1 East Asian Perspectives on Silence in English Language Education: An Introduction

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How does silence function in second language learning? Do learners deliberately or perhaps unconsciously use silence as a strategy in the language classroom and, if so, why? When language students engage in second/foreign language (L2) learning, they use whatever resources they bring into classrooms. Silence may be one such interactional resource, used to signal the psychological or linguistic difficulties they encounter, or it may be an expression of solitary activity through reflection, enabling learners to process their own thoughts. It can also be viewed as an indicator of the social and cultural perspectives which can act as frameworks for second language acquisition. What is without doubt is that when we look closely at this issue, it is clear that learner silence is a complex and multifaceted phenomenon that emerges from a whole gamut of sources and hence defies easy generalisations. This book offers an insight into this complexity in order to build a better awareness and deeper understanding of the silent episodes which occur within East Asian language classrooms and beyond.

This introductory chapter argues the case for why education-oriented research into the relatively neglected issue of silence has the potential to have a significant impact not only on second language acquisition (SLA) theorists, but also on classroom practitioners and education policy planners alike. The chapter sets out the main goals of the collection, provides a historical overview of silence-oriented research since the 1980s, illustrates a wide range of definitions of silence and considers some of the fundamental issues and questions surrounding the topic of language learning silence by highlighting the significance of contextual factors. It also discusses the methodological challenges and approaches to data collection used in the study of silence. For example, how best can the multi-formed phenomenon of silence be defined by researchers working within specific contexts, and should silence be considered a positive or a negative phenomenon in education? This first chapter in the collection

also provides a detailed overview of each of the studies that make up the edited volume.

Why a Book on Silence?

The topic of silence has great relevance both for academics researching international education and SLA, and for language teachers in their daily interactions with learners. It is only quite recently that recognition has grown around the crucial role that silence plays in the L2 classroom, particularly within East Asian contexts, and this nascent awareness has led to some innovative research focusing on silence both as a barrier to successful learning and as a resource that may in some cases facilitate language acquisition. Silence is a pedagogical issue that touches all who teach. However, its key role in language classroom practices has not been fully explored. Over the last few decades, the multiple meanings and uses of silence in L2 contexts has increasingly begun to draw the attention of researchers and practitioners, who have revealed its hidden dimensions and pedagogical value in enhanced classroom interaction.

There are two main reasons why this volume focuses on the use of silence by East Asian learners specifically. Firstly, despite a growing number of recent empirical studies and a trend towards a more communicative approach in classroom practice, the silence of East Asian learners is still considered by many practitioners to be something entirely problematic and to be a niche topic for researchers both in mono- and multilingual settings. While this book helps challenge the stereotype of the silent, passive East Asian learner, it also provides an acknowledgement that learners' backgrounds, in conjunction with other variables, do play a role in shaping classroom discourse behaviour. The key here is to base one's conclusions about silence on reliable, empirical research. This volume presents the results of such research and, as it does so in a contextually valid manner, we can learn much about the silences of language learners in other settings too. Wherever there is L2 learning, there are sure to be some silent learners. Secondly, prior to the appearance of this book, no single collection of studies focusing on East Asian learners had attempted to show a complete picture of classroom silence seen from interdisciplinary perspectives and using a range of theoretical approaches. With this in mind, the idea for the current collection emerged from discussions between the editors following a talk organised by the Japan Foundation in London (see King, 2016a). As applied linguistics researchers who share a fascination with silence in language education, we were becoming increasingly aware of the groundswell of interest in this topic and the need to share a state-of-the-art account of current research on silence within L2 settings. We were delighted that such a strong and internationally diverse set of applied linguistics researchers responded to our endeavours and embraced our theme to make this book possible.

The volume's scope includes work that is informed by cognitive, sociocultural and interactional perspectives. It brings together empirical works that explore silence in a wide range of educational settings and that collectively illustrate the diversity of innovative theoretical approaches. Some of our contributors offer a fresh perspective on ways to facilitate classroom interaction while at the same time embracing the phenomenon of silence. The book touches upon key pedagogical concepts, such as teacher cognition, the role of L2 task features, classroom interactional approaches, pedagogical intervention and socialisation, willingness to communicate (WTC), as well as other psychological and sociocultural factors. Taken together, the collection's findings and insights on pedagogical implications drawn from its empirical studies will help researchers and classroom practitioners to gain a thorough understanding of key issues related to silence in relevant and diverse educational contexts.

Silence: A Historical Sketch and Conceptualisations

Silence is an issue that touches all who teach. Whether encouraging reticent learners to participate or having to quieten the boisterous, silence plays a key role in educators' daily classroom practices. Silence in the L2 classroom has been perceived as a complex, ambiguous, yet meaningful communicative resource. Recent perspectives on classroom silence have shed light on the significant roles it has played in second language education, focusing on its varied roles across cultures and aiming to understand its often fuzzy and multilayered meanings and functions. This research has also considered a range of strategies for responding to silence, taking into account its ambiguity and different uses by learners and teachers alike, as well as exploring ways that silence might be utilised as a linguistic resource to facilitate learning.

Research since the early 1980s has tended to draw attention to culture-specific and group-based usages of silence through ethnographic studies, often from intercultural perspectives (e.g. Gilmore, 1985; Lebra, 1987; Philips, 1972; Saville-Troike, 1985). At a micro-level, sociocultural differences in the expected length and tolerance of pauses and silences have been extensively discussed from interactional perspectives (e.g. Scollon & Scollon, 1981; Tannen, 1985). At around the same time, further studies on classroom silence conceptualised it as a teacher's waiting time after posing a question or otherwise soliciting a response (e.g. Rowe, 1986; Shrum, 1985; see also Smith & King, 2017); these began to raise awareness of the facilitative role of silence in educational contexts as a pedagogical strategy for increasing the quality and quantity of learner talk. What was clear from this early work was that silence takes on a variety of forms, from the micro-silences of pauses and hesitations, to the macro-silences of non-participation in communicative events, through to the subtler silences of under-elaboration and topic avoidance.

Among these early studies, those focusing on the use of silence in intercultural communication offered an intriguing perspective on how silence fulfils various communicative roles, depending on the specific culture and communicative setting in which it occurs. The studies provided a fresh perspective on how misunderstandings can occur when participants from different cultural backgrounds interact. These misunderstandings can be traced to different cultural expectations and interpretations in the use of silence and talk during interaction (Lehtonen & Sajavaara, 1985; Nakane, 2012; Spencer-Oatey & Franklin, 2009; Tannen, 1985). While the length of pauses and silences in interaction can be a source of cultural misconceptions, the mismatch of expectation and tolerance of the pace of overall interaction, turn-taking practices and meanings attributed to communicative style can result in serious misunderstanding or negative stereotypes (Scollon & Scollon, 2012). For example, the ethnographic study by Scollon and Scollon (1981) found that Anglo-American English speakers considered the longer silences of Athabaskan Indian people to indicate that they were being uncooperative and therefore regarded this use of silence negatively, as a sign of interactional failure. The Athabaskans, on the other hand, considered the talkativeness of Anglo-American English speakers to be rude and aggressive. Similar interactional misconceptions are illustrated by Tannen (1985), who observed how the avoidance of silence during a Thanksgiving dinner by two New Yorkers of Jewish background was interpreted as dominance rather than cooperation in interaction by other participants from differing cultural backgrounds. Illustrating that the idea of the silent 'East' and talkative 'West' is a somewhat simplistic generalisation, longer uses of silence by Finnish people, when compared with Anglo-Americans, were reported by Lehtonen and Sajavaara in their 1985 study (see also Sajavaara & Lehtonen, 1997). Carbaugh (2005) argues that Finns may not intend to convey lack of interest in communication through the use of longer silences.

Tolerance of silence has been studied from intercultural perspectives in varied situational contexts. For example, in business settings, Yamada (1997) reported longer use of silence, lasting around five seconds, by the Japanese participants in a formal Japanese business meeting, compared with less than one second in the case of a US business meeting. Also in an intercultural business context, a lack of familiarity with other participants' communicative style was explored by Fujio (2004), who reported that Japanese managers tended to be able to tolerate longer silences than their North American colleagues, who saw silence as a sign of discomfort and frustration. Although few in number, some studies have been conducted on the use of silence in intercultural communication in wider sociocultural contexts and in other languages. Mushin and Gardner (2009) analysed inter-turn pauses among Garrwa language speakers from Aboriginal communities in Australia and found that a 1.5-second gap

indicated trouble in communication. Interestingly, this seems to mirror Watt's (1997) conversation analysis of British interactants, in which he suggests 1.5 seconds is the central point on a continuum between 1.3 and 1.7 seconds, after which silence becomes marked (cf. Jefferson, 1989).

Looking at academic contexts, Turner and Hiraga's study (2003) on tacit interactional style and lack of initiation by Japanese international students in tutorial sessions in British academic contexts explored silence as a source of misunderstanding, in this case interpreted by UK academics as lack of willingness to communicate as part of study procedures. This finding mirrors Nakane's (2007) research, which explored the use of silence by Japanese overseas students in Australia and illustrates how their use of silence was interpreted in a negative way by Australian lecturers, who saw the absence of talk as a sign of withdrawal from interaction. Similarly, a study by Harumi (1999) illustrated British informants' negative interpretations of the video-recorded classroom silences displayed by Japanese learners of English, seeing them as signs of boredom or lack of interest.

Some non-Japanese English language teachers express the desire to have faster interactional exchanges with Japanese students; when these are not forthcoming, feelings of frustration can result (King, 2016b; Morris & King, 2018). This phenomenon is also reported by Harumi in Chapter 3 of this book. On the other hand, silence may be regarded as an invisible or unmarked phenomenon, as explored by Morita (2004) in a study on Asian students' academic discourse in a Canadian university. Morita illustrates how students actively negotiated multiple roles and identities in the classroom, even when they appeared passive or withdrawn. This reflects King and Aono's (2017: 494–495) idea of the 'active state of silence', in which learners may not be producing talk but are nevertheless cognitively engaged. In a recent study on silence in the intercultural collaboration of a Dutch and a Chinese university as part of a scientific international research project, the Dutch researchers attributed Chinese researchers' silence in everyday conversation to a lack of communication (Verouden & van der Sanden, 2018). For example, failing immediately to provide feedback or to reply to comments was interpreted as detrimental to collaboration when seen from a Dutch point of view, as was silencing the voices of subordinates (p. 145). In Chapter 6 of this collection, Karas and Faez observe similar societal roles of teachers, who are seen as figures of authority in L2 classrooms, triggering the use of silence by learners in Chinese contexts.

Recognition of the crucial role that silence plays in the L2 classroom has also inspired research into multiple aspects of second language learning and amply demonstrates its relevance to evidence-based language teaching. Pioneering research outside the field of applied linguistics paved the way for methodologically and conceptually varied empirical L2-oriented studies from the 1990s onwards, which situated silent behaviour

within various specific educational contexts. In particular, increasing attention was paid to reticent language learners in East Asia (e.g. Bao, 2014; Harumi, 2011; King, 2013a, 2013b; Liu, 2009; Tsui, 1996) as well as to overseas East Asian international students (e.g. Liu, 2002; Nakane, 2007).

A small number of scholars have chosen to explore the facilitative role of silence and learners' silent periods in mainstream and second language education (e.g. Granger, 2004; Jaworski & Sachdev, 1998; Li, 2001; Reda, 2009), while others have considered silence as an example of invisible pragmatic transfer which becomes a possible source of misunderstanding (Nakane, 2007). By focusing on silence's varied communicative and social meanings in L2 classrooms across cultures, a key theme to emerge in research is how participants' perceptions of silence may differ significantly. While some may interpret silence as a space for critical reflection and the absorption of content, others within the SLA community acknowledge that non-participatory silence by language learners has the potential to impede L2 development by limiting target language interaction and output. In light of this, an increasing number of studies have been carried out to seek better pedagogical practices aimed at enhancing the oral participation of silent learners (Talandis & Stout, 2015; Yashima *et al.*, 2016; Zhang & Head, 2010).

Given the historical development of research perspectives on silence, a growing body of recent studies on its role in second language education has applied varied perspectives on its conceptualisations (e.g. Bao, 2014, King, 2013a, 2013b; Smith & King, 2017, 2018) as both an inhibitive and a facilitative element in interaction. More specifically, Bao (2014) has stressed the need to draw attention to the distinctive roles of silence as a voluntary productive communicative resource able to enhance L2 learning opportunities as 'modes of learning' (p. 2) and of reticence as withdrawal from learning. Following this distinction between silence and reticence, this collection further conceptualises and approaches silence as a phenomenon through multiple formats.

Overview of the Collection: Understanding Contexts and Methodological Approaches

To close this introductory chapter, we illustrate the scope of the collection and provide a detailed overview of each individual study, further highlighting the rich variety of research that can be found in subsequent chapters by focusing on the role of context and methodological approaches in each study.

Awareness of the interaction between the use of silence and contextual factors is indispensable to an understanding of the nature of silence. Just as silence has been variously defined in this collection, there are also different ways to understanding context (see King, 2015) and

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its significance to the study of silence. In this collection there are three broad areas encompassing essential contextual factors, seen through analytical lenses which closely relate to the use of silence by learners in L2 classrooms: psychological, cultural and immediate educational settings. Below we illustrate why understanding context is essential to the exploration of silences, which serve as unmarked and invisible practices in L2 learning and discuss methodological approaches which have the potential to explore silence within multilayered contexts and to enhance learners' active participation in L2 learning.

The collection includes the following studies: an interpretive case study on the interplay of task complexity and Asian learner silence in an Australian university (Bao); conversational analysis of teacher talk and interaction with the silence of Japanese students learning English as a foreign language (EFL) (Harumi); a longitudinal intervention study aiming to enhance Japanese EFL learners' oral participation from a complexity perspective (King *et al.*); a mixed-methods study on anxiety and silence using a cognitive-behavioural model (Maher); a cognition study exploring Chinese language teachers' perceptions of silence and communicative language teaching (CLT) (Karas & Faez); a study on Japanese high-school ELT learners' perceptions of their capacity to speak (CTS) (Humphries *et al.*); and an investigation from a dynamic systems perspective on the interplay of silence and willingness to communicate (WTC) in Chinese EFL classrooms (Peng). A final commentary on the collection is provided by Amy Tsui and Rintaro Imafuku.

In Chapter 2, the collection's first empirical contribution, Bao presents interpretive case studies examining task complexity and learner silence through in-depth interview data. These involved 10 postgraduate students from various East Asian backgrounds (Chinese, Mongolian, Korean and Japanese learners) in an Australian university, and explore the role of silence as a mode of learning. Bao conceptualises silence as a mode of learning by focusing on the nature of classroom tasks. This entails the examination of task orientation, differentiating modes of learning which involve talk, silence or something in-between (a kind of hybridity of talk and silence that can include inner, private speech), forming a sequence within the learning process. This study sheds light on the interaction between the nature of tasks and learner silence as immediate educational, contextual and cultural factors, revealing learners' inner-speech dynamics, manifested in the metacognitive process of self-discovery through the interview process. Bao's findings demonstrate a clear relationship between various aspects of tasks and learners' choice of verbal or reflective responses and he concludes that learners' preferred modes of participation involve reflection and articulation. Bao also explores learners' movement between these modes as part of the process of task design. The study also emphasises the essential role of teacher flexibility, supportive attitudes and innovative pedagogical strategies, which enhance

learners' learning experience through the optimum engagement of tasks and also the need to improve task design. The investigation's insights into the interplay between task and silence urges a reappraisal of the significance of task design in teaching practice and the need for educators to understand learners' uses of silence.

In the collection's next chapter, Harumi employs a mixed-methods research design to focus on the silences which occur during dyadic interactions within EFL classrooms in Japanese universities. Harumi specifically examines the use of silence from an interactional perspective and conceptualises the facilitative role of silence as an interactional resource by engaging in microanalysis of turn-taking systems, mindful of the potential for learners to maintain interaction and achieve L2 output with the support of teachers in order to create space for learning in Japanese tertiary EFL contexts. In order to examine the role of teacher talk as a key immediate educational contextual and also cultural factor, her study uses questionnaires with open-ended items to investigate how teachers working in this context react to instances of silence when they encounter them. She discovers that, within her sample, some teachers had experienced a degree of discomfort resulting from different interactional norms on silence when experiencing silent episodes (cf. King & Aono, 2017) but, on the whole, did not perceive these episodes entirely negatively. The teachers revealed a variety of techniques for responding to silence: from increasing their wait time to five seconds, to providing further linguistic support for learners (e.g. in the manner of reformulations). Harumi's discussion of teachers' perceptions of learner silence within Japanese EFL contexts and their pedagogical approaches for dealing with it indicate that, in varying degrees, teachers are also aware of the cultural expectations of classroom interaction as it occurs within Japanese EFL classes. Echoing themes of social inhibition explored elsewhere in the book (e.g. King *et al*., Chapter 4; Maher, Chapter 5), she observes that learners are extremely conscious of peer evaluation and that teachers use various strategies and responses to avoid pressurising learners to interact in English but also to support learner oral output. Taking the stance that silence (of more than one second) can be an interactional resource which has the potential to provide a shared space for learning, Harumi then delves deeper into student silence, wait time and teacher talk by using conversation analysis to scrutinise eight hours of classroom interaction video data. The study provides important empirical evidence of the pedagogical strategies and interactional patterns that accompany instances of silence within Japanese EFL tertiary contexts.

In order to tackle non-participatory learner silence from a psychological and complexity perspective, the longitudinal intervention study by King, Yashima, Humphries, Aubrey and Ikeda reported in Chapter 4 examines three key interrelated areas: students' anxiety coping strategies; the improvement of interpersonal dynamics and social collaboration

among students; and encouragement to engage in target language inter-action. In their study, silence has been defined as anxiety-driven social inhibition in the classroom and learners' avoidance of talk. This aspect of silence has been problematised as a social aspect of foreign language anxiety heavily influenced by group dynamics in Japanese tertiary contexts (King, 2014; King & Smith, 2017), suggesting the possibility of improved oral participation through pedagogical interventions which encourage improved peer relationships. Drawing data from structured classroom observations of 71 students and learners' self-report reflections, stimulated recall interviews and teacher reflections over the course of an academic semester, this study extensively explores the effects on classroom discourse of a multi-strategy intervention enhanced through socialisation strategies outside the classroom in addition to in-class activities. The findings suggest that key factors which trigger learner silence are learners' anxiety in the use of English and their social inhibition within immediate social groups. The study illustrates the overall improvement of social dynamics in the classroom after a series of interventions, which conse-quently enhanced learners' oral participation. This study also emphasises the significance of other factors, such as task demands, topic choice and teachers' roles in shaping classroom discourse participation. This inno-vative and insightful approach towards learner silence sheds light on the significant role of pedagogical interventions, both within and outside the classroom, which have the potential to improve social dynamics among learners and enhance their oral participation in the L2 classroom.

In Chapter 5, Maher also explores silence from a psychological perspective and presents an innovative study using concepts drawn from cognitive-behavioural theory (CBT), adopting a cognitive-behavioural model (King, 2014) to explore how an anxious student's thought patterns can be modified in such a way as to encourage a reduction in anxiety and a corresponding increase in oral participation in the target language. In this study, silence expressed as individual fear of verbal participation in L2 within a cycle of negative thoughts among university students in Japanese EFL contexts is explored. The chapter focuses on Mari (pseudonym), whose tendency to remain silent in her English language lesson while blushing, wringing her hands and keeping her head lowered caught the attention of Maher during a series of classroom observations conducted at a university in Japan. Maher recounts how she worked with Mari during a succession of CBT-style interviews to raise the student's awareness of how a negative cycle of thoughts, behaviours, emotions and bodily sensations was feeding her silent behaviour. The study suggests that confidence to speak can be built as students become more aware of such negative cycles and are encouraged to relate them to their core beliefs about language learning. Rather than suggesting that silently anxious learners are in some way mentally ill, the use of CBT-style inter-views actually has the potential to empower students and liberate them

from silent behaviour which they previously had no control over. This study therefore suggests that CBT-style interviews can be a useful tool for enhancing L2 participation. This approach not only reveals contextual factors which affect learners' psychological states and subsequent oral participation but also suggests ways to overcome obstacles by encouraging learners to set goals. Both Maher's research and King *et al*.'s in Chapter 4 deal with learner anxiety and illustrate that tackling silence-inducing affective factors is possible through focused interventions which facilitate social and psychological contextual improvement.

In Chapter 6, Karas and Faez investigate the role of silence in the CLT classroom from the perspectives of 91 Chinese pre-service teachers in Canada. They also consider both the macro- and the micro-level positive uses of silences using sociocultural, interactive and cognitive perspectives. This includes silence used to show respect for the teacher, reflecting sociocultural values in Chinese educational contexts at a societal level, as well as associated interactional values which involve allowing others to speak or time for cognitive processing and listening, acting as a productive approach to learning. They also explore the pros and cons of introducing CLT in China (cf. Jin & Cortazzi, 2006), and potential methods to support learners who prefer silent learning strategies in CLT classrooms. Thus, this study explores perspectives of Chinese teachers on the role of silence in the CLT classroom where the implementation of this pedagogical approach is considered problematic due to various impediments influenced by sociocultural beliefs and factors such as students' preference for silent learning strategies and societal expectations of teachers' roles. Despite practical constraints such as class size and the Chinese education system's focus on examinations, the participants' responses illustrate the productive use of silence in L2 learning, with its focus on group discussion and written reflection. However, by discussing pedagogical approaches as well as the post-writing reflections, teachers in their study were able to offer a range of pedagogical strategies which may be well suited to East Asian CLT classrooms. The participants' highly positive attitudes towards the use of silence and its productive role in L2 learning suggests that various strategies can be utilised to support silent learners in the CLT classroom. This study raises our awareness of the relevance of the practical pedagogical roles of learner silence, not only in China but also in other settings where similar issues persist, revealing the interplay between CLT used as a pedagogical approach and the uses of silence as a learning strategy. The study also illustrates the important role of teachers' perceptions in dealing with dilemmas and possibilities in L2 pedagogy (see also Harumi, Chapter 3) by reflecting on their own teaching contexts.

In contrast, Humphries, Akamatsu, Tanaka and Burns take a quite different approach in their study reported in Chapter 7, preferring to focus on student perceptions rather than on those of teachers. They make

the valid point that research on learner silence has tended to focus on undergraduates, with pre-tertiary contexts relatively unexplored – a non-linguistics-oriented exception to this being Yoneyama's (2009) excellent investigation into silence as a form of resistance in Japanese high schools. Thus, the research they present here explores how Japanese high school students perceive their capacity to speak (CTS) English during various classroom activities, such as when responding to teachers' simple questions, engaging in group discussion, or reading aloud from a textbook. This study defines silence relative to the learners' CTS. It focuses on classroom situations and activities which directly influence the use of target language speech or silence within Japanese high school contexts. Humphries and his colleagues adopt a structural equation modelling (SEM) approach to test the influence of contextual factors through an online survey, and find that confidence and classroom support are the key factors which influenced their participants' CTS. Their study emphasises the need to nurture learners' confidence to enable them to progress in target language oral participation. Using an online questionnaire, data were gathered from 260 participants attending five different high schools to provide insights into the kinds of target language activities that learners believed either helped or hindered them in speaking English in class. By looking at levels of structure and preparation time for speaking activities, the study also indicates that cognitively demanding activities can induce more silent responses. Interestingly, the survey's findings play down the role that motivation and anxiety play in learner silence and instead emphasise the importance of confidence and classroom support for encouraging talk in the classroom.

Turning to the role of immediate educational contextual factors, two studies in this collection (Bao, Chapter 2; Humphries *et al.*, Chapter 7) explore the central roles of tasks and activities in dealing with classroom silence. These are the immediate contextual factors which teachers encounter directly and constantly in daily teaching practice. These studies suggest that the type of task and its nature can significantly influence the learner's choice of responses (cf. Yashima *et al.*, 2016) and emphasise the need for teachers to be aware of this when dealing with silence. Further, Harumi's conversational analytic study reported in Chapter 3 explores the ways teachers respond to learner silence and also further support their L2 output by utilising various types of responses, including calibrated wait time. These three chapters, which explore the immediate classroom educational contextual factors outlined above, demonstrate the crucial role that activities and teachers play during silence events and emphasise the need for teachers to listen to silence within the moment-to-moment shifting interactions of the classroom so as to better understand and respond to students' needs.

The next chapter in the collection is Peng's partial replication of King's (2013a, 2013b) study which used structured observation to measure

the levels of oral participation and silence within EFL classrooms from a psychological perspective. Peng's investigation explores how silence and a lack of willingness to communicate (see MacIntyre *et al*., 1998) interact as two separate systems serving to drive Chinese learners of English towards various discourse behaviours within the L2 classroom. Peng examines the interplay of two essential concepts: on the one hand, willingness to communicate, seen as readiness to contribute to verbal participation; and on the other, silence perceived as reticence in Chinese university learning environments. In this study Peng defines silence as 'the absence of sound, noise and voice', adding 'students remaining silent when they are expected to provide a response and referring to reticence on the part of the teacher' (Peng, this volume, p. ##). Peng employs the COPS instrument (see also King *et al*., Chapter 4; Maher, Chapter 5) to good effect in order to form a picture of classroom discourse patterns within three Chinese university English language classrooms. Silence and the construct of second language willingness to communicate (L2 WTC) are intimately linked and Peng's ambitious research attempts to study the two phenomena in an integrated, contextually sensitive manner. Her study uses data from multiple sources: students' own appraisals of their WTC, structured classroom observation and also interviews. This study defines five types of silence, which Peng suggests form together in a psychological tapestry in which silence can interact with complex psychological parameters. Drawing on data from classroom transcripts, student self-reports of dynamically changing WTC levels and stimulated recall interviews with learners following specific silent episodes, the research helps to uncover the complex relationship between Chinese students' L2 WTC, silence and situated classroom communication psychology.

Rounding off this collection of *East Asian Perspectives on Silence in English Language Education* is Tsui and Imafuku's concluding chapter, which takes stock of the empirical studies described above and highlights the shared themes, particularly relating to sociocultural values, that are apparent across the collection's papers. Viewing 'classroom silence' through the prism of learner reticence, they argue that our collection provides further evidence of the complexity of L2 learner and teacher silence and call for more longitudinal research on the complex interplay of factors which shape oral participation in educational contexts. To illustrate this point, Tsui and Imafuku draw upon data from a longitudinal study of the participation of individual students attending tutorials at a Japanese university and discuss parallels between their own findings in this L1 context and findings in the collection's L2-focused studies, emphasising the role that social dynamics play in shaping learner silence.

Thus, the definitions of silence in this collection clearly demonstrate great diversity in the way silence is conceptualised. As we emphasise above, the nature of silence is complex, multidimensional and fuzzy in L2 learning contexts. However, this variety of definitions works to illustrate

how silence can be demystified when conceptualisation, observation and analysis are carefully applied. Whether or not silence is considered an inhibitive or facilitative element in L2 learning, these studies share an understanding that silence can be conceptualised as a significant part of learners' engagement in L2 learning, and can thus be 'viewed in ways of participating in situated practices' (Taguchi, 2015: 7). Moreover, another commonly recognised feature of silence illustrated in this book is the way it can function as a fuzzy process of learning which may involve shifting silent learning styles and transitions of attitudes and perceptions which are shaped by sociocultural interactional exchanges within L2 classrooms and beyond. This begs the question: how can we apply these different perspectives on silence to specific learning and teaching practice situations? To shed some light on this, we have discussed the role of contextual factors in how silence has been defined in the collection, by looking at the way each study explores silence from various methodological perspectives in order to deepen understanding of its use and also to enhance L2 learning within each context.

Self-reflection/Discussion Questions

(1) Have you experienced silence in your daily life recently? What was the situation and who else was present? How did the silence make you feel? Do you think it signified anything? If so, what?

(2) This chapter discusses the various ways in which silence can be defined. Think about a language-learning setting that you are familiar with. How would you define the silence that occurs in this setting? Do you see it as a negative or a positive phenomenon? Why?

(3) Some people believe there is a dichotomy with the silent East on one side and the garrulous West on the other. What do you think of this idea? Is it just a gross generalisation or do you think there is some truth to it? When discussing your ideas, think carefully about the context in which silences may occur.

(4) This chapter deliberates on the difficulties associated with effectively researching the ambiguous phenomenon of language-learner silence. Think about a language-education setting that you are familiar with. What are your ideas about the best ways to research silence in that particular context?

Recommended Reading

Edited volumes which focus on the topic of silence are, without doubt, few and far between. Two that are worth consulting are as follows:

Tannen, D. and Saville-Troike, M. (eds) (1985) *Perspectives on Silence*. Norwood, NJ: Ablex.

Despite its age, Tannen and Saville-Troike's book is often cited, as it contains a fascinating collection of still-relevant studies on the role of silence in human communication. Look out in particular for Gilmore's study of silence and sulking within a US high school, and Lehtonen and Sajavaara's contemplation of 'the silent Finn'.

Jaworski, A. (ed.) (1997) *Silence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

Jaworski's book looks at silence across an exceptionally wide range of genres and domains. Chapters include discussions relating to how silence connects with such diverse areas as fine art, religion, literature, music and professional discourse. A highlight is Sifianou's chapter, which considers the role of silence in expressing politeness during Greek and English interactions. Some of her ideas have relevance for the L2 classroom in certain East Asian contexts.

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