

Strategic Negotiation in Scenario Role Play

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Research to date on communicative tasks for second language learning has focused on certain task types: information-gap, jigsaw, discussion, and problem-solving. One factor in this has been the preference for certain tasks that are thought to promote negotiation of meaning and modified output, which are considered by many researchers to be critical for acquisition (*e.g.*, Long, 1980; Swain, 1985). In particular, a reliance on information-gap or jigsaw tasks involving visual input has resulted in a view of negotiation limited largely to negotiation for the purposes of information exchange. Modification of output within this interactive context is largely towards comprehensibility of physical description.

Scenario role playing, common in some second language classrooms, remains little-researched. This study presents findings from an analysis of ESL learner output in scenario and jigsaw tasks, in which participants were held constant between tasks. Output was assessed for frequency of negotiated interaction and modification of output. In addition, the study addresses qualitatively the nature of negotiation in role play interaction.

Negotiation and Tasks

Pica et al. (1993) presented a framework for evaluating the potential of communication tasks to promote negotiated interaction and modified output. According to this framework, negotiation is maximized when: all participants hold unique pieces of information; the entire information set is needed to complete the task; all participants act as requesters and givers of information; there is a single, acceptable outcome to the task; and all participants share a common goal.

Tasks for the Study

A jigsaw task designed to maximize opportunities for negotiated interaction according to the criteria of Pica et al. (1993) was devised for the present study. A series of eight pictures

depicting a sequence of events was jumbled and divided into two sets of four pictures each. Task participants were to cooperatively discover the story sequence by describing their pictures to each other while hiding them from view.

The scenario used for the study presents the following context for the interaction: A lent a car to B in the hopes that B would like the car enough to buy a car at the same dealership, which would result in a lucrative commission for A. The car in fact performed poorly and was subsequently damaged in a hit and run accident, which B must explain.

Setting, Participants, and Data Collection

The four learners whose oral performance provides the data for this study were high intermediate students at an intensive English language program operated by a large, public university in the San Diego area. All four participants were males in their early to mid-twenties; two were Korean and two were Japanese. For the tasks, two binational dyads were formed. Data were collected in a natural class setting.¹ The transcribed data sets from the two tasks were time-equalized for each dyad.

Results

Data were assessed for occurrence of negotiated interaction and modified output. Modified output (MO) is considered to occur when a potential trouble source (Schegloff, Jefferson, and Sacks, 1977) is subsequently modified by the original speaker towards comprehensibility or accuracy, as in the following examples.

(1) *Taka*: Actually, he he he don't ru- he m mm he's not running, he's just walking.

(2) *Chin*: Yeah, so, when I got, when I come, came back to your car, some strange guy is crashing your car, so.

¹ The program included classes in oral communication, grammar, and listening, as well as a multiple skills core class. This ELP uses a system of eleven proficiency levels, with 99 the lowest and 109 the highest. The study participants were enrolled in the level 106 core course at the time of the study. The data collection was carried out in this class. Names given in the study are pseudonymous.

MO was quantified by the number of such occurrences divided by total utterances.² Table 1 shows that both dyads modified their utterances more often in the role play task.

Table 1. Proportion of Utterances Containing Modified Output

	JIGSAW	ROLE PLAY
<i>Dyad 1</i>	.14	.17
<i>Dyad 2</i>	.9	.13

Table 2. Negotiation Sequences

	JIGSAW	ROLE PLAY
<i>Dyad 1</i>	13	4
<i>Dyad 2</i>	8	3

Initial analysis of the data focused on comprehension-oriented negotiation sequences (*e.g.*, Long, 1980; Pica, 1987). As shown in Table 2, there were fewer such sequences for both dyads in the role play interaction. All together, there were three times as many such sequences in the jigsaw task (21, as compared to 7 for role play). This result might be seen as reflective of the attributes of the task framework of Pica et al., (1993). This framework's emphasis on information exchange, single outcome, and goal convergence favors the jigsaw task over the role play for promotion of negotiated interaction.

Discussion and Analysis

On the surface, role play interaction might appear to lack sufficient negotiation sequences to be of value as a task context for second language acquisition. The higher frequency of modification of output found in the role play task in the current study, however, suggests otherwise. Indeed, close examination of the oral data reveals that role play task participants engage in negotiation towards message *acceptability* rather than simply comprehensibility. In the process, they modify their utterances lexically and syntactically, and expand upon, enhance, and exemplify what they have said before. What appears to push this is the need to achieve pragmatic

² *Utterance* in this study denotes an entire turn, including all subordinate and coordinate structures. They are defined by clear intonational boundaries, or by abandonment due to interruption.

ends, such as gaining acceptance or forgiveness, or to reach strategic goals determined by the role, *e.g.*, getting a commission or avoiding having to buy a lemon.

The following data excerpts and parallel commentary track the course of one participant's ("Taka") strategy and serve to illustrate how he maintains or shifts that strategy in response to his partner ("Chin"), amending and modifying his output to achieve maximum acceptability and illocutionary effect. (Key utterances by Taka are shown in *italics*.)

Taka attempts virtually from the outset to steer the conversation directly towards the achievement of his goal: the purchase of a car at his dealer by Chin. He opens the exchange by asking about the car and attempting to build a case for the utility of car ownership (Lines 4-6). Chin deflects this move by agreeing with Taka, giving Chin an opening to begin explaining the story of Taka's damaged vehicle (Line 9).

1. *Chin:* How was your trip?
2. *Taka:* Yeah, it was good
3. *Um:* yeah I was very excited *but* (0.5)
4. *Anyway um:* how about your (0.5) how about my car?
5. *Chin:* Uhh
6. *Taka:* *I think car is very helpful* (0.5) *car is very helpful in: San Diego*
7. *Chin:* Yeah^
8. *Taka:* *Yeah so: yeah I think so* (0.5) *you should buy a car*
9. *Chin:* I think so but let me tell you about something^

At this point, Chin begins his narrative about the stalled engine. Taka doesn't get a chance to press his case again until 51. His strategy has shifted here. He appears to make use of the events surrounding his car's demise to assert that Chin is rightfully in his debt. In lines 56-62, Taka explicitly lays out his intention to introduce his friend to the dealer (though without divulging the commission, it should be noted).

50. *Chin:* I'm sorry your ##.
51. *Taka:* *So, what do you* (1.0) *what can can you do* (0.5) *for me you know*
52. *Chin:* Yeah, so, when I got, when I come, came back to your car, some strange guy is crashing your car so

53. *Taka*: What?!
54. *Chin*: Please listen, listen.
55. Uh (1.0) please calm down and
56. *Taka*: *Yeah yeah yeah but, but you know, but I'm supposed to introduce my, so, I, yeah, I know, I knew (0.5) uh you were interesting in buying car*
57. *Chin*: Yeah.
58. *Taka*: *So (0.5) I'm supposed to uh (1.5) introduce my (0.5) dealer, and then you can buy a*
59. *Chin*: Thank you!
60. *Taka*: *You can buy a (1.0) cheaper than other place.*

In Lines 75 and 76, Taka returns to the tactic of deflecting responsibility for the situation onto Chin. This does little more than impel Chin to promise to pay for repairs. Not satisfied, Taka attempts to extract a bit more in the way of recompense by getting Chin to pay for a rental car.

74. *Chin*: I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm sorry about that.
75. *Taka*: *So so what sh- what can we do?*
76. *No no no what can you do (0.5) for me*
77. *Chin*: Uh (1.0) it is (0.5) I think this is serious problem between you and me so (0.5) I gonna repair the whole: thing: of your car^.
78. *Taka*: [Yeah, I think so.
79. *Taka*: Mmhm.
80. *Chin*: I can do that.
81. *Taka*: Mmhm. (1.0)
82. You can do that?
83. *Chin*: Yeah, I can do that.
84. *Taka*: *Right, but, how about, uh, until repair m- my car?*
85. *Chin*: Uh huh.
86. *Taka*: *Because I need a car to go to to go to job, you know, my job.*
87. *Chin*: [Right now?
88. *Chin*: I can rent it for you.
89. *Taka*: Really?
90. *Chin*: I can rent some: car for you,
91. *Taka*: Oh, right, right.
92. *Chin*: until (1.0) your car's ready.

What the above excerpts suggest is that negotiation can be motivated by interpersonal and strategic concerns, rather than simply by informational concerns.

Conclusion

The commonly-accepted SLA research framework for negotiated interaction is explicitly oriented towards the resolution of problems in comprehensibility of utterances, particularly of individual lexical items (*e.g.*, Pica, 1987; Pica *et al.*, 1989, 1993; Varonis and Gass, 1985). The transcribed oral data presented here indicates that this view of negotiation may be somewhat limited. Within scenario role play, there appears to be much negotiation that is focused on the resolution of conflicting interpersonal goals. The problematicity of scenario negotiation includes item-level comprehensibility issues, but goes beyond that to include problems in reaching strategic or pragmatic ends.

Most notably, the study participants engaged in more modification of output in a task—scenario role play—that is virtually devoid of the kinds of negotiated sequences that are thought to best promote modified output. Factors other than the need for comprehensibility of objects, locations, and events can, it appears, push task participants to modify their utterances. In the case of scenario role play tasks, the need for message clarity in the service of achieving pragmatic and strategic aims appeared to create a favorable context for modifications to occur.

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