

NUFS Workshop 2008

Newsletter No. 8

Workshop in October

<Part 1>

Date: October 11, 2008, 10:30-14:30

Venue: NSC College, Bld. IIS, Room 51

Instructor: Paul Crane (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

Title: "Conversation Strategies: Who, What, When, Why, and How"

The number of participants: 32

Abstract: If you haven't taught "conversation strategies" (CS) before, then this is a good opportunity to learn about them. CS are about how to start, continue, and maintain conversations, which is very important in communication. CS are useful to language learners of all levels but are especially useful for beginners because CS give them confidence to talk even when their vocabulary level is limited. In this workshop, you will have many opportunities to practice conversation strategies in fun, effective, and natural ways.



1. Interesting activities you might want to use in your class. Why?

- I'd like to use some contents of the booklet in 2008 Power Up Tutorial in my conversation class for warming up. It is very useful to let students some hints of asking something. Sometimes they need to be given ideas to keep conversation going. Also the contents of yellow sheets are available to 'adopt' my class.
- I'm interested in using 'Quick Look'. We have four English classes a week. Students have an English class with the ALT a week. In the class, he has the students review the basic CS and encourage them to use the CS in the class. So, I'd like to make a new card like 'Quick Look' adding the useful sentences to the basic CS our ALT made.
- Writing a conversation with a pair was fun and interesting. This activity enables learners to notice how and when to use conversation strategies. Learners do not have to respond quickly because it is a writing activity. Also, this makes learners aware of conversation strategies more.
- I like the "Who am I" introduction game/task. I would like to use it in class on the first day of next semester with my new students.
- Modifying skits is a very interesting activity. By adding some information, you can make boring conversation more vivid and authentic. I want to adapt this task and try it in my lessons.
- I enjoyed pair conversation using cards to find my partner. It gave us chance to meet new people I didn't know before. I enjoyed talking with them with the help of the conversation strategies and scaffolding you had included in your handouts.



- I would like to use “Dialog 4” activity in my class. Since I have a reading class, I’m going to pick up some of the new words students learned, and they can attempt to explain the meaning of the words in other words. I also liked the way how Paul introduced himself in the classroom. Introduction part tends to be boring. This will be a new way to start a new class.
- I’d like to use the web-camera to record students’ conversation. They may find it innovative and it’s very convenient for both teachers and students to have following activities such as transcribing and feedback.

2. What you learned from today’s workshop.

- There are many kinds of ways to teach students to make conversation longer and more interesting. Especially shadowing or showing interest are is easy even for beginners to use.
- The way of introducing topic, the skillful way to managing class, such as making jokes, facial expression or using colorful handouts.
- The more we use conversation strategies, the more chances we get to enjoy talking with foreigners. I realized that rich conversation strategies make out learning condition much better and deepen our relationship.
- I learned it’s really important to teach conversation strategies, because they don’t know how to maintain conversation. If the conversation that students have got to be awkward, they don’t want to talk anymore. I think conversation strategies are like a lamp or a torch which help you when you explore a dark long cave. I’d like to use it when I have English classes next year.
- Using color paper is very efficient for the classroom management because students can easily find a certain handout or worksheet. And we enjoyed lots of joking in today’s lesson. I hope I can create some interesting stories which attract students’ interest.
- I realized that CS is vital to maintain conversation. I would like to teach my students the basic pattern: greeting, talking about weather, compliment, using ‘so~’ and closing. This pattern is very useful to keep talking with no silence so that the students could feel easier to participate in communicative activities.
- It’s a good idea to connect the first activity with the last activity.
- Various kinds of conversation strategies. When we give sample conversation on the textbook in oral communication class, it tends to be too plain. With conversation strategies, the dialogue itself can be more fun. And students can create more natural daily conversation.



3. Questions and Answers

Q (1): My students have time for interviewing some classmates in English at the end of every lesson. I don’t know how many students they should interview. Do you have any suggestions?

(A): I would say it depends on how much time you have. If you have 15 minutes, for example, feasibly you could have them change partners 3 times with 3-4 minute interviews or what I call “mini conversations”. If you want to help raise their awareness of conversation strategies and basic listening skills by having them reflect and writing down “notes” of their conversation, then you would need to include some time for that. You could have one-on-one interviews or you could have 2 people

interviewing 1 student, etc. It all depends. Think also about your **objectives** for the activity: Are you working on specific conversation strategies? Are you working on fluency and automaticity? Are you working on developing their basic repertoire of questions? Experiment with different patterns and find one that is suitable for your situation.

Q (2): For the first year students in junior high school, what is the first conversation strategy? Please tell me where to start teaching; from rejoinder or starting conversation...

(A): Well, I would say opening and closing conversation strategies would be where I would start as they are probably the easiest and most enjoyable! I would also include teaching the rejoinder “How about you?” to get them used to the idea that a conversation should have some balance of speaking, if possible, by allowing both conversation partners chances to talk.

Q (3): Is it bad when students ‘talk around’ too many vocabulary words? Should they be encouraged to study vocabulary more in order to avoid the necessity of using other words to describe things?

(A): Certainly studying vocabulary is important and necessary for communication but remember that one of the purposes for teaching conversation strategies is to show students with even a limited vocabulary that they can have fun and interesting conversations if they try. That means no silence and not giving up just because one doesn’t know a word. I think the word to describe this is “circumlocution” and it does help students to remain in the conversation without stopping to look in their dictionaries all the time, which can be even more frustrating.



Q (4): ‘Quick Look’ seems very useful. I want to adapt it and make my own version for SHS use. What is the point you have to have in mind?

(A): Unfortunately I did not have much time to talk about this useful classroom management tool during the workshop and I apologize. I think the main point of the Quick Look, originally developed by my colleagues Sarah Haas and Hiroki Uchida, is to increase the amount of English in the classroom by encouraging students to use English for the common repetitive language that students often use to manage their interactions. For example, “Could you repeat that please?” or “I’m sorry, I didn’t catch what you said...” are interactive sentence patterns that also work as conversation strategies! You could have the students help you make your own original Quick Look by noting what they say to each other in Japanese during off-task activities. As a class, you could then write those sentences on the board with the equivalent English expressions. Over a period of a few classes, you would have enough classroom English to create your own version of the Quick Look!

Q (5): How should we start and take steps toward adapting conversation strategies newly in class?

(A): Well, first of all read my answer for question number 2 above. In addition to that, I suggest using what I call “mini-conversations” based on topics of interest to the students. By creating a bank of readily-usable questions and answers organized by topic, we can give our students at least some

language to use to begin conversations. From that point, introducing a couple of conversation strategies to help them manage their conversations would be the next step. One aspect of language development is repeated exposure to language as well as the actual use and manipulation of language. Conversation strategies can be a valuable part of that.

Q (6): In the case of a 50-minute English class held twice a week, is it necessary to give explicit teaching of CS every time?

(A): I would say that it is not necessary **every** time but at least remind the students to use CS. To focus the students without too much explicit teaching, I sometimes write a few CS on the blackboard like this: HIG, NDIT, HAY, P?, etc. (Key: HIG = How's it going?, NDIT = Nice day, isn't it?, HAY = How about you?, P? = Pardon?) Time is limited and you want the students to be talking as much as possible!

Q (7): In which class do you think teaching CS is effective; reading, writing or oral communication?

(A): Why not use CS in all classes? In any class where the students have opportunities to talk to each other during tasks and activities, CS could and should be used. Even if you do not have time to “explicitly” teach CS (see question number 6 above), a simple reminder to raise their awareness of CS might be enough. In a reading class, they might have a chance to shadow, which is part of CS. In a writing class, they might read each other's sentences or paragraphs during some task and ask “clarification” questions like “What does this mean?” which is a CS.

Q (8): Could you explain the difference between ‘Conversation Strategies’ and ‘Communication Strategies’ again?

(A): “Conversation strategies” are one part of larger set of “communication strategies”. In other words, “communication strategies” are the umbrella and “conversation strategies” are under the umbrella. Communication strategies are described as strategies that language learners (LL) use to overcome communication difficulties due to limited knowledge of the target language (TL) which in our case is English. For example, “code-switching” between languages. (My stomach is “itai”.) On the other hand, conversation strategies would be specific language patterns that are used to overcome such difficulties. Instead of code-switching, the LL could “circumlocute” (one CS) to describe “itai”. (My stomach is “bad”). Another general communication strategy is to give up when one doesn't know what to say. To compensate, a student could use a CS like “Just a minute” to get extra time to think of what they want to say instead of giving up. Simply, communication strategies are what LL **do** when they have communication difficulties, but CS are **tools** to help students to survive (or float instead of sinking, to use my life jacket metaphor) in such situations.



Q (9): I'm teaching third-year's reading and grammar class at high school. How can I teach and use CS in such classes?

(A): Since I believe that one goal of these workshops is to help make our language classrooms more “communicative”, you first need to include tasks and activities in your lessons that create

communicative situations whenever possible. For example, in a reading class, is there any chance for the students to interact with what they are reading? Can they paraphrase or summarize what they are reading? Both paraphrase and summarization are conversation strategies! In a grammar class, is there a chance for students to create their own original sentences or conversations based on a grammar point? In such a situation, CS could also be introduced or used! I think CS can be a part of any teaching and learning situation as long as there are chances for communication to take place.

<Part 2>

Date: October 11, 2008, 14:30-17:00

Venue: NSC College, Bld. IIS, Room 51

Advisors: Kazuyoshi Sato, Nancy Mutoh, Paul Crane (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

The number of participants: 28

Abstract: Group discussion



Workshop in November (Schedule)

Date: November 8, 2008, 10:30-14:30 (Part 1), 14:30-17:00 (Part 2)

Venue: Nagoya NSC College, Room 51

Instructor: Mathew White (Nagoya University of Foreign Studies)

Title: "Exploring FUNdamentals in Teaching Topic Studies Courses"

Please email Chihaya <chiha143(atmark)nufs.ac.jp> if you can attend this workshop.