



Interaction Strategies in English Film and Chinese College Students' Oral English Teaching

JIANG Yan^{[a],*}

^[a]School of Foreign Languages of China West Normal University, Nanchong, China.

*Corresponding author.

Received 25 September 2014; accepted 8 November 2014
Published online 26 December 2014

Abstract

In this study the author tries to assess the effects of interaction strategies in English film on the oral English proficiency of college students in China West Normal University. The study follows the quantitative and qualitative methods in light of questionnaire, videotape and multi-method study. The pretest showed that prior to strategy training, interaction patterns did not reflect students' oral English communication. The posttest reveals, however, that learning interaction strategies through English film can not only promote students' interactional competence, but also affect students' performance in the oral English test and trial teaching test.

Key words: Interaction strategies; English film; Oral English teaching

Jiang, Y. (2014). Interaction Strategies in English Film and Chinese College Students' Oral English Teaching. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 9(3), 156-160. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/6028> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/6028>

INTRODUCTION

In spite of the years of formal language instruction, Chinese university students' English proficiency particularly in speaking is far from satisfactory. In response to a call for reform in College English teaching, the Ministry of Education has promulgated a series of educational policies renewing the curricula, syllabuses and teaching methods throughout the country, in which

communicative competence is highlighted as a chief goal for English teaching and learning in China. In practice, however, it proved to be extremely challenging because English teachers have to cope with many difficulties, such as the lack of oral English environment, limited teaching resources, insufficient instructional time. And one inherent barrier appears to be the lack of oral English learning strategies, which indicate that language researchers should attach greater importance to oral English by means of strategic training in language teaching than before.

As an attempt to address the issue in question, this paper makes use of English films to teach interaction strategies in oral English instruction. It is hoped that findings from this study will provide insights to oral English teaching.

1. NAUGHTON'S INTERACTION STRATEGIES

Communicative competence is the chief target in oral English teaching. Canale claims that 4 types of communicative competence are needed to make smooth conversations: grammatical competence, social-linguistic competence, discourse competence and strategic competence. Although more and more empirical researches have shown that the relationship between oral interaction and acquisition of language is far more complex than what traditional theories have suggested, interaction is still believed to play an important role in language development.

In China students are good at learning grammar of English while know little about strategy application in oral English. Providing students, therefore, a direct strategy training should be appropriate teaching content. In view of Naughton, four strategies were introduced and analyzed for incorporation within the teaching procedures:

The use of follow-up questions, considered to be one important part of learners' repertoires, whose functions

include fostering continued interaction, pushing the output of the interlocutor, ensuring attentive listening and creating an appropriate social and affective framework for communication.

Requesting and giving clarification, that can facilitate the negotiation of meaning and can encourage learners to handle breakdowns in the communication.

Repair, in which learners try to revise their own or other's non-target-like errors in utterance, meaning, form and cooperative atmosphere. And the teaching of this strategy implies that such repairs are inoffensive and acceptable.

Requesting and giving help, referring to the assistance among learners or the social mediation in group interaction, with the pre-emptive focus on form and real emphasis on the promotion of the dialogue.

2. INTERACTION STRATEGIES IN ENGLISH FILMS

In oral English textbooks, many dialogues always exist an inclination of idealization in communication—neat language, successful cooperation, consistent goal. However, more and more researchers and teachers are concerned about the authenticity of oral English dialogues because the natural dialogues in daily life, which include back words, filling words, correction words, overlapping words, ellipsis, etc., seem to be more broken and disordered.

To make up this defect of oral English textbook, the introduction of English films into oral English teaching may be an attemptable method. Although some scholars think that there is still a gap between film narration and spontaneous conversation, McCarthy & Carter considers that dramatic corpus is typical examples to explore the universal rules of daily dialogues. For the purpose of exhibiting four interaction strategies in English film, a section of the script of *Notting Hill* is analyzed in details:

(Bernie and Anna attend a birthday party in a friend's house. When the host introduces Anna to Bernie, Bernie does not recognize who she is. Now they are left alone in the lobby.)

Bernie: So uh tell me um Anna. What do you do? (T1)

Anna: I'm an actress. (T2)

Bernie: Oh splendid. (T3)

Anna: What do you do? (T4)

Bernie: I'm actually in the stock-market myself so uh not really similar fields. [smiles] Though um um I have done the odd bit of amateur stuff um uh P.G. Wodehouse uh farce, all that, you know, [with acting voice] "Careful there, vicar!" [Both Bernie and Anna laugh] (T5)

Bernie: Always imagined it's a pretty tough job though, acting, I mean the wages are a scandal, aren't they? (T6)

Anna: They can be. (T7)

Bernie: I see friends from university, clever chaps.

Been in the business longer than you, they're scraping by on seven, eight thousand a year. [frowns] It's no life. [Anna looks down] (T8)

Bernie: What sort of acting do you do? (T9)

Anna: Films, mainly. (T10)

Bernie: Oh splendid. Oh well done. [Anna smiles, nodding] (T11)

Bernie: How's the pay in movies? I mean, last film you did, what did you get paid? (T12)

Anna: Fifteen million dollars. (T13)

Bernie: [surprised] Right. Right. So, that's ...mm fairly good. (T14)

At the beginning of the dialogue, Bernie uses two discourse markers: *so*, with the function to introduce a topic; and *uh*, as a filling word, to gain the time for himself to think. Then comes Bernie's first **follow-up question** (T1) and Anna's immediate answer (T2). Obviously, "career" is an appropriate topic to open a conversation. Soon Bernie and Anna find "acting" as their common topic to continue the dialogue. Here with the principle to **request and give clarification**, Bernie starts to talk about his similar experience (T5), and gives his personal point of view (T6). Now Bernie uses second **follow-up question**: actors' wage (T6-T8), to further narrow the psychological distance with Anna. In T6, when talking about wages, Bernie seems worried about his own judgment, so he says "*I mean*" to **repair** his intention, and "can" in Anna's response confirms his concern. Until T8 Anna keeps silence and looks down, Bernie realized there seems an embarrassment to continue the same question, so he shifts his topic to T9, which is another **follow-up question**. Because of this **repair**, their conversation goes on smoothly (T9-T11). At T12, Bernie wants to learn more about Annie, he employs the principle of **requesting and giving help** that ends the conversation in a rather funny way (T13-T14).

3. THE CURRENT STUDY

The data presented in this paper were generated by 54 sophomores from oral English public course in China West Normal University, who majored different subjects, including history (10), politics (5), laws (13), computer science (8), physics (4), mathematics (6) and Chinese literature (8). Among them, 14 students were male while 40 were female. Since having passed CET-4, which was an important reason for them to choose this course, all students gained extra time and enough energy to improve their oral English.

Before the study, there is an investigation carried out on the students' interaction strategy awareness by the way of questionnaire. The questionnaire used here was designed by the researcher with reference to O'Malley & Chamot's questionnaires. All of the questions were formulated in Chinese hoping that the participants can

have a better understanding of these questions. And Likert Scale was applied when designing the questionnaire, and a five-point scale from 1 = SD (strongly disagree), 2 = D (disagree), 3 = U (undecided), 4 = A (agree), to 5 = SA (strongly agree) made the data analysis more convenient. Among 54 participants, about 92.6% (50) students admit that they have not learnt any interaction strategy theories before; and there exists a 100% acceptance to strategy training because all students agree that strategy-learning should be a crucial factor for successful oral English learning.

The teaching procedure was 12 weeks from September 2012 to January 2013, each of which had 120-minute (3 lessons). And in order to teach Naughton's four interaction strategies, every 3 weeks was allocated to drill one strategy. At the beginning, 54 students were divided at random to form 9 groups of 6. In the first lesson, students group had free talks on one given topic and in the last 10 minutes their conversations were videotaped; in the second lesson, the teacher explained one interaction strategy in details and analyzed it through 3 or 4 English films' dialogues (like the conversation in Notting Hill), then students discussed its effectiveness and stated out their own opinions; in the third lesson, students group began new conversations on the former topic, with a clear awareness to apply this interaction strategy. Until the third lesson of third week,

after 3 weeks' practice of the same strategy, there were a new-topic exhibition of every students group that was recorded to compare their application of interaction strategy with their initial recording before strategy training.

This paper, employing open-ended questionnaire, videotape and a multi-method case study to elicit both qualitative and quantitative data, focuses on two questions:

With what frequency do students use the interactive strategy before and after strategic training through English films?

Is there any correlation between strategy training and the marks of the final oral English test and trail teaching test?

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

After the recording was transferred into data, all the data were put into the computer for statistical analysis, and the software utilized to process the data was SPSS10.0.

4.1 Four Interaction Strategies Frequency Before and After Strategy Training

In order to address research question 1, Table 1 is presented to show the actual numbers of observation falling in 4 strategic categories.

Table 1
Strategy Frequency Before and After Training

	Follow-up questions	Requesting and giving clarification	Repair	Requesting and giving help
Pre-training	3.2342	0.8323	0.1314	0.4743
Post-training	9.1231	5.3476	1.2321	2.3489

Table 1 shows that before strategic training, strategic participation is low, suggesting that in the absence of training students rarely engages in any types of strategic interaction. In contrast, there is an increase in four strategies, which confirm the effectiveness of training.

Through K-S test, "follow-up questions" and "requesting and giving clarification" are normal distribution, thus can be analyzed by t-test; while "repair" and "requesting and giving help" are non-normal distribution, thus by nonparametric test.

As shown in Table 1, "follow-up questions" is the most frequently used strategy by students and is also the most greatly-improved one. (*T*-test indicates that the mean difference before and after training is negative; the confidence interval at 95% does not contain zero; double tail significance level is .004<.05). The frequency of "requesting and giving clarification" is increased significantly (.05<.05). This result may be due to the fact that the act of using the follow-up questions and

requesting and giving clarification is not complex interactional moves, and students should not have much difficulty in employing these strategies. In addition, these types of interaction strategy frequently emerge in the native speakers' conversations in English films, and having exposed in these strategies may have greatly influenced students' acquisition, indicating the success of English films' input.

"Repair" is the minimal-used strategy, even though 3-week training, its application still ranks at the bottom. Through open-ended questionnaire survey, there are five reasons that may provide the answer (Table 2).

"Requesting and giving help" is slightly increased but does not arrive at the significant level ($p < .05$). 38 students (70.4%) admitted in the questionnaire that "It's the teachers who have the authority and competence to give the helps". 10 students (18.5%) mentioned that "In the dialogues of English films this strategy appears less than other 3 strategies", which calls on a more cautious choice of English films to meet students' strategic need.

Table 2
Why Do Students Not Like to Employ “Repair” Strategy?

		Number	Percentage
1.	The main task to communicate is to convey different ideas, no matter whether grammar or language form is right or not.	12	22.2%
2.	The partners do not pay attention to my utterance.	8	14.8%
3.	If there are pauses to correct my mistakes during the conversations, the dialogues will be broken into pieces.	9	16.7%
4.	If I can speak quickly enough, the partners may ignore my mistakes.	11	20.3%
5.	I am not sure about my own knowledge and competence, so I don't know how to do.	14	25.9%

4.2 The Correlation Between Strategy Training and the Marks of the Final Oral English Test and Trail Teaching Test

In order to address research question 2, it is necessary to get 54 students' final oral English test and trial teaching

test. Then, through Pearson correlation matrix analysis, the relative coefficient and significance probability between four strategies after training and two tests are shown in Table 3.

Table 3
The Correlation Between Four Strategies and Two Tests

	Follow-up questions	Requesting and giving clarification	Repair	Requesting and giving help
Final oral English test	0.187**	0.169*	0.043	-0.154*
Trail teaching Test	0.116**	0.121*	0.055	-0.147*
Sig(p)	0.008	0.016	0.548	0.029

Note. * $p < 0.05$, ** $p < 0.01$

Based on the data collected in Table 3, the conclusion should be made that 3 strategies, i.e. the use of follow-up questions, requesting and giving clarification and requesting and giving help, have a significant relation with final oral English test and trial teaching test. In fact, these first two strategies have a positive correlation with scores in two tests, which means that the more students employ these strategies, the better they perform in the tests, while the relation between the last strategy and two tests is negative, which means that the less students use it, the more scores they can obtain. There is no palpable relation between repair and two tests' score, because in two tests students prepare their performance beforehand and they obviously avoid using “repair” that they are less good at, which, conversely, reflects the outcome of the question 1.

In the following questionnaire, all students hold positive attitude to interaction strategy training. They remark that the training “helps us to comprehend the rules under conversations”, “makes our communication go on smoothly”. In addition, 45 students (83.3%) affirm English film's function in the training: “it unveils the true dialogues in foreign language”, “it gives us confidence to continue our conversation or give a speech when we face up to some barriers during speaking”, “it is so vivid and live that we picture it when we employ the strategies”. 4 students (7.4%) regard English film as an inappropriate way to teach strategies, because “its speed is too fast to follow” and “some topics in films seem far from our life”.

5 students (9.3%) have neutral attitude for English film in strategy training because “there is no comparison when we are learning interaction strategy between through English film and in other ways”.

CONCLUSION

Teachers in EFT countries such as China encounter many obstacles in their attempt to develop students' speaking competence. Apart from the external constraints from the contexts, the internal barrier appears to be the students themselves who are lack of effective interaction theory.

As Ciccone claimed that the main function of EFL classroom was to provide true language input; McKnight also pointed out that there was a need to use natural language material to cultivate students' pragmatic strategy. The present study revealed that English films in the oral English classroom can be effectively applied in teaching interaction strategies. This type of training can not only greatly increase the frequency of interaction strategies, but also improve students' oral English and trial teaching performance. Most students claimed that through English films they can learn visual examples of strategic performance that can not be learnt from textbooks or other materials. There is, however, still a bias or unreliable attitude among participants about English films. For this reason, teachers should select English films with caution and design its application with more consideration.

Moreover, only 54 students were participated in this paper, which therefore may undermine the representativeness of the sample and the generalizability of the findings. The results may have been influenced by the research procedures and instruments, such as the limited time of teaching, the chosen English films, the videotaping, etc.. What's more, the analysis took place immediately after every 3-week experimental intervention and its outcome may be not the same as that in a delayed test. All in all, teaching interaction strategy through English films is suggested to be applied in oral English teaching to promote students' spoken English.

REFERENCES

- Canale, M. (1983). From communicative competence to communicative language pedagogy. In J. C. Richards & R. Schmidt (Eds.), *Language and communication*. London: Longman Group limited.
- Ciccone, A. A. (1995). Teaching with authentic video. In F. R. Eckman, D. Highland, P. W. Lee, J. Mileham, & R. R. Weber (Eds.), *Second language acquisition theory and pedagogy*. Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.
- Hu, G. (2003). English language teaching in China: Regional differences and contributing factors. In *Journal of Multilingual & Multicultural Development*, (24), 290-318.
- Liu, J. (Eds.). (2007). Empowering non-native English-speaking teachers through collaboration with their native English-speaking colleagues in EFL settings. In *English language teaching in China: New approaches, perspectives and standards*. London and New York: Continuum.
- McCarthy, M., & Ronald, C. (2004). *Language as discourse perspectives for language teaching*. China: Peking University Press.
- McKnight, A. (1995). *Pragmatics and TESOL: Using authentic language data*. Paper presented at the Biennial Meeting of the MELTA International Conference on Innovations in Approaches to the Teaching and Learning of English. Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.
- Naughton, D. (2006). Cooperative strategy training and oral interaction: enhancing small group communication in the language classroom. *The Modern Language Journal*, (90), 169-184.
- O'Malley, J. M., & Chamot, A. U. (2001). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. Shanghai, China: Shanghai Foreign Language Education Press.
- Zheng, X., & Davison, C. (2008). *Changing pedagogy: Analyzing ELT teachers in China*. London, New York, NY: Continuum.
- Zhu, H. (2003). Globalization and new ELT challenges in China. *English Today*, (19), 36-41.