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8

Classroom Silence and the Dynamic Interplay between Context and the Language Learner: A Stimulated Recall Study

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Introduction

Context is key to understanding the roots and meanings of silence. As Saville-Troike (1985) explains, 'silence (like all nonverbal communication) is more context-embedded than speech, that is, more dependent on context for its interpretation' (p. 11). Ergo, the silence of a monk deep in prayer is profoundly different to that of a suspect refusing to talk in a police interview. The same holds true in the language classroom where a learner's silence may emerge for any number of reasons and represent any number of meanings, depending on the complex contextual circumstances in which it occurs. So how can we best achieve an in situ analysis of such silences, paying close attention to contextualised classroom events and foregrounding the way in which immediate classroom and higher sociocultural contexts impact upon individuals? Framing its results through the lens of complex dynamic systems theory (CDST), the current chapter attempts to answer this question by reporting on a mixed-methods study which utilised a series of stimulated recall interviews in conjunction with empirical observations of silence occurring within naturalistic L2 classroom settings.

Stimulated recall is a form of introspective inquiry that has been employed extensively in educational research, primarily as a means of investigating individuals' concurrent thinking during specific past events (e.g., Butefish, 1990; Calderhead, 1981; Fox-Turnbull, 2009; O'Brien, 1993). This is achieved by encouraging subjects to comment

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in a subsequent interview on what was happening at the time an event occurred, using prompts or stimuli connected to the incident as support. As Gass and Mackey (2000) have illustrated in their extensive overview of the approach, this method of data collection has recently been gaining increasing prominence within the field of second language education. While much of this previous research has focused on teachers' decision-making (e.g., Johnson, 1992; Nunan, 1991; Woods, 1989), stimulated recall has also been employed effectively in studies focusing on a variety of language learning topics, including for example, vocabulary acquisition (e.g., Paribakht & Wesche, 1999), written composition (e.g., Bosher, 1998) and interlanguage pragmatics (e.g., Robinson, 1992). More relevant to my own investigation into Japanese language learner silence are those studies which concentrate on oral interaction, and I shall now consider a number of these investigations in more depth.

It is no exaggeration to say that studies using stimulated recall which have silence at the heart of their focus are few and far between in the literature. One rare example is Nakane's (2007) investigation into silence in intercultural communication. Employing a mixed-methods research approach that included a retrospective interview component, Nakane's conversation analysis-based study included three case studies of Japanese sojourners studying on mainstream university courses in Australia. After ethnographic observations of the three learners' classroom turn-taking performances, Nakane made use of video-supported stimulated recall interviews to explore how the learners themselves, their co-learners and lecturers perceived the Japanese students' silent behaviour. Although lacking detailed discussion on the procedural aspects of the recalls she carried out, Nakane's findings are nevertheless strongly triangulated by the multiple data sources from which she collected her evidence. One key finding, in what was a wide-ranging study, was that silence poses significant problems for Japanese students studying abroad in English-speaking countries, particularly as there appears to be a mismatch in how silence is used and perceived by participants within intercultural classroom contexts.

Another quite different study investigating Japanese learners' L2 oral interactions can be seen in Sato (2007). He employed a stimulated recall methodology to examine how eight first-year university students modified their oral output differently depending on whether they were interacting with a peer or one of four native speakers (NS) of English. This quasi-experimental study found that self-initiated modified output was greater in learner-learner dyads when compared to learner-NS dyads. In addition, learner participants tended to feign understanding (see also

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Ellis, Tanaka & Yamazaki, 1994) and engaged in less negotiation of meaning when speaking to non-Japanese partners. Sato also explored the connection between social relationships and interactional moves by examining learners' perceptions of their interlocutors and the effect this had on the number of repetitions they produced. Interestingly, some of Sato's retrospective data suggest that repetitions were significantly higher amongst learner-NS dyads partly because learners wanted to show verbally that they were listening to their partner's talk and thought that remaining silent might have appeared excessively rude.

Mackey has been involved in a number of retrospective studies focusing on language learners' oral interactions (e.g., Mackey, Gass & McDonough, 2000; Mackey, 2006). Building upon the notion that interaction facilitates second language acquisition, Mackey's (2002) study used a stimulated recall methodology to examine 46 language learners' perceptions of conversational interactions taking place in classroom and dyadic settings. Supported by a detailed description of research procedures, the investigation discovered a significant overlap between learners' insights and researchers' previous claims (e.g., Gass, 1997) about the benefits of L2 conversational interaction. For example, a common pattern in the data was that learners perceived interaction as providing an opportunity to negotiate meaning with interlocutors and make input more comprehensible at the point when there is a communicative need for that input (Mackey, 2002, p. 387). While underlining the benefits of oral interaction for L2 learners, studies in the vein of Mackey's serve to emphasise how excessive silence and non-participation in spoken tasks may have a negative influence on a language learner's L2 development.

Using a psycholinguistic conceptual framework based on Levelt's (1989) model of speech production, Dörnyei and Kormos' (1998) study employed a stimulated recall approach to investigate how speakers manage problems in L2 communication. Forty-four Hungarian learners of English were audio-recorded performing three communicative tasks. The recordings were played back to each participant and, after listening to their own elicited speech, they were asked to comment on the communication difficulties they had encountered. The four main sources of communication problems were: resource deficits, processing time pressure, perceived deficiencies in output and perceived deficiencies in the interlocutor's performance. Dörnyei and Kormos identify the use of micro-level silences in the form of non-lexicalised, unfilled pauses as one of a range of communication strategies which help manage processing time pressure. Even so, they point out that L2 speakers are aware of 'the need to avoid lengthy silences, which can terminate the conversation

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or deter the interlocutor' (Dörnyei & Kormos, 1998, p. 368) and present various other stalling mechanisms (e.g., the use of fillers or repetition) that allow for extended cognitive processing time.

In the current chapter, I use complex dynamic systems theory (CDST) as a primary analytical framework because this conceptual approach recognises the true complexity of events which occur in language classrooms and acknowledges that learner behaviour may be influenced by multiple, concurrent learner-internal and contextual variables (termed 'attractors' in CDST – see Hiver, 2015, for a fuller discussion on attractors and attractor states) whose influence may shift over time (de Bot & Larsen-Freeman, 2011; Dörnyei, 2009; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). MacIntyre and Legatto (2011) also utilised a CDST approach in their idiodynamic-based stimulated recall study of 'willingness to communicate' (WTC). Six female Canadian learners of French were asked to perform eight L2 communicative tasks adapted from MacIntyre, Babin and Clément's (1999) work on L1 WTC. The participants used special software to continuously rate their WTC while watching video recordings of their performance during the tasks. They were then shown the video again and, with the aid of a graph detailing their self-ratings, asked to describe why changes in WTC occurred at particular points. MacIntyre and Legatto found that in their sample, WTC was an interconnected dynamic phenomenon affected by a range of factors, including the process of retrieving vocabulary from memory and the presence of language anxiety. The researchers posit that WTC is produced by interconnected linguistic, social, cognitive and emotional systems:

> When the systems function together to facilitate communication, we see WTC as an attractor state. When the systems interfere with each other, such as when vocabulary items are absent or a threat to self-esteem is detected, we see a repeller state where communication is abandoned. (MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011, p. 169)

While MacIntyre and Legatto's innovative research provides a useful conceptual background for my own investigation into language learner silence, the two studies do differ significantly in character. The stimulated recall data presented in this chapter are based on interactions within naturalistic classroom settings (see Lyle, 2003) and are therefore contextually quite different to MacIntyre and Legatto's more controlled, laboratory-based approach which they liken to 'an oral exam's question-and-answer format' (2011, p. 168).

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Data collection

A series of seven stimulated recalls were undertaken in order to explore learners' perceptions of specific silence events which they either produced or directly experienced during lessons which I observed. This introspective method of data collection proved to be a fruitful way of uncovering students' thoughts and feelings about silence at the micro-level of classroom interaction, particularly as silence is a phenomenon which is heavily context-dependent and often requires a high degree of inference to gauge its meaning (Jaworski, 1993). In order to better reflect the variety of tertiary institutions which exist in Japan, data were collected at three sites: a small municipal university specialising in fine arts, a medium-sized, middle-ranking provincial university known for its economics and pharmacy courses, and a large, urban university specialising in foreign languages.

Participants

I approached learners whose individual modality had been tracked over the course of three classroom observations. All of these students had been observed to remain silent in specific situations when talk was expected of them during their language classes; for example, during whole-class drilling exercises, small-group speaking activities, in response to teachers' questions, and so on. Although this approach guaranteed recalls could be conducted with learners who had actually been silent, it did also run the risk of singling out reticent, inarticulate participants who may have been lacking in perception. Of course, this is one of the major challenges facing silence researchers: how do you get people to talk about not talking, especially when silence tends to operate at a semi-conscious or unconscious level? A range of measures was therefore put in place to diminish the possibility of participant non-responsiveness during retrospective interviews. The measures were effective, and in the end I was able to gain usable data from five of the study's participants, whose details are set out in the table below (all names are pseudonyms).

These participants, who were all in their late teens or early twenties, nicely reflect the broad range of student experience on offer within the language classrooms of Japanese universities. At one end of the spectrum are reasonably proficient language majors like Yuri and Tamaki who benefit from at least 24 hours of contact time per week in classes limited to a maximum of 25 students, while at the other end of the scale, non-language majors, such as Jiro, can expect only 90 minutes of foreign

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Table 8.1 Participant details for stimulated recall study

	Gender	Year	Uni	Major	Class name/type	No. of students in class
Nao	F	1	X	Pharmacy	English Conversation (c)	16
Yuri	F	1	Y	English	Intensive Academic English	24
Jiro	M	2	X	Sports Science	General English (c)	52
Miho	F	1	Z	Art	General English (c)	26
Tamaki	F	1	Y	English	Intensive Academic English	20

Note: Uni – university; c – class is compulsory component of student's course

language education in a week, often provided in lecture-style sessions containing over 50 learners. All the students in the study had received the six years of pre-tertiary English language education that is compulsory upon entering Japan's junior high schools from the age of 11.

Classroom observations

Each participant's class was observed on three separate occasions, with silent episodes occurring during the final observation forming the main basis of subsequent recalls. This multiple-observation approach had the twin benefits of enhancing the reliability of any observational data collected, whilst at the same time reducing reactivity amongst students as my presence become a familiar aspect of the language lessons. Using the Classroom Oral Participation Scheme (COPS) (King, 2013a,b), I was able to successfully code classroom events on a minute-by-minute basis to form a chronological representation of the oral participation which occurred in each lesson. The simplicity of the COPS design allowed me to use completed coding sheets as an effective stimulus for the subsequent recall sessions. This was in addition to the use of recorded audio sequences of classroom events as a further prompt. As silence and reticence tend to be deemed negative phenomena in classrooms (c.f. Kusaka, 2013; Reda, 2009), students were informed I was conducting research into language learner interaction rather than focusing specifically on silence. The above measures, coupled with my non-intrusive seating position and careful avoidance of any interaction with the learners I was observing, meant that participants were able to arrive at their stimulated

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recall sessions in a position to provide unbiased accounts of natural classroom behaviour involving targeted silent episodes.

The retrospective interviews

In order to avoid memory decay and to maintain the validity of the retrospective data collected, all stimulated recall sessions in the study were conducted in line with Dörnyei's (2007) recommendation that a time lapse of less than 24 hours between event and recall is preferable. The recall sessions were conducted primarily in the participants' first language. As Gass and Mackey (2000) rightly point out, learners of limited L2 proficiency may not only misunderstand the instructions and questions of the researcher, there also exists the possibility that these learners will only verbalise what they *can* during recalls, instead of providing a full account of their cognitive processes. The problem of limited verbalisation is exacerbated when the focus of the research is on something as intangible as the participant's silence; an aspect of classroom behaviour he/she is likely to have never even considered before. Although conducting recalls in the L1 should not be considered a panacea to the limitations of this type of research – some students did still experience difficulties in producing a verbal account of their silent behaviour – the use of L1 certainly helped subjects to make incursions into their implicit knowledge more easily, and enabled them to externalise any thoughts and feelings discovered there much better. With the participants' consent, each recall session was audio recorded and subsequently transcribed directly into the L1 before being translated into English. Sections of the data were then back-translated (see Brislin, 1970) into the source language so as to ensure the reliability of the original translation.

During the interviews, learners were shown completed observation coding sheets and were played audio recordings of specific classroom episodes involving silences in order to access their concurrent interpretations of events. The recordings helped to provide context around which silence incidents occurred, for example, by allowing a learner to listen again to the teacher's question which he/she did not respond to, or to be reminded of a whole-class choral drill in which he/she failed to participate. Even so, the immediacy of the stimulated recall after the task, coupled to the use of a chronologically ordered observation coding sheet acting as a strong stimulus, meant that a number of participants were able to clearly remember targeted incidents even before an audio recording was played to them. Following Gass and Mackey (2000),

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learners were asked to remember what they were thinking and feeling *at the time* the silence occurred, rather than provide comments on their thoughts about the episode now (i.e., in the recall session) with the benefit of hindsight. Even so, the focus of the interviews was not exclusively cognitive in orientation, and learners were able to provide other interesting contextually orientated insights about, for example, their impressions of the teaching methodology employed in their language classrooms.

Results and discussion

Nao: 'I'm not interested. I'm not listening to the class'

Nao, a first-year non-language major studying Pharmacy at a large provincial university in the west of Japan, was consistently silent and unresponsive throughout the small-sized (comprising less than 20 students) English conversation classes I observed her attend. Over the course of three structured observations, Nao never once initiated discourse within the class, nor did she verbally respond to any of her teacher's questions or prompts. Her silent behaviour was profound, and in the third and final observed lesson, which acted as the arena for the subsequent stimulated recall session, Nao was observed to avoid speech even during the relative anonymity of whole-class choral drills, when learners' L2 oral production moves out of the public and into the private sphere. These drills formed the tasks which were subsequently recalled during a retrospective interview conducted immediately after the lesson had ended.

The first point to make about Nao's recall session is that it provided me with the somewhat ironic task of having to encourage an inarticulate, reticent learner to provide a verbal account of her silent classroom behaviour. Even so, as Nao spoke entirely in Japanese throughout the recall session, the procedure did allow me to observe at first hand her lack of verbal expressiveness when communicating in her own language. After being asked to describe what she had been thinking whilst she remained silent during a whole-class speaking drill in which learners were required to repeat phrases from a shopping dialogue modelled by their instructor, Nao indicated she was able to recall the episode and made the following response:

> Eh (4.5) we:ll (7) mm (hhh) (3.5) ((sniffs)) (14.5) (hh) (6) er::m (10) (hhh) °I don't know° (30) no, say something- (7.5) say- (13) ((laughs

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> slightly)) (6) I didn't consider replying (3) something. (3) Well (1.5) er:m (2) Perhaps, I always don't say anything. Come to think of it, I remember. (1.5) About- (9.5) hm (8) eh? I don't- I don't know.

Although from a cognitive perspective, this extract provides us with little useful data about Nao's concurrent thought processes during the episode of classroom silence in question, the 130.5 seconds of silence contained within this short passage do provide an indicative example of Nao extensively using silence in a communicative situation and, related to this, her lack of ability in expressing herself verbally in her own language. There is a strong argument to be made that Nao's inarticulateness in the L1 transfers directly to her L2 performance, thereby contributing to her limited oral production in language classes. Interestingly, throughout the above exchange, the participant was observed to remain perfectly at ease and displayed no outward signs of embarrassment or discomfort during her silences, apart from a single brief laugh after the 13-second pause. This behaviour points towards a learner who is both accepting of silence and one who treats the absence of talk as a relatively unmarked phenomenon (see Sobkowiak, 1997).

Further data from Nao's recall session revealed that deep feelings of apathy and a lack of engagement with the subject were major additional factors contributing to her avoidance of talk during the lesson. Speaking about her thoughts during one of the lesson's choral drills, she revealed:

> I didn't feel anything special about everybody else speaking. (3) I didn't think anything. (5.5) I don't think but (22) I wasn't like- I couldn't be bothered to do it sort of thing. ((laughs slightly))

Nao's failure to orally participate in the lesson's choral drill appears, then, to emerge partly from her disengagement from a language learning process in which she is not prepared to invest much effort. Her silence was, to a degree, born from her inattention and she freely admitted that, 'I'm not interested. I'm not listening to the class.' Nao may have been physically present in the lesson, but cognitively speaking, she was somewhere else. Rather than performing some form of cognitive or interactive function (for more on the relationship between silence and communication, see e.g., Bruneau, 1973; Jaworski, 1993), her silence during the choral drill was inactive and without communicative meaning. Indeed, when asked to describe what she was thinking during a subsequent

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activity in which she also failed to participate, Nao freely acknowledged her thoughts were:

> 'Now is the chance to sleep', °kind of thing° (hhh) ((very slightly laughs)) while the teacher was talking, well (7) it'll probably be alright.

Such an attitude is supported within the context of Japan's education system which, while placing great emphasis on attendance, appears less concerned with what learners actually do whilst the lesson is in progress and, consequently, is highly tolerant towards sleeping in class (see Steger, 2006). Indeed, I recorded in my research notes one conversation with a senior Japanese professor who informed me (not entirely in jest) that he was quite content for students to sleep while he taught them because slumbering learners tended to cause him fewer classroom management problems than the conscious ones! The issue of sleeping aside, although various concurrent factors would have acted to contribute to Nao's silent disengagement, contextual issues at the classroom level, particularly her instructor's use of a highly structured teaching methodology, would certainly not have helped to stimulate her interest. With a rigid emphasis on lexical and grammatical accuracy, all L2 discourse within Nao's class was tightly controlled by the instructor, with students allowed very little freedom of expression. It is perhaps therefore unsurprising that, in addition to Nao, a significant number of learners were observed to be off-task and not orally participating over the course of the observation period.

Looking at Nao's silence during the targeted choral drill from a CDST perspective, as the above discussion shows, it was certainly not the result of just one factor. Rather, it emerged because of multiple, interrelated silence attractors present both within Nao herself and also within the immediate classroom environment around her. Her silent behaviour was shaped not only by learner-internal aspects such as her lack of oral expressiveness, apathy towards the task and general lack of interest in learning a foreign language. It was also influenced concurrently by external agents, such as her instructor's approach to teaching and his strict control over classroom discourse. All of these elements worked together within an interconnected dynamic system to produce a relatively stable attractor state of silence within Nao's classroom discourse system, meaning she rarely spoke whilst lessons were in progress.

Yuri: 'I thought I'd better behave myself'

An English-major in her first year of study at a large, foreign languages-orientated university, at the time of data collection Yuri was a member

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of the university's intensive English programme. This two-year module consists of a minimum of 24 classroom contact hours per week, ostensibly in an English-only environment, and aims to help prepare students for potential study abroad placements. The programme is streamed and even though the class I observed Yuri participate in was one of the lower-ranked groups (sixth out of eight), its learners could still be considered to have above-average foreign language skills when compared to Japan's general undergraduate population. Entry onto the programme had ensured that Yuri and her peers were regularly exposed to a wide range of communicative language learning activities, and that discussion and other oral activities played a key role in their L2 development.

The silence which formed the basis for Yuri's stimulated recall occurred during one such speaking activity. The 24 students in her class were invited by their non-Japanese instructor to form small groups of four members in order to discuss a text they had read earlier focusing on physical appearance, a topic easily accessible to them. To help direct the exchange, the teacher provided three discussion questions on the board and afterwards slowly moved around the room monitoring each group of learners, occasionally joining in with discussions but not taking a dominant role in groups' exchanges. Two minutes into the activity, I observed that when the teacher approached Yuri's group (made up of two male and two female students), they immediately ceased talking and remained silent until the instructor moved away again a short time later.

Later in her stimulated recall session, Yuri provided an ingenuous account of her classroom behaviour during the class. When questioned about what she had been thinking at the time the silent episode described above occurred, she recalled:

> I thought 'Oops!' Because we were talking about something else ((spoken while slightly laughing)) if he'd heard what we were talking about, we would've been in trouble, (·hhh) yeah. It doesn't mean I behaved badly in the class, but we drifted onto a different topic so ((sniffs)) we went quiet because we all realised that we were talking about something else. ((sniffs))

Although Yuri and her group had been conducting their discussion primarily in English, she was concerned that their off-topic talk would displease the teacher and stated that when he arrived, 'I thought I'd better behave myself'. This is interesting as her instructor, who has many years of experience teaching in Japan's tertiary sector, was the

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antithesis of what could be called a disciplinarian and conducted his lessons in an approachable, easy-going manner throughout the three sessions I observed. It was therefore highly unlikely the group would have been reproached for straying off-topic during their L2 discussion. This begs the question, what lay behind Yuri's avoidance of relevant talk during this particular classroom event?

We can better understand how her silence emerged if we remember there exists a significant relationship between power disparities and a person's silent behaviour (see Braithwaite, 1990; Saville-Troike, 1985), and correspondingly, as Carlsen (1991) rightly notes, classroom interaction tends to reflect status inequalities and the differences in authority which exist between teachers and their students. The silence that emerged in this particular incident presents a prime example of this phenomenon, with Yuri and her peers employing silence in an attempt to negotiate what they perceived to be a potentially face-threatening encounter with a person deemed to have superior status. Yuri's behaviour was supported at a societal level by Japan's particularistic orientation towards social relationships which reinforces power disparities and results in a well-defined superior-subordinate environment (see Nakane, 1988) in which juniors tend to assume a silent, passive role in the presence of seniors (McDaniel, 2003; c.f. Kurzon, 1992). We may therefore consider Yuri's silence, manifested in the form of her intentional avoidance of talk, to have been an effective defensive strategy that ultimately saw the instructor retreat from the group, and for their L2 talk to resume once more.

Viewed from a complexity perspective, this silence incident during small-group work provides us with a clear example of the dynamic nature of one language learner's silent behaviour and encourages us to consider role of temporal context in learner silence. CDST posits that systems are self-organising and even seemingly fossilised systems are capable of change (de Bot, Lowie & Verspoor, 2007; Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008). In the case of Yuri, her classroom talk system, supported by social and cultural elements encouraging silent behaviour, entered into a silence attractor state when the instructor approached to monitor the group during their L2 discussion. The lack of interaction the instructor encountered would likely have contributed to him continuing on his way, thus providing an example of the reciprocal relationship between learners and their context. The fact that her silence did not persist once the instructor had walked away, illustrates that Yuri's silent behaviour was not a static phenomenon and that fluctuating variables encouraged on-the-fly change within her classroom talk system.

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Jiro: 'I was thinking something else'

At the time of his retrospective interview, Jiro was a second-year Sports Science student studying English once a week at a medium-sized, provincial university in the west of Japan. This language class formed a compulsory component of Jiro's course, and the lessons he attended contained over 50 students, all of whom were male. A member of his university's baseball team, Jiro came across as an intelligent and confident young man whose interests clearly did not lie in the field of foreign language education. Despite this, his record of attendance at the English class was generally good and he did display reasonably proficient receptive L2 skills in comparison to some of his classmates.

During the final session that I observed of his class, Jiro remained silent throughout a choral exercise in which the instructor read aloud a dialogue in English and invited the whole class to repeat after him the various phrases contained within. The dialogue focused on the functional language of how to first reserve and then check into a hotel room. Jiro failed to orally participate for the entire duration of the task, which lasted around nine minutes. He was not alone in his avoidance of talk; the majority of learners in the class remained silent during the exercise and those that did participate did so with such a lack of enthusiasm and expression that I recorded in my research notes their efforts produced what could best be described as 'a terrible murmur of voices'.

In the stimulated recall session, after being shown the relevant section of the observation coding sheet and having listened to a recording of the task, Jiro was quickly able to remember that he had indeed not orally participated in the choral drill task. When I asked him what he had been thinking and feeling during this specific episode of classroom silence, he replied:

> (·hhh) You know, it's like ((clears throat)) er:m always the same lesson so ((spoken while slightly laughing)) all I need to do really is study before the exam and er (...) mmm well I couldn't be bothered. ((spoken while slightly laughing)) That was one thing and (..) (·hhh) er I was thinking something else like it'll soon be break time so I'll be able to take it easy – totally different stuff to the class. ((spoken while slightly laughing))

Jiro's reference to only needing to study for the exam is unsurprising, coming as it does from a learner who is a product of an education system

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which McVeigh (2006) terms Japan's 'examocracy'. The important thing for Jiro is merely to pass the end-of-term exam and gain a credit for the course. He therefore had very little to lose by not participating in the drill as he was indifferent to improving his L2 speaking ability. He knew his oral performance was not being assessed during the activity, and neither would it be subsequently in any examination.

This learner's silent behaviour appears, then, to be very similar to that of Nao, whose disengagement and apathy were strong factors in the emergence of her classroom silence. Jiro used the same phrase as Nao, *mendōkusai* – meaning 'I couldn't be bothered', when he described how he felt during the targeted exercise, and his admission that he was thinking about something completely disconnected to the L2 task in hand illustrates a fairly typical silence attractor which emerges in large-sized Japanese university language classes whose learners have not chosen to be there. However, it is the context of Jiro's silence that differs from Nao's, which I would now like to examine in more depth.

Always surrounded by teammates from his sports club, Jiro was part of a clearly defined sub-group within the classroom. Whilst lessons were in progress I observed there to be little integration and no interaction between members of this Sports Science class's various sporting cliques, and in his retrospective interview Jiro underlined this lack of assimilation when he explained, 'Football club members, they sit at the back and baseball club members, we sit in the front.' Following Sifianou's (1997) work on silence and politeness, we could interpret Jiro's silent behaviour during the targeted choral drill as representing a positive politeness strategy in which his avoidance of talk contributed towards a feeling of solidarity with similarly silent in-group members. Certainly, Jiro considered his actions in the class to be within the public domain and therefore open to the scrutiny of fellow group members whose close physical proximity to each other meant that any L2 oral contributions could be easily heard. Jiro himself made a distinction between his lack of volubility in public contexts such as in a classroom, compared to his private talk:

> But in my case ((clears throat)) in the class, I don't usually- I mean I talk a lot in private life but when it comes to the class, I tend to fall into a long silence or think about something else

Such comments again support the concept that we should not consider a person's silent behaviour to be a static phenomenon, but rather it is

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dynamic and highly dependent upon the here-and-now of contextual factors. From a CDST perspective, we could say that Jiro's silence had been *softly assembled* (Thelan & Smith, 1994), in that it was a non-permanent, adaptive action produced in response to the task in hand and the various contextual influences that were concurrently in play at the time.

When I asked what those in his group would have thought of him if he had actively participated in the choral drill, Jiro's response was, '...maybe my friends would probably think I'm odd- odd.' Indeed, over the course of my three observations of his class, on the rare occasions that members of Jiro's clique did participate in choral drilling, they did so only very briefly and in a theatrical, almost mocking manner – much to the amusement of those around them. Along with Jiro's comments, such performances suggest that active oral participation had come to represent out-of-the-ordinary behaviour for these learners and their classroom silence had emerged as a predictable, consensual norm within the development of the group's classroom L2 talk.

Miho: 'I understood only the name "Shakespeare"'

At the time of her stimulated recall session, Miho, a first-year Fine Arts student at a small municipal university located in a rural area of Japan's main island of Honshu, was studying English for 90 minutes a week in a compulsory class comprising over 25 learners. The non-Japanese instructor of the class rated Miho's cohort as having an L2 proficiency level slightly above average in comparison to undergraduates he had taught at other universities in the area. He ascribed this to the fact that places at Miho's university were highly sought after amongst local high school students attracted by the reduced tuition fees charged by a public institution. Despite this assessment of his learners' L2 abilities, I observed Miho to communicate only once in the target language over the course of the three observation sessions I conducted with her class, and in the final session she remained persistently silent throughout.

It was Miho's silent responses to her instructor's various questions and prompts that I wished to explore in more depth during the stimulated recall interview which followed immediately after the concluding observation session. On a number of occasions during the lesson, the teacher, speaking in the target language, either attempted to elicit verbal answers to short written exercises the students had performed, or tried to interact with the group by posing open-class questions related to various topics which arose as the lesson content progressed. In one particular incident, the class was asked what William Shakespeare was famous for. Miho,

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who up until this point had had her eyes lowered, staring at the textbook open on the desk in front of her, suddenly looked up at the teacher as he spoke but did not attempt to make a verbal response. In her retrospective interview, after being shown the relevant observation coding sheet and listening to an audio recording of the incident, Miho quickly recalled what had happened, explaining:

> At that point, I understood only the name 'Shakespeare' and er a little- I also knew only some titles of his works.

Clearly then, rather than having understood the teacher's L2 utterance in its entirety, Miho had only been able to recognise and process just one word: Shakespeare. Although her recognition of the bard's name momentarily ignited an interest in the teacher's discourse, which was displayed physically by a change in gaze direction and body posture, her inability to comprehend the instructor's whole message proved to be a major contributory factor in her silent non-responsiveness. But attributing Miho's silence to a deficiency in her L2 aural skills does not tell the whole story. As CDST emphasises that multiple concurrent variables may influence one's classroom behaviour at any one time, rather than focusing on the learner in isolation, it would be germane to also consider how the actions of those others present during the interaction contributed to the production of Miho's silence. With this in mind, let us now examine how a primary contextual agent, Miho's instructor, played a key role in attracting her silent behaviour.

The first point to make is that discourse in Miho's class was almost completely dominated by her teacher. That he was responsible for the majority of classroom talk is not particularly remarkable, given the instructor's institutional status and his power in determining topics and accessibility to the floor. But the extent to which he monopolised talk was surprising. During the lesson which provided the focus for Miho's stimulated recall session, data from the COPS revealed that the teacher was responsible for an incredible 96 per cent of all talk, with there being no recorded instances at all of students initiating discourse in the target language. Other studies focusing on interaction in foreign language classrooms (e.g., Tsui, 1985; Yashima, Ikeda AQ1 & Nakahira, Chapter 7 this volume) have also pointed to an acute imbalance in the distribution of classroom talk between educators and learners, but not to the extent found in the current study. This excessive teacher talking time (TTT) appears to have led to the divergent process of what Tannen (1981), drawing on Bateson, calls 'complementary

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schismogenesis', whereby the more the teacher talks, the more silent students become, and the more silent students become, the more the teacher talks.

Furthermore, it appears Miho's instructor may have overestimated the students' abilities to comprehend his English. This contributed to a failure in sufficiently modifying his language, for example, by slowing the pace of delivery or by producing less grammatically/syntactically complex sentences (see Walsh, 2002), with the result being a wall of incomprehensible input for Miho. As Allwright and Bailey (1991) rightly note, it is notoriously difficult to assess learners' levels of cognitive involvement during tasks, and this is particularly true when the activity involves listening. Even so, in her stimulated recall interview, Miho estimated she had been able to understand only about 30 to 40 per cent of the teacher's talk, before quickly adding she thought this estimation was perhaps a little high. The instructor's incomprehensible L2 input was further exacerbated by his tendency either to pause only very briefly or not to pause at all after posing a question or inviting a comment, with the effect that general solicits to the class were liable to blend in to a kind of 'white noise' of teacher talk. Various researchers (e.g., Rowe, 1986; Smith & King, submitted) have highlighted the benefits of educators extending their silent wait time after solicits as a way of combating student non-responsiveness. Extended pauses allow students space for cognitive processing during which they can deal with input and formulate appropriate responses in the target language. From a CDST perspective, a change in her teacher's wait-time behaviour could help shift Miho's classroom discourse system out of its silence attractor state and towards a different trajectory.

Tamaki: 'It's kind of my role to be the listener'

Tamaki was the most highly proficient learner to take part in the study. A first-year undergraduate studying at the same foreign languages-orientated university as Yuri, Tamaki had gained entry into her year's most advanced English class after scoring very highly on the university's institutional TOEFL test. Her class included some learners who possessed near native-like L2 skills, with a number being *kikokushijo* (returnees) (see Kanno, 2003) who had completed the majority of their secondary education abroad. While perhaps not quite up to this level of proficiency, Tamaki nevertheless possessed language skills of a standard high enough to make it unlikely that any episodes of classroom silence on her part would be down to a lack of L2 ability. There is an understandable tendency for language learner silence to be viewed purely as an issue

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related to deficiencies in ability in the target language, but Tamaki's case helps illustrate that the reality of events at the classroom level is not always as straightforward as this, and language learner silence is indeed a complex phenomenon.

The specific incident discussed here which saw Tamaki refrain from talk at a time when talk was reasonably expected of her occurred during an English language content lesson focusing on the topic of art. Following an engaging slide presentation entitled 'What is art?' by Tamaki's instructor, the class divided into groups of four in order to discuss a questionnaire related to this subject which they had completed earlier. This small-group oral exercise lasted for approximately five minutes and saw Tamaki remain silent for the majority of the discussion. When I later questioned her about the incident in the subsequent stimulated recall session, Tamaki explained she had had little to contribute to the discussion because her opinions had not differed greatly from those of the other group members. She went on to reveal that she had been more interested in hearing what the other members had to say, with the implication being that her own similar-sounding answers might have been of little consequence to the rest of the group. This suggests a lack confidence more in the content rather than in the L2 form of any potential utterance and is perhaps a little surprising, coming as it did from a student raised in a society which places such a high value on the building of consensus. Indeed, citing a sociocultural background which stresses the importance of group-mindedness and harmony, Anderson (1993) goes as far to say that Japanese learners who express original ideas and initiate discussion tend to be viewed as social misfits by their peers and, consequently, this type of behaviour is not usually expected in language classrooms. Even so, the L2 ability of Tamaki's class, combined with their past educational and international experiences, meant that they were much more adaptable to the cut and thrust of debate and discussion in English than the average Japanese undergraduates to which Anderson refers. Despite this, Tamaki still remained orally passive during the targeted discussion task, and so it is yet another concurrent variable that emerged during her stimulated recall session that we will now turn our attention to in order to better understand the roots of her silent behaviour.

Tamaki described how, even though she did have a desire to talk, she always seemed to end up as the listener during classroom tasks. When asked why this was, she replied:

> Well it's been like that since the beginning- from the off. By the time I realised, I'd already become like a listener. When I want to speak, I

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> do but mmm it's kind of my role to be the listener. I could be wrong but I'm maybe under the impression that it's my role so I've become someone who doesn't initiate speaking much.

From this extract we can see that Tamaki's self-concept in relation to her co-participants appears to act as an important agent influencing her interactional behaviour during oral tasks. Here, the immediate context appears to help shape Tamaki's thoughts and behaviour, and, in turn, she exerts an influence on the context, hence distinction between the two becomes blurred. She sees herself more as an orally passive listener rather than as an initiator of interaction in classroom situations. This insight reflects the fact that identity construction (see Edwards, 2009; Morita, 2012) can be a useful avenue of inquiry for the CDST silence researcher wishing to trace back the multiple routes of individual learners' classroom silences. Recently, applied linguists such as Richards (2006) in relation to classroom talk and Ushioda (2009) writing about language learner motivation, have found Zimmerman's (1998) model of social and discoursal identity to be a helpful analytical framework for exploring interaction-relevant identity. Explained briefly, this framework includes three aspects of identity: 'discourse identity' which dynamically shifts on a moment-by-moment basis so that within the course of an interaction a person may take on the role of questioner, listener, initiator, and so on; 'situated identity' relating to the specific context of an interaction and which would include participants orientating themselves towards the roles of, for example, teacher or student within a classroom situation; and finally, latent 'transportable identity' based on physical or cultural insignia that '"tag along" with individuals as they move through their daily routines' (Zimmerman, 1998, p. 90). The interesting point about Tamaki's performance during the discussion task in question relates to Zimmerman's idea of a dynamic discourse identity. Throughout the activity, although Tamaki remained engaged and displayed supportive non-verbal responses to her co-participants' talk, her discourse identity patently did not shift as the interaction progressed and remained steadfastly fixed in the role of listener. This empirical observation of Tamaki's performance during the 'What is art?' discussion, in tandem with her spoken data gained from the subsequent retrospective interview, seems to suggest that Tamaki's L2 classroom talk system has settled into a stable attractor state of silence. Her sense of self, contextually supported by past experiences and the here-and-now behaviour of co-participants during L2 tasks, leads to a repeated orientation towards a listener discourse identity, and it is this identity which

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seems to be a major factor amongst the multiple, concurrent agents supporting her silent behaviour.

Conclusion

By employing a stimulated recall methodology, backed up by empirical qualitative data garnered from relevant classroom observations, this chapter explored event-specific examples of Japanese university language learner silence. Such an approach has allowed for a fine-grained analysis of individual episodes of classroom silence, thereby providing insights into why students refrained from talk in certain situations and what they were thinking or feeling whilst these silent episodes were in progress. The study's series of retrospective interviews resulted not only in cognitive-related data concerning learners' concurrent interpretations of silence events at the micro level of classroom interaction, but also provided a useful forum in which interviewees were able to voice their perceptions about co-participants, the L2 tasks they encountered, and to express fundamental beliefs about their silent behaviour, hence providing an insight into how cognitive and contextual factors may be dynamically interrelated.

The results of the study point towards the underlying complex nature of language learner silence, highlighting it to be a phenomenon which may emerge during any number of L2 oral task activities. The current study focused on five event-specific instances of silence which arose in the following scenarios: during whole-class choral drills; in the course of small-group discussions; and following a teacher's general solicits to the class. Viewed through the prism of complex dynamic systems theory we can see that single cause-effect explanations for why participants in the study failed to talk in classroom situations where talk was expected of them are not valid, and that in reality multiple, interconnected concurrent variables were at play influencing learners' silent behaviour on a moment-by-moment basis. The diverse set of silence attractors uncovered in the study include learner-internal factors (relating to areas such as L2 processing, identity construction and affect), in addition to a myriad of external environmental factors (with elements and agents at classroom, institutional and societal levels). Because silence emerges from such a wide range of starting points, and because it is both educationally and culturally supported in Japan, learners in the study appeared to be easily drawn towards what is the seemingly normal behaviour of not speaking in their language classes.

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Transcript convention

(..)	pause of about 0.5 second	It means (..) oak tree in English
(…)	pause of about 1 second	Er (…) I couldn't be bothered
(2)	pause of about 2 seconds	Let's see (2) it was last Wednesday
?	question intonation	Are you sure?
-	abrupt cut off	There were nine- ten to choose from
(·hhh)	inhilation	(·hhh) That was close
(hhh)	aspiration	(hhh) Let's get started
((sniffs))	other details	This is totally safe ((falls off chair))
°°	quieter than surrounding talk	I'm fine °really°

(adapted from Richards, 2003)

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