Strategic Interaction

Dr. Scott Stevens
Director, English Language Institute
Coordinator, MA TESL Program
University of Delaware
sstevens@udel.edu
Back to the Future in Language Teaching
The UD Link

- **Creator:** Dr. Robert Di Pietro, University of Delaware professor of linguistics and Foreign Languages
- **Piloted in the English Language Institute**
Beginnings of Strategic Interaction

Followed “designer methods” of late 70s
1. Suggestopedia
2. Total Physical Response
3. Silent Way
4. Rassias Method

Reaction against structural syllabus

Professor John Rassias
The theoretical basis of SI

- Built on Notional/Functional Syllabus
  1. Interaction vs. drill
  2. Acquisition vs. learning

John looked the number up.
John looked the chimney up.
Features of Notional/Functional Syllabus

- Means of organizing curriculum
- Notion:
  context for communicating
  For example, at party or funeral
- Function:
  speaking function within a specific context
  For example, expressing sympathy at a funeral
Di Pietro’s criticism of N/F Syllabus

The artificial nature of lists
The arbitrary sequencing of notions
The simplistic approach to discourse

“The value of L2 methodologies is judged by how well learners are able to extend them outside of the classroom.”
What DiPietro added to the Notional/Functional Syllabus

- Psychological and cultural complexity of discourse
When do I use the language of arguing?
What DiPietro added to the Notional/Functional Syllabus

- Psychological and cultural complexity of discourse
- Ambiguity and intent part of many interactions “It's interesting. . .”
- Complexity of roles involved in many interactions

“To speak is to be human. To learn how to speak a new language is to find new ways to express that humanity.”
Three Dimensions of Language

- Information Exchange: (grammatical, semantic focus)
- Transaction: (negotiation and intentions)
- Interaction (roles and speaker identities)

"In real life, there is often ambiguity, especially in the transaction and interaction dimensions." (DiPietro)
Analyzing Discourse

- Example: (At fitness center, individual at one station next to individual at another)
- A: Do you know what time the center closes tonight?
  B: I think--10:00 PM

- **Information**: structure/semantics
- **Transaction**: negotiation/intention
- **Interaction**: roles/identities
A: Do you know what time the center closes tonight?
B: I think--10:00 PM

**Information**: question, time language of introductions

**Transaction**: information seeking/giving striking up conversation, flirting...

**Interaction**: seeker, giver, competitor, flirt
Example 2: “It’s cold in here.”

- **Information**: structure/semantics
- **Transaction**: negotiation/intention
- **Interaction**: roles/identities

“A grammar of a language should be able to disambiguate sentences, i.e., give a structural explication of underlying meanings.” (DiPietro)
The Nature of Roles

Definition: a set of norms and expectations that are oppositional.

Types of roles
- Psychological (covert)
- Social (overt or covert)
  - A. Complementary (reciprocal)
  - B. Non-complementary (diverging)
Roles continued

A. Episodic (short term, unfamiliar)
B. Non-episodic (long term, familiar)

Impact: scripting, clarity, strategy

Ex: Woman asking friend, daughter, husband (non-episodic) vs. sales clerk (episodic) what they think of her dress.
Roles are not Static

- Competitor (____) who is long time friend (____) asking for advice about troubled son (____) vs. asking your plans for the upcoming federal grant proposal (____)
Roles are not Static

Competitor (non-complimentary/social) who is long time friend (non-episodic/psychological) asking for advice about troubled son (complimentary) vs. asking your plans for the upcoming federal grant proposal (non-complimentary)
The Nature of Roles influences Discourse

- Asking your son to clean his room. (psychological, non-episodic, non-complimentary)
- A police officer is about to give you a parking ticket when you discover that you both are fans of UD football (social, episodic, complimentary)
How to prepare language learners for the many roles and complex settings in which they will find themselves?

- Enter Strategic Interaction
Scenarios

- Real-life happenings that include the unexpected and require the use of language to resolve them.
Elements of a Successful Scenario

1. **Open Ended** (unscripted ending)
   - A: You are studying for a final exam and worried you don’t have enough time
   - B: You want to persuade (A) to come to your room, as you have a secret surprise party for his birthday

   vs.

   - A: You want a study break and want to get a pizza with your friend (B), whom you call
   - B: You’ve been dying to get a pizza with (A)
Elements of Scenario—cont’d

2. Involves strategic interplay of roles

3. Involves efforts to fulfill personal agendas

4. Involves interaction within a shared context

5. Should be relevant to students’ lives
Sample Scenario (1)

- **Journey to the Past**
  - **Role A:** You are traveling on a train on your way to a meeting. You are sitting next to a person who looks familiar. After a time you realize this person looks like the individual who sold you a television last year. It broke a month after the purchase. When you tried to return the TV, the salesperson no longer worked there, and you couldn’t get your money back. What will you say to the person now?

- **Role B:** You are a traveling salesperson, having sold many different products in your career. Currently you are selling clothing. You are riding on a train and sitting next to a well-dressed person. You decide to try to sell this person some of your merchandise. What will you say to this person?
Sample Scenario (2)

The Beauty and the Artist

Role A: You have won a beauty contest. The prize is that you will have your portrait painted by a famous artist. But you would really prefer to have some art lessons from this artist. What will you say to get the lessons?

Role B: You are a famous artist. You signed an agreement with an art gallery to paint a nude portrait. The painting must be finished soon, but you don’t have a model. Furthermore, you have to paint a portrait of a beauty contest winner, so you don’t have time to do the painting for the art gallery. You have decided to try to get the contest winner to allow you to paint a nude portrait of her/him and display the painting in the art gallery in town. Prepare yourself to talk to this beauty contest winner.
The Scenario Process

- Rehearsal
- Performance
- Debriefing
The Rehearsal

a. Class divided into groups, each group = one role.
b. Group only sees the description for its role.
c. Group members read the role, asking teacher for clarification as needed.
d. Group members generate ideas and select a representative to perform.
e. Script may be written or spoken.
f. Allow ten to twenty minutes.
The Performance

- a. Representative performers keep group members nearby to give assistance as needed.
- b. Performers can call time out during the performance to confer with group members.
- c. Teacher takes notes in preparation for debriefing.
- d. Non-performing group members can be given assignments.
- e. The teacher uses best judgment as to when to stop performances.
The Debriefing

- a. The teacher reviews the performance, addressing what was said and what could have been said.

- b. Debriefing can address strategic uses of the language, language and cultural appropriateness, etc.

  c. Teacher leads impromptu lessons related to what was performed.

  d. Teacher notes, student feedback sheets, etc. can be incorporated into the debriefing phase.
Choosing and Sequencing Scenarios

- A. Review the course textbook for the subject matter of each unit.
- B. Write scenarios that relate to the subject areas and notions/functions.
- C. Look for readings that touch on the scenario theme.
- D. Provide scenario-derived writing assignments.
- E. Have students keep grammar logs for keeping a record of what they have learned.
- F. Level the scenarios based on the amount of language one might perceive necessary for the scenario.
Rehearsal and Debriefing L2
Discourse Strategies

“Interaction is more of a manipulation than a cooperative act, but within rules.”

- A. Conversation Management
  1. Beginning/Closing
  2. Showing attentiveness/Turn Taking
- B. Disclaimers (give criticism: I hate to be the one to tell you. . .)
- C. Postscripts (special requests: Incidentally, by the way)
- D. Apologies (and saving face: Yes, I was responsible, but my brakes failed)
- E. Refusals (appropriate to status of speaker)
- F. Defensive Strategies (Do you mind if we talk about something else?)
- G. Nonverbals
Protocols

1. Daily Functions
   a. Welcome
   b. Glad you could come
   c. Must you go so soon?
   d. Please begin
   e. Cheers
   f. Help yourself

2. Rites of Passage
   a. Congratulations
   b. I’m sorry for your loss
   c. Happy Birthday, anniversary
   d. Best Wishes

3. Moving in “traffic”
   a. Is this seat taken?
   b. Excuse me, can I get by?
   c. Sorry (and its gradations based on incident)
      i. Oops!
      ii. Sorry!
      iii. I’m so sorry!
      iv. My God! Are you alright!
Scenario One: The Newlyweds

- Role A, husband: You have been married for nearly a year and live with your wife in a small apartment in New Jersey, USA. It’s been difficult because, even after three years, you are still in an entry level position at your company. You have been able to pay the bills and meet expenses for the apartment you and your wife share, but your dreams of buying a home together will have to be put off for some time at your current salary. However, just today, you got wonderful news: your boss has offered to you the position of branch manager—in Asia. It would require your leaving in six weeks and living there for two years. For the first six months, you will not be able to bring your wife with you. However, you will be able to fly home for three days every six weeks. The new job will mean a lot more money and a better position. You can’t wait to tell your wife the exciting news. Think of what you will say.
The Newlyweds

Role B, wife: You have been married for nearly a year and live with your husband in a small apartment in New Jersey, USA. The two of you do not have a lot of money, as your husband has only been with his company for three years. You would like to have a nice house someday, but for now, you are content with your life. Your family (mother, father, sisters, brothers) lives in Delaware, only an hour away by car, and you are emotionally very close to them. Today you just got some exciting news: you are pregnant! You will have a baby in nine months. You can’t wait to tell your husband and your family. How surprised they will be. Plan the discussion you are about to have with your husband when he returns from work.
Scenario: Lineman for the County
Role A: Lineman

You work for the telephone company. Your position is “lineman.” Your job is to climb telephone polls twenty feet above the street to make repairs when a telephone wire is damaged. The telephone company has a rule that all linemen must wear hard hats when they are working on telephone polls. You understand this rule, but today is very hot and humid. You are very uncomfortable wearing the heavy hard hat in the heat. You take the hat off for just a minute to wipe away the sweat from your eyes. While your hat is still off, you see a car in the distance. It is your boss. You don’t want to get in trouble for not wearing your hard hat, so you quickly put the hat back on your head. The car is some distance from you, so it is possible your boss did not see you with the hat off. But you cannot be sure. This job is important for you. What will you say if he/she asks about your hard hat?
Role B: Supervisor

- You are an employee for the telephone company. Your job is “lineman supervisor.” You manage twenty-five linemen who report to you. The lineman must climb telephone polls twenty feet above the street to repair telephone wires when they are damaged. It can be dangerous work. The company has a rule that all linemen must wear a hard hat when they are working. Recently, there have been some accidents and injuries. You receive a bonus if none of your linemen gets injured during the year. Today, you are driving to check on the work of one of your linemen. You see him/her from a distance, and you believe he/she is not wearing a hard hat. But the sun is in your eyes, and he/she is far away, so you cannot be sure. When you arrive at the work site, the lineman is wearing his/her hard hat. What will you say to the worker?