic interplay, roles, personal agendas, and shared context. One sample scenario follows:

Level:

Intermediate-Low (may vary depending upon scenario)

Purpose:

To practice interactional language (will vary depending upon the scenario)

Communicative Function(s):

(will vary depending upon the scenario)

Interpersonal: Inviting; accepting and declining invitations

Directive: Persuading

Language Structure(s):

(will vary depending on scenario) Question formation; present tense

Cultural Aspects:

(will vary depending on scenario) Persuasive language, polite decline of an invitation; intonation; discussion of common birthday celebrations or customs

Modalities:

Speaking
Listening

NOTES

- Role A: You are an exchange student in (X country where the target language is spoken) and have made a number of good friends there. You just learn that one of your friends (B) is having a birthday, and you decide at the last minute to introduce him/her to the U.S. practice of a “surprise” party. You have organized the party and have invited many of B’s friends. You know that B may be studying for exams since it is toward the end of the semester, but you must call B and arrange a way to get him or her to your place, where the party will be. Of course, you can’t reveal the real reason behind your invitation.
- Role B: It is close to the end of the semester and you are preparing for a final exam, which will be given tomorrow. It is early in the evening and your friend from the U.S. (A) calls you to invite you over to his/her place for a while. What will you do? You know that A loves to talk and may keep you there for hours, and you do not feel well-prepared for tomorrow’s exam. At the same time, you do not want to offend A, as s/he is very nice and you want to make sure s/he feels welcome in your country.

Rehearsal:

Divide the class into an equal number of small groups having 3-5 members each. Give half of the groups a description of Role A and the other half of Role B so that there are two groups for each scenario. [Note that it is also possible to have several pairs of groups work with the same scenario.] *No group is allowed to know the description of the role given to another group.* In their small groups, students are to elect someone to perform the role during the next phase. They are also to prepare for the role, jotting down phrases to be used to carry out their agenda. Students can use English, the target language (TL), or both, depending upon their level of proficiency, but the performance must occur in the TL. Students should consider all options as well as possible reactions to these options by the other role. During the rehearsal phase the teacher should observe the dynamics of the groups, suggest options to groups if necessary, be prepared to provide vocabulary and model phrases in the TL as needed, and give brief explanations as requested.

Performance:

The teacher should announce in the TL the “frame” or context of the performance without revealing too much detail about either role. For this sample scenario, the teacher may say “A, an exchange student in X country, calls B on the phone to invite him/her over for a visit. B is studying for an exam when the call occurs.” The performers of selected pairs of groups

then enact the role while the rest of the class acts as “onlookers.” The performers’ job is to carry out the role, not to entertain. If at all possible, the performance phase should be recorded (either on video or audio) to facilitate the debriefing. For this example, an audio recording is suggested since the interaction occurs over the phone. At any time during the performance, the performers may seek consultation from their small group members. For example, if a performer becomes “blocked” because s/he did not anticipate a reaction that came from the other group, s/he may seek help. Similarly, the group may request a “time-out” with the performer to advise him or her to respond in a particular way. Performances can either be limited to a time frame as imposed by the teacher, or can be allowed to continue as long as participants and onlookers remain interested. The performers should be instructed to come to some sort of solution to the conflict, however. During the performances, the teacher should take notes and keep track of issues that should be discussed during the debriefing phase.

Debriefing:

The debriefing phase should begin with attention to the content of the interactions. What was the outcome? Were participants’ agendas reached? Could there have been other resolutions? After the meaning of the interaction is discussed, attention can be drawn to the structural aspects of the interaction (grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, cultural conventions). For the example presented here, the discussion on grammatical issues should focus on accurate question formation and use of the present tense. Use of persuasive language and cultural appropriateness for accepting or declining invitations should also be emphasized, as these highlight the connection between culture and language. The priority should be to lead to the improvement of target language use within the context of live performances. Teachers can offer explanations, alternative vocabulary or grammatical forms, etc. It is very important to encourage students throughout the debriefing phase, so teachers must be careful not to single out a particular student who may have made the errors being discussed. Questions asked during the debriefing stage should be formulated in such a way so as to encourage students to take control of the discussion as much as possible. If students have difficulty recalling aspects of the interaction, the audio (or video) recording will be useful. If debriefing takes place on a different day from the performance phase, a recording of the performance will be especially important. During the debriefing stage, discussion of additional cultural issues may be appropriate depending upon the scenario. For example, the scenario presented here suggests a need for comparison of common birthday celebrations and/or customs in the U.S. and the target culture.

Assessment:

Throughout the three phases of the process, the teacher observes the students' interactions in an informal way. More formal assessment can be incorporated after students are familiar with the approach. For example, performers can be assessed using a rubric comprised of criteria for defining a quality performance (see rubric provided).

Extensions:

Suggestions for adapting the task for various levels:

For beginning levels: The class can be divided into groups that are assigned the same very basic scenario. The instructions, rehearsal, and debriefing stages can occur primarily in English.

For advanced levels: Increasingly more complex and sophisticated scenarios can be used. All phases of the process can occur in the target language. Scenarios can be expanded to include more than two roles (see samples provided).

Other extensions:

- Reading and writing can be incorporated more so by building these modalities into the scenarios or by developing extension activities based on the scenarios that involve reading and writing.
- Specific grammatical structures can be included in the role descriptions in order to place emphasis on practicing particular forms.

Cultural extensions

A great deal of cultural applications can be incorporated depending upon the content of the scenarios (see additional role descriptions provided).

References and Resources:

Cohen, A. D. (1994). *Assessing language ability in the classroom* (2nd. ed). Boston, MA: Heinle & Heinle.

DiPietro, R. J. (1987). *Strategic interaction: Learning languages through scenarios*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Shohamy, E. (1985). *A practical handbook in language testing for the second language teacher*. Raanana, Israel: Shoshana Goldberg.

For creating scenarios that deal with French cultural issues:

Carroll, R. (1990). *Cultural misunderstandings*. Trans. Carol Volk. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Platt, P. (1995). *French or foe? USA: Cultural Crossings*, Ltd.

Taylor, S. A. (1993). *Culture Shock! France*. Portland, OR: Graphic Arts Center Publishing Company.

Reflections:

Multitrait Rubric for Assessment of Strategic Interaction

This rubric can be used by the teacher (and, with guidance) by other students to assess the performance of students during the performance stage. Each performer is assigned a score (1, 2 or 3) for each of the three categories. The maximum score is 9.

	Communication	Language Control	Pronunciation
3	The speaker communicates the message clearly, using good persuasive language (Role A) or polite responses to the invitation (Role B). The speaker is able consistently to maintain and continue the flow of the conversation in an attempt to convince the other to accept the invitation (Role A) or to convince the other of his/her reluctance to accept the invitation (Role B).	Excellent control of language features; a wide range of well-chosen vocabulary and appropriate register; accuracy and variety of grammatical structures.	Some identifiable deviations in pronunciation, but with no consistent or gross mispronunciations. Intonation and juncture approximate those of native speakers. No mispronunciations interfere with understanding.
2	The speaker communicates the message relatively clearly, though with occasional miscommunications. Adequate persuasive language (Role A) or mostly polite responses to the invitation (Role B) are used. The speaker is not consistent in his/her ability to maintain and continue the flow of the conversation in an attempt to convince the other to accept the invitation (Role A) or to convince the other of his/her reluctance to accept the invitation (Role B).	Good language control; good range of relatively well-chosen vocabulary; appropriate register; some errors in grammatical structures possibly caused by attempt to include a variety, but none that obscure meaning.	Some pronunciation inaccuracies are consistent. "Foreign" accent and intonation require careful listening. Mispronunciations lead to occasional misunderstandings.
1	The speaker is not able to communicate the message clearly, and there are frequent miscommunications. There is almost no use of persuasive language (Role A); responses to the invitation (Role B) are sometimes polite, when understood. The speech is difficult to follow and is characterized by many pauses.	Adequate to poor language control; vocabulary range is lacking; register may/may not be consistently appropriate. Frequent grammatical errors that may obscure meaning at times; little variety in structures.	Frequent gross errors in pronunciation. A heavy "foreign" accent and intonation require careful listening but still may inhibit understanding. Difficult to understand without repetition.

Total Score (Role A): _____

Total Score (Role B): _____

* Rubric adapted from scales found in Cohen (1994) and Shohamy (1995).

Additional Role Descriptions

Social Faux Pas*

Role A: You are an exchange student in France and some good French friends of yours invite you to dinner at their house. Since you have recently arrived in the country, and this is your first formal French dinner party, you are unaware of cultural differences and proceed as if you were going to an American household for dinner. As such, you make at least five social errors during the course of the evening: you bring a bottle of wine, expecting it to be served with dinner; you have selected some beautiful flowers (white mums) to give to the hosts; you wear blue jeans and tennis shoes; once in the French home you open closed doors and enter private bedrooms in search of the bathroom and a place to leave your jacket; you follow the hostess into the kitchen to offer your help; and you leave your hands on your lap during the meal.

Role B: You are a French native who has been invited to dinner at a friend's house. An American exchange student is also one of the guests, and you decide to guide him/her through the evening by offering advice and correcting his/her mistakes. Use the conditional tense when explaining what the American should or shouldn't do.

Role C (2 people): You are a native French couple and have invited friends over for dinner. You have decided to include an American exchange student whom you've recently met and hope that such a social occasion will help him/her to feel welcome in France. You welcome the student into your home, explain the different dishes served, and attempt to ask the student questions about his/her country, family, and traditions. However, as the evening proceeds, you become aware that the American is very impolite and at times inappropriate! How do you react to his/her surprising social faux pas?

*Thanks to Catherine R. Moore and Deborah B. Beyer of Western Illinois University for this scenario!

An Auto Dilemma*

Role A: A German friend has lent you his/her car to take a trip to Munich. Unfortunately, you are not acquainted with German traffic laws and you prefer that your friend go along with you. How will you convince him/her to accompany you?

Role B: You have lent your car to an American friend who wants to go to Munich. But after having promised him/her the car, a rich uncle from Berlin calls you to say that he will buy you a new car if you take your parents to visit him—on the same day that you promised the car to your friend. What will you tell the friend?

*Adapted from scenario in DiPietro (1984).

At the Post Office*

Role A: You are an exchange student in Madrid. You are unfamiliar with the different ways to mail packages. You have a big package to mail back home that needs to arrive safely, but not necessarily in a hurry. You need to ask the postal clerk about all of the different options for mailing so that you can get a cheap price but be sure that the package will arrive intact.

Role B: You are a postal clerk in a busy Madrid post office that serves primarily the business community. You are trying to service a large crowd of people who are mailing important official documents toward the end of the day—it's almost closing time, and most of your co-workers have left for the day or are sorting mail. Here comes a customer from the U.S. with a big package to mail overseas, and you suspect that he/she will have many questions about postal rates. How will you accommodate the U.S. customer but be sure to have enough time to deal with the business customers who are impatient and whom you serve on a daily basis?

Role C: You are a business secretary and have been ordered by your boss to get to the post office before closing time to mail important documents express-delivery. You are waiting in line behind a customer who wants to mail a big package to the U.S., and the more questions he/she asks, the more impatient you become. You know the postal clerk and hope that he/she will hurry the customer from the U.S. along so that you can get your boss' important documents mailed in time for the last pick-up of the day.

*Adapted from scenario in DiPietro (1984).