Action Research Final Report 2019

Satsuki McNeill

1. Title: Developing students' communicative competence and motivation
    through the use of communication strategies in "Small Talk"

2. Teaching Context:

1) Level: Older adults (50~80 years old), low-level life-long learners

2) Class size: 11

3) Time : 75 mins 1/week

4) Textbook: NHK おとなの基礎英語　"100 のフレーズで話せる英会話"

　　　　　　　Basic English for adults "English conversation with 100 phrases"

5) Problems: Students in this class are always happy and they appeared to be enjoying
    studying English. However some students speak Japanese during Small Talk activity,
    although they are told not to use Japanese. Since the atmosphere of the class is nice, I
    hesitate to give them strict pressure since many of them are the Third-age Learners also
    voluntary students at a culture center, (they are not graded or evaluated.) Under these
    circumstances in characteristic of a culture center, I have been seeking the most
    appropriate approach to encourage students to improve their English and keep them
    feeling motivated and satisfied.

3. Goals:

    　　　　Students will speak English during the Small Talk activity without using
    Japanese.

    For that,

(1) Students will try the Timed Small Talk Activity for four minutes for which they
     prepare answers to three questions and follow-up questions related to traveling topic.
     Each pair of students presents within four minutes, without scripts in the last practice.

(2) Students will practice and prepare some of the conversation strategies (including
     rejoinders and follow-up questions) to adopt them in their small talk.

(3) Students will try three pair changes over two classes aiming to be able to talk
     communicatively without their script.

(4) Students will try not to speak Japanese during small talk.

4. Literature review

    ⑴ CLT

        Communicative Language teaching emphasizes the communication of meaning in interaction rather than the practice and manipulation of grammatical forms in isolation (Lightbown & Spada, 2013, p. 215). Furthermore, communication involves the expression, interpretation, and negotiation of meaning (Savignon, 1998 (in Lee & VanPatten, 2003, p. 51)). The purpose of CLT is developing learners' communicative competence through communication, therefore learners need to be exposed to plenty of opportunities to be able negotiate in their communication in a wide range of meaningful contexts for language development.

    ⑵ Communication Strategies (Conversation Strategies)

        Canale and Swain (1980) defined Communicative competence as having four components: ①grammatical competence ②sociolinguistic competence ③discourse competence, and ④ strategic competence. Each one should be addressed in language teaching classes. One significant part of Communicative competence; strategic competence, contains communication strategies which help learners' utterances to increase and also keep a conversation going spontaneously. Moreover, it is effective for learners to learn that by using frequent chunks and single words, they can help their interaction be more fluent and can also allow them to effectively negotiate in their communication (McCarthy, 2004). Sato (2005) summarized that "learners need continuous opportunities to actually use English and to evaluate their use of CSs. In particular, recycling the process seemed to be effective to improve not only their strategic competence but also their overall communicative competence." The use of Conversation Strategies also goes along with sociolinguistic competence, which includes grammar, vocabulary and usage (Kehe, 1994). As they say, mastering CSs helps learners improve other communicative competence, therefore integrating these strategies seem to be crucial to have success in communicative development.

    ⑶ Timed Conversation

        Pair practice is an important part of the Communicative Approach, and focusing on Conversation Strategies in short Dialogs can help students develop natural language. An important paper (Kenny,1990) introduced the use of Timed Conversation, and

described the method of using time limits to encourage students' use of the L2. Knowing that there is a time limit, students are motivated to use only L2 in their practices. "The greatest benefit of using timed practice is that it keeps learners speaking in an 'English only' environment. "

Naturally, if students have a limited time in which to perform a task, they tend to remain focused on it" (Kenny, 1996, p. 108). Other researchers (e.g. Parish, 2011) have described the positive results they achieved using this method. Also, Kenny and Woo's textbook, *Nice Talking With You* (2011), has Timed conversation as its core principle. With these ideas in mind, as part of my Action research I have implemented timed conversation into the pair practices.

⑷ Limitations

Much research focused on second language acquisition is done in college classrooms. Research on other age groups is not extensive. Senior learners, also called Third Age Learners, represent a group of learners that may have characteristics different from college learners. For example, some studies found that older learners have difficulties with memory problems, anxiety problems and hearing problems. Ramírez Gómez (2014) and Singleton (2018) suggested that senior learners are not good at remembering new words and vocabulary. Teachers need to carefully plan activities to address this situation. Regarding anxiety problems, Derenowski (2018) states that senior learners extremely tend to feel anxiety and fear of loss of face. In addition, Castañeda (2017) discussed that senior learners can have elevated pressure to acquire a second language at the same pace or rhythm as younger learners, and they often face on the negative outcome that they would not expect which causes stress and anxiety in class. Teachers need to take care to make the classroom a safe environment for these older learners. As to hearing problems, older learners lose their ability to imitate sound and their oral response is emphatically slower (Birdsong, 2006 (in Castañeda, 2017)). This is also related to fossilization, which is the permanent cessation of second language development, as the aging process may limit older learners' ability to pronounce the target language fluently (Scarcella & Oxford,1992 (in Shumin, 2002)). Teachers need to work carefully with such older learners to help them develop proper pronunciation of language items.

However, senior learners possess more experience, and such life experiences can make class more interesting and enriches the classes development of the lesson.

Thus, teachers always have to be aware of the characteristic of the Third Age Learners that can be different from young learners, and find a way to motivate their students through new sights and strategies when teaching a second language in class (Deawele & MacIntyre, 2014 (in Castaneda, 2017)).

5. What I did:

My goal focuses on developing students' communicative competence through Small Talk. In the first semester, we attempted Timed Small Talk from two minutes with one minute of follow-up questions, however, students easily got stuck what to say in English and tended to speak Japanese rather than English in their conversation. For this reason, I decided to introduce Conversation Strategies one by one from the beginning for students to be able to scaffold their interaction in timed conversation.

a) Timed conversation (Small Talk)

I distributed a preparation sheet to students in advance which included three questions to prepare what they would say in their small talk. The questions were made based on their travel experiences or their daily lives. Each pair of students had a three minute timed conversation, then 1 minute of peer editing. Then they tried three pair changes with the editing procedure over two classes, and in their third practice, they tried the timed activity without scripts. However, students soon struggled to finish their Small talk within three minutes since their pace of talking was slow even though they prepared the contents of conversation that they wanted to say. They also showed their dissatisfaction that they could not complete their small talk, and they insisted that they wanted to extended the time of Small talk. Therefore, I decided to have four minutes of conversation to be able to finish their small talk. Students finally seemed to be comfortable to have more time to talk at their pace.

b) Communication Strategies

Through the reflection from the past lessons of the timed Small Talk, as I mentioned above, I decided to introduce Conversation Strategies officially from

the beginning. I started with openers, clarification questions ("Pardon me?" "Excuse me?") and closers. Students enjoyed using the chunks every time when they found they could use them in the conversations. They soon got used to using the simple expressions by the second class, so I introduced some new CSs fillers such as "Hmm…Let me see/think" and "That's a difficult/good question", then some more new CSs rejoinders and follow-up questions every other week. However, some students started to show frustration to make follow-up questions, and also some could not use rejoinders instantly in their conversations. They claimed that it was more difficult than they thought to choose and respond with rejoinders and full-follow-up questions to what their partners said. Thus, I suggested to prepare their rejoinders and follow-up questions in advance by predicting what interlocutors might say in their dialogs. I included some spaces to prepare them on their scripts to make them prepare some follow up questions. On that account, I chose questions which were easy for students to predict interlocutors' utterances in their dialogs. Furthermore, I directed them to use "What …?" and "Where …?" questions first if they did not come up with anything, also, using only Wh-words is acceptable if it's understandable in the conversations compared to using full Wh- questions (which I suggested first). As the last CSs in this Semester, I introduced "Repetition" for their Small Talk Activity. Students had no difficulty to use this Strategy, they spontaneously repeated some phrases and words that their interlocutor said enjoyably in their Small Talk. As for noticing the use of the CSs, I made a conversation Strategies record sheet which doubles as their name stand. I distributed them in the beginning of the class to decide their seats, and students used them to record what CSs they used and how many times they used them in their dialogs every time after the Small Talk activity.

As a result, they seemed to be aware of the CSs which they were supposed to use in their Small Talk.

c) Peer-editing

I attempted 1 minute peer-editing after each Small Talk following Keiko Takahashi's DVD "Communicative writing". However, after consideration of the characteristics of senior students, and the goal of this class which was only speaking about travel and daily experiences, I decided to excluded the peer-

editing procedure. Instead, I decided to implement a Common Mistake Activity suggested by Prof. Sato.
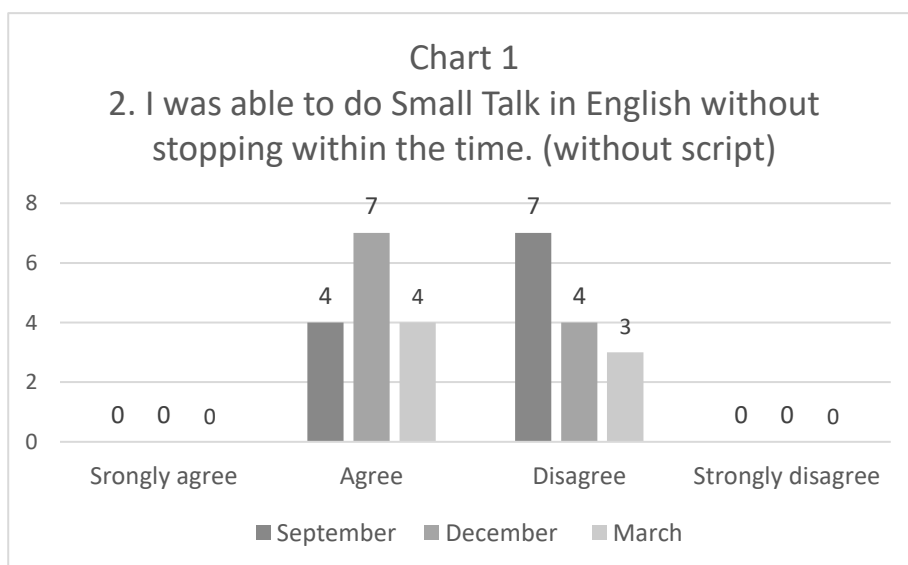
d) Common Mistake Activity

After students finished Day 2 of the Small Talk Activity, I collected their scripts to give feedback. After I returned their scripts, I showed students some common mistakes and made them think in pairs to find mistakes and what the correct answers should have been as a quick feedback activity, this was suggested by Prof. Sato. Students looked curious and serious about what their mistakes were, and they looked happy when they found the correct answers. I also gave a quick extended activity to review what they found in the Common Mistake Activity to make sure if they understood and could apply the rule in different situations, this was suggested by Prof. Heigham.

6. Results

a) Data from students' Self -evaluation

Although Self-evaluations were conducted every month after Day 2 Small Talk Activity on AR day, some students have been absent alternately and there were also some absent students this month. For that reason, the data might not be enough to analyze accurately the change of students' language development.

Chart 1
2. I was able to do Small Talk in English without stopping within the time. (without script)

Regarding the feedback from students on their self-evaluation, in Chart 1 - "I was able to do Small Talk in English without stopping within the time (without script)", three

students have decreased from Agree compared to December, meaning that perhaps students might be more aware of "without stopping" than before since I have mentioned trying "without stopping" in the past few weeks in their Timed Small Talk". On the other hand, it could be showing students' struggling with follow-up questions as mentioned above in section 5b, otherwise, possibly three students who were absent from this activity might have been led to this result.
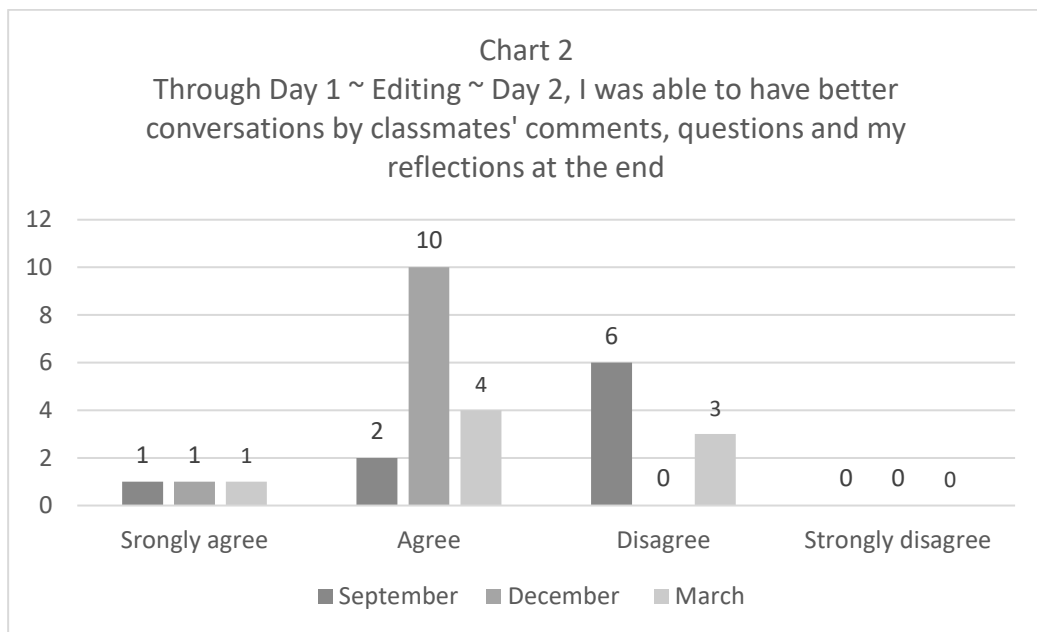
Chart 2
Through Day 1 ~ Editing ~ Day 2, I was able to have better conversations by classmates' comments, questions and my reflections at the end

	Srongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
September	1	2	6	0
December	1	10	0	0
March	1	4	3	0

■ September ■ December ■ March

Chart 2 - "Through the first day –editing-the second day, I was able to have better conversations at the end", also shows a negative result this month compared to December. In December, all students responded "Agree" plus one student was "Strongly agree" responses. This time, it decreased to six students responding "Agree" and one student was "Strongly agree", but three students moved from "Agree" to "disagree" out of eight students. This was probably considered the same reason as Chart 2 that students' struggling with follow-up questions mainly. As mentioned above, some students showed a difficulty to make follow-up questions towards interlocutor's utterances, they tended to pause frequently and this led to lost time in their Timed conversation. On the other hand, three students who were absent might have made a slightly a different result.

Chart 3
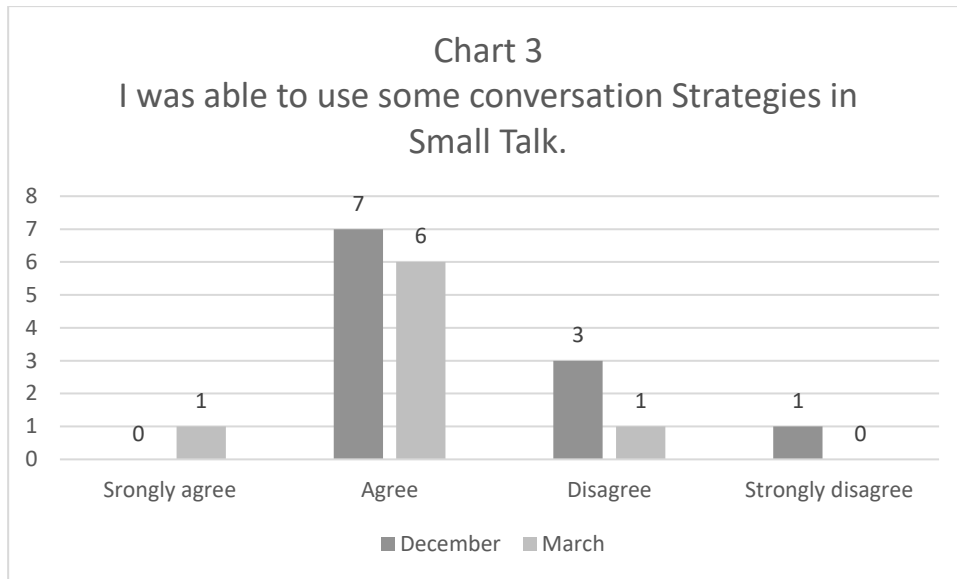I was able to use some conversation Strategies in Small Talk.

Chart 3 - "I was able to use some appropriate Conversation Strategies (excluding follow-up Questions) in Small Talk", shows the similar result to the one in December, six students reported "Agree" plus one student "Strongly agree" compared to seven students "Agree" in December. As for reporting "Disagree", the data shows that just one student reported "Disagree", while three students reported "Disagree" and one student "Strongly disagree in December. This change also again might have been affected by the three students who were absent from this activity.

Chart 4
I was able to ask some appropriate follow-up questions towards my partner's utterance in English
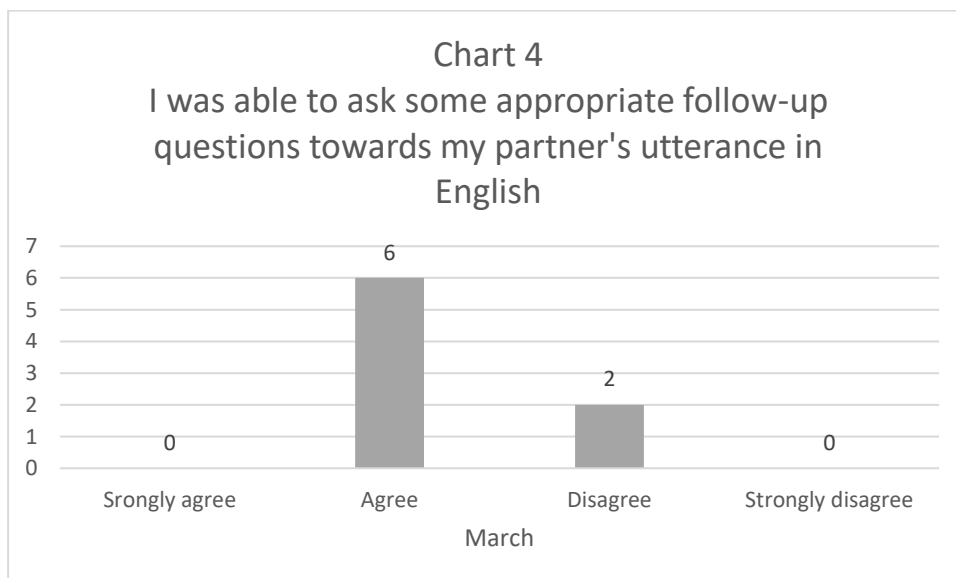
Regarding using follow-up questions in Chart 4 - "I was able to ask some appropriate follow-up questions towards my partner's utterance in English", it shows a positive result, six students out of eight reported "Agree" despite the fact that some students had a struggle with follow-up questions. This is probably the positive result of the preparation of follow-up questions and directing the use of "What…?" or "Where…?" first, with also the single use of Wh- words if needed.

b) Data from Survey through the half year

Although some students seemed to struggle with "rejoinders" and " follow-up questions", Item#1, Chart 5- "Conversation Strategies makes my conversation better" showed a positive result that all students responded "Agree". Furthermore, Item#2 "Conversation Strategies is useful" , five students reported " Strongly agree" plus four students reported "Agree". This proves that students have positive attitudes and motivation toward the use of CSs.

Regarding Timed Conversation Item#3 " Timed practice is a good way to practice conversation", six students reported "Agree" (four) or "Strongly agree" (two), and three students responded "disagree". Furthermore, Item#4- "I spoke "English only" during timed practice", indicates that four students out of nine responded "Agree", the other half of students reported "Disagree" including some with "Strongly disagree". The half of students who reported "Disagree" tend to have the same problem in their comment that four-minute Timed conversation is too short to finish their conversation. This is probably due to their utterances in Japanese causing the lost-time problem.

However, Item#5-"I have improved compared to before", shows a positive result, that is, six students responded "Agree" plus two students "Strongly Agree" whereas one student responded "Disagree", meaning almost all students are satisfied and have realized their improvement in their language development. Regarding the Common Mistake Activity, Item#6-"The Common mistake activity is useful", eight students reported "Agree" (five) or "Strongly agree"(three), and one student responded "disagree" though her comment was positive. Many of students gave their positive comments about this, and asked me to continue this activity.

Regarding use of CSs, Chart 6 – Use of CS shows that Rejoinders were the most commonly used CS, followed by Openers. This data is in agreement with

my observation that students found these easy to use with their partners. Fillers and Follow up questions were less commonly used, and this is in agreement with my observation that students tended to struggle with follow up questions. Overall, the reported counts of use of CS agrees with my observations in class.

Chart 5. Data from Survey through the half year

	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
1. Conversation Strategies makes my conversation better.		9		
2. Conversation Strategies is useful.	5	4		
3. Timed practice is a good way to practice conversation.	2	4	3	
4. I spoke "English only" during timed practice.		4	4	1
5. I have improved compared to before.	2	6	1	
6. The Common mistake activity is useful.	3	5	1	

Sample Students' Comments about Conversation Strategies

*They are very good. It has become easier for me to respond what partners say.   *I think they are useful in conversation.(by 2 students)   *They are very good to get used to real conversation also to have sense of it.   *I think they are very good.(by 2 students)   *I have been getting used to using them.   *I think they are very good, it might take a little time to get used to using them though.   *They are very good. Please continue this.   *I have come to be able to use CSs, however it is difficult finish the Small Talk within the time.

Sample Students' Comments about Common Mistake Activity

*It is very useful.(by 2 students) *I can review grammar rules. *It is very good to review some grammar rules.(by 2 students) *I have learned a lot. Please continue this. *It is good to know what we make mistakes about.

Sample Students' Comments about their achievement and reflection.

*My listening is still weak. It is difficult to catch what the partners and teacher talk about in their small talk. It is also difficult to make sentences in English. I tend to put words together instantly. *This lesson is very good. I have learned a lot. I have never taken this kind of class before even though I have taken many English classes before. *Although I can use eye contact naturally now, it takes time to say things in English and it leads to the lost time problem. *I think my listening skill has improved compared before. *It is difficult to finish the Small Talk within the time.(2 students)

Chart 6. Use of CSs (December – March)

Openers	
How is it going?/How are you doing? – Good/Great/OK/Not bad/	155
Clarifications with Question Words	
Pardon me? /Excuse me?	104
Fillers	
Let me see/think. / That's a good/difficult question.	69
Rejoinders	
Really?/ Oh yeah?/ Is that so? I see./ Uh huh. Wow.	180
Asking the same questions	
How about you?	65
Follow-up Questions (February ~ March)	
What~?(36)/Where~?(19)/Why~?(4)/When~?(3)/Which~?(2)/How~?/(2)Who~?(2)	68

7. What I learned

This has been a fruitful experience since I started this Action Research. In this class, I was introduced to Communicative approach, especially Conversation Strategies and Timed conversation. I learned about how to implement Timed conversation and Conversation Strategies to scaffold conversation in class. As reported the result from the students' self-evaluation sheets and surveys, students showed their positive attitude towards using Conversation Strategies, and many students reported that they are useful and good to improve their conversation. From their records of the use of CSs, as well as my observation, they seemed to get used to using rejoinders. However the use of follow-up questions seemed to be a bit challenging for them, especially until they prepared which Wh-question to use and focus on using only Wh-words.

Regarding Timed conversation, students seemed to try hard as reported, it appeared to be difficult to finish within the time due to them not being able to work quickly, which is the typical characteristic of senior learners. However, some students tended to utter Japanese when they tried to express things instantly in English. After I experienced this approach through this Action Research, especially with my senior students, I learned the particular characteristics of the Third Age Learners has its own features that I as a teacher have to be aware and careful of when I conduct the class for those who are different from young learners.

Throughout the year, my view of teaching has dramatically changed through this course. Reforming my teaching style from a traditional method such as Audio Lingual method to communicative language teaching was not easy, especially with the older learners who learned English in a traditional way. By reforming the whole idea and attitude of learners, including me, about language learning, students and I have just started to realize that this way is much better to improve our language learning.

8. Future Issues

In the future, I would like to reset the conversation time to 1 minute to encourage students' quick interaction, as well as to decrease students' use of Japanese. Also, I want to show them that they can complete their Small Talk within the assigned time. Furthermore, I'd like to implement a 'speaking contest' to objectively evaluate their conversations in addition to their self-evaluations, also to encourage students'

motivation. I hope that these new challenges will stimulate their motivation to improve their language competence as English learners.

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Lesson Plan   Name: Satsuki McNeill
Objective: Challenge timed Small Talk activity for 4 mins x 3 pair changes with CSs

Time	Interaction T-Ss, S-S, S	Activity & Procedure	Things to say
1	T-Ss	<u>Greeting</u>	How are you today? It's a ___day today, isn't it?
3	T-Ss	Small talk "Your shopping experience while traveling" (Day 2) Brief summary of the instruction + Q&A (In English or Japanese, depending on the situation.)	Have you edited your script?
16-18	S-S	Small Talk in Pairs, (Put Ss in Pairs, 4mins pair practice) x3	
3	Ss	Students write what CSs they use and how many times after each practice.	*Be aware if you are speaking only English.
3	T-Ss	Feedback (In English or Japanese, depending on the situation.)	*Do you have any questions or comments?
5	Ss	Students write self-evaluations.	
5	T-Ss	Activity Review of the key phrase " What do you think I should do?" Explain the activity Information exchange task	
35	S-S	Students work in pairs.	
2	T-Ss	Closing	

Total Time   73-75 mins
S-S: 51-53mins   Ss: 8mins   T-Ss: 14mins

15

Activity.1
What do you think I should do?

	Desire	Advice 1	Advice 2	Advice3
I -->my( )				
My ( ) -->me				
Free				

(Dialog 例)

A: I want <u>my husband</u> to <u>go jogging together</u>.

B: Oh yeah?

A: <u>But he</u> said "No". <u>He</u> wants <u>me</u> to <u>go to the gym</u>.

B: Is that right? What are you going to do?

A: I don't know. What do you think I should do?

B: Hmmm…let me see. I think you should _____.

   / _____, I can't tell you what to do.

   You should talk to _____.

Activity.2
What do you think …?

下のそれぞれのシチュエーション毎にミニ会話を作ってみよう。

　⑴（今日のランチで）何を食べたらいいと思う？（私は／私たちは）
　⑵（今日のランチで）何を飲んだらいいと思う？（私は／私たちは）
　⑶ あなたは今夜何を食べたいと思う？
　⑷ あなたは今夜何を飲みたいと思う？
　⑸ 私は今夜何を料理したらいいと思う？
　⑹ 私は（スーパーで）何を買っていけばいいと思う？

　（Dialog 例）
　A: What are you going to _____?
　B: I don't know. What do you think _____?
　A: I don't know, either. It's up to you.
　B: OK./ You are right.

Your shopping experience while traveling

Name (   )

Q1. What do you like to buy while traveling?
   Ex) I like to buy necklaces for myself.

Follow-up questions

Rejoinders

Q2. Do you buy duty-free items while traveling?
   Ex) Yes, I do.

Follow-up questions

Rejoinders

Q3. Free follow-up questions
   Ex) What's your favorite souvenir that you bought before?

・ New vocabulary
   Ex) souvenir, Duty-free items

・ Example of follow-up questions
   What did you buy? /Where did you buy it (them)? / How did you pay?
   Did you like it (them)? / Was it (Were they) expensive?
・ Example of Rejoinders
   Wow! /Uh-huh? /Oh yeah? /I see. /That's great!(nice!/cool!)/
   Oh, really! /Oh no! /That's too bad.

Students' Name stand & Conversation Strategies record sheet

	/	/	/	/	/	/
Openers						
How about you?						
Let me see/think.						
Rejoinders						
Closing						
Follow-up questions						

Appendix

評価シート Self-evaluation & Survey sheet　　　　　　　　　名前（　　　　　　　　）

（例 example）　4　　　　　　　　　　　3　　　　　　　　　　2

Strongly agree （とても思う）　　agree （思う）　　disagree（思わない）　　strongly disagree（全く思わない）

⑴ Small Talk を時間内で英語で止まることなく行うことができた。（原稿あり）

　I was able to do Small Talk in English without stopping within the time. (with your script)

　4　　　　　　　　　　3　　　　　　　　　　2　　　　　　　　　　1

⑵ Small Talk を時間内で英語で止まることなく行うことができた。（原稿なし）

　I was able to do Small Talk in English without stopping within the time.(without your script)

　4　　　　　　　　　　3　　　　　　　　　　2　　　　　　　　　　1

⑶ 1日目→編集→2日目の練習を経て最終的により良い会話を行うことができた。

　Through the first day – editing – the second day, I was able to have better conversations at the end.

　4　　　　　　　　　　3　　　　　　　　　　2　　　　　　　　　　1

⑷　❶ 会話の中で相手の発言に対して適切な Conversation Strategies を使うことができた。

　I was able to use some appropriate Conversation Strategies in Small talk.

　4　　　　　　　　　　3　　　　　　　　　　2　　　　　　　　　　1

----> Conversation Strategies を使えた場合 どの Conversation Strategies を使うことができましたか。また何回使いましたか。

　If so, which ones were you able to use? And how many times?

How's it going?(　) How are you doing?(　) Great.(　) Good.(　)OK.(　) Pretty good(　)Not bad.(　). Not good. (　) How about you? (　)

Pardon me?(　) Excuse me?(　) Let me see.(　) Let me think.(　) That's a difficult/good question.(　) Really?(　) Oh yeah?(　) Is that so?(　) I

see.(　) Uh huh(　)

　❷ 相手の応えに関連させ適切な Follow-up questions をすることができた。

　I was able to ask some appropriate follow-up questions towards my partner's utterance in English.

　4　　　　　　　　　　3　　　　　　　　　　2　　　　　　　　　　1

----> どの Follow up questions を使うことができましたか。また何回使いましたか。Which ones were you able to use? And how many times?

（　　　　　　　　）（ ）回（　　　　　　　　）（ ）回（　　　　　　　）（ ）回（　　　　　　　）（ ）回

⑸ この半年を通しても最も使用した Conversation Strategies (Follow up questions を含める)はどれですか。

　Which CSs have you used the most over the half year ?（　　　　　　　　　　　　　　　）

⑹ Conversation Strategies は自分の会話の上達に役立った。

　Conversation Strategies makes my conversation better.

　4　　　　　　　　　　3　　　　　　　　　　2　　　　　　　　　　1

⑺ Timed practice （時間制限のある練習)は会話を練習するのに良い方法だと思う。

　Timed practice is a good way to practice conversation.

　4　　　　　　　　　　3　　　　　　　　　　2　　　　　　　　　　1

⑻ Timed practice（時間制限のある練習)では英語のみで行った。

　I spoke "English only" during timed practice.

　4　　　　　　　　　　3　　　　　　　　　　2　　　　　　　　　　1

⑼ 以前に比べて英語が上達した。

　I have improved compared to before.

　4　　　　　　　　　　3　　　　　　　　　　2　　　　　　　　　　1

⑽ 達成できた点、難しかった点、反省点と次回に向けての改善点

　Things which you achieved, you found difficult, reflection and how you can improve next time.

＊他コメント、意見 Comments, opinions