Research on the English Silence Classroom in Chinese Universities

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Abstract: This phenomenon of silent English class almost reflects the common fault of current college English classroom education in China. It clearly reveals that the discussion-based English classroom education in Europe and America is not easy to popularize in our country’s universities. At the same time, it is easy to cause the embarrassment of English teachers asking students to answer questions or hastily picking up a student to answer questions to some extent. What’s more, it triggered a chain reaction, causing more students to join the group of silent students. This runs counter to scientist Mazur’s plan to pay more attention to peer discussions and to let students adopt active learning methods, eager to strengthen teaching through the same treatment as scientific research. Based on this common phenomenon in English class, this paper analyzes the “components” of the student who is silent in class, selects a different angle, briefly explores the inner and essence of the phenomenon with a psychological change of the process between students, and interprets the phenomenon of silence in a shallow layer. It aims at providing a perhaps useful inspiration for how to solve this problem in class.

Introduction

Although in the eyes of some western scholars, some Chinese universities are gradually ranking higher and higher in the world at present, there is a serious gap between the English class of most Chinese universities and the current new thinking education. That is under the premise that the teacher does not clearly indicate that answering questions in class or participating in class discussions and speaking questions can earn points and rewards, most students will choose silence and rarely take the initiative to participate in the class to the full degree actively. It is just the opposite of the active participation of students from the Europe and America in the class to express their own ideas. Meanwhile, English classroom learning environment research values a student cognition paradigm that focuses on the ways in which students perceive their learning environments and react to their learning tasks [1]. That is to say, some students who choose to be silent think on their own. Even if they have their own independent thoughts, they are neither open nor shared with others.

At present, English has become a “stumbling block” in the development of many students, and the learning status of middle school students in English classroom teaching is still not ideal[2]. The current situation of college English classroom education in China is not optimistic. Apart from the problem of merit score education in some education groups for Level 4, level 6, there is also a serious “virus” in English silent classes that is gradually spreading and spreading. Moreover, some scholars have conducted surveys on the
phenomenon of silence in English classes alone. From 2002 to 2011, the research on silence in English classes showed an upward trend. Since 2011, the degree of attention has decreased somewhat. The proportion of related research on classroom silence in the first five years (2003 - 2007) was 5.4%, while that in the second five years (2008 - 2012) was 94.5%, and such research peaked in 2011. At the same time, the data show that the proportion of ordinary universities is 65.1%. 14.1% in higher vocational colleges and 2.1% in independent colleges. The results show that the research on silence in English classes is on the rise.

The increase in the study of English silence class reflects the seriousness of the current silence class in our country. The increasing trend of silence class shows that the atmosphere in most college English classes in our country is not active and the interaction between teachers and students is not high. In college, the teaching mode of large classes is a fixed mode in which teachers speak and students listen. Students passively accept it below[3]. It is not enough to the ideal interactive teaching, which is to create a multilateral and interactive teaching environment, and to achieve the collision and blending of different viewpoints in the process of equal exchange and discussion between the two sides of teaching so that it can stimulate the initiative and exploration of both sides of teaching. To achieve a teaching method to improve the teaching effect [4]. English learning stays in the old-fashioned receiving education instead of the open discussion education in Europe and America. Moreover, this phenomenon is not limited to technical schools and ordinary universities, and is not common in “211” and “985” universities. More importantly, the simple English classroom bonus incentive mechanism can only treat temporary symptoms but not root causes. Over time, the silent students will remain silent as usual. Moreover, this mechanism does not guarantee to arouse the enthusiasm of most English classroom students immediately who are used to silence. It is difficult to solve the silence phenomenon effectively.

As a result, the students hinder from effectively improving their oral English ability, making their communicative ability very difficult, and their performance will become more and more obvious. Some research shows that students in high groups are more active in class, but students in low groups are silent in English class [5].

The Current Situation of Classroom Silence

The phenomenon of classroom silence is a newly arisen phrase in recent years. The simple explanation is that in the classroom, students who do not take the initiative to answer questions, do not actively ask questions and participate in classroom discussions. It is a phenomenon of lack of dialogue, interaction and exchange between teachers and students.

The study of classroom silence originated from the concern about “dumb classroom” in English teaching. After finding that this phenomenon or behavior is not unique to English classroom, it gradually extends to ordinary classroom. As for the definition of classroom silence, it is general believed that one of its main components is that students have no classroom expression or silence in class [6].

However, after careful study, the definitions of different scholars are not the same. For example, some scholars regard classroom silence as a phenomenon that students are unwilling or unable to ask questions in class, while others regard it as a phenomenon or behavior that students cannot and dare not answer questions or ask teachers questions in class. These definitions involve “unable to express”, “unwilling to express” and “afraid to express” classroom silence. In fact, the three factors influencing classroom silence may vary greatly: “inability to express” often caused by students’ lack of ability or knowledge. “unwilling to
express” is mostly influenced by whether expression can bring value (for example, in some classes, students feel that there is no difference between answering questions and not answering them); However, “dare not express” is mostly motivated by self-protection, fearing that classroom expression will bring some negative or unsafe consequences and remain silent.

Analysis of Four Silent Groups in English Class

Students Who Wait for Answers

Generally speaking, it refers to those groups who want to learn knowledge but are not willing to take the time to think hard and finally wait for other students to reveal the correct answer through their own answers. This kind of students usually do not think deeply enough, especially when the questions raised by the teachers are deep, they tend to paralyze themselves: the difficulty of the examination should not be so great, we should only understand it, and as for the answer, let those “Daniel” come on! Therefore, when facing the teacher’s question, it is usually an expression that I do know few. Who knows who will answer it?

They are psychologically used to thinking about such difficult problems is very nerve-racking and very time-consuming. It is better to choose to stay silent and wait for those who actively answer to answer first. They can save both energy and time to solve the basic problems which not fully understood before.

Moreover, those who wait for the answer usually have such characteristics. For example, they may feel that they do not like to show their thoughts in front of others naturally and are not used to being the focus of people. Therefore, when waiting in class cannot solve their doubts in their hearts, they may be able to find a teacher to solve the problem alone after class. This also provides a good reason for silence in class!

Students Who Are Game Thinkers

If critical thinking is necessary for any student, it is a must for a university student [7]. Maybe the game thinkers are the same. The so-called thinkers generally refer to those groups who vaguely know the answer to the question or have new ideas. They often have a deeper understanding of the problem and can follow the rhythm of the teacher more easily, but they will consider their own benefits and costs in their own invisibility. When none did think of the answer to the question, or they were thinking about the answer to a question raised by the teacher, perhaps they already had a clearer answer in their hearts. For game thinkers, there might be a situation at this time:

In class, when other students answered the teacher’s questions, I would also answer with them. When none could answer the teacher’s questions, even if I knew the answer to the question, I would not answer the teacher’s questions, because it would make me appear out of group. I will answer the question when the teacher calls the roll call. If the teacher does not call the roll call and just you that take the initiative to answer the teacher’s question, it will appear that you are so fond of showing off your cleverness that are going to be rejected by everyone after class[6].

At the same time, they may also consider if they have learned some authoritative explanation before and the answer is just different from the teacher’s, if they speak their thoughts whether the difference between the two explanations will damage the teacher’s face
and make the teacher unable to stand down. Will it lead to some influence on the final evaluation of this subject of English? However, at the same time, some hope that their questions be answered by the teachers. As a result, in the balance between the two, they hope that someone can break the deadlock and end the silence, while their psychology is in infinite thinking and game. Because there are many worries and hesitations, they finally choose silence. According to the principle of game theory, first the silent choice in this case is not to put yourself at the risk of falling academic performance evaluation. Second, you can wait for others’ thinking to verify whether there are still shortcomings in your thinking. Third, you can just have a look at the mobile phone news or flip back the contents in this free section.

**Students Who Are Lack of Confidence and with Face Engineering**

Those who lack confidence mean literally that those students are unable to speak or answer questions in class because they are not confident enough. Almost all English classes have those who are more or less unsure. Being unfamiliar with the pronunciation of English as a second language is one of the reasons. However, the most important thing is the strangeness of English class teachers’ requirements for communicating in English and English teachers’ open answers to questions. In the deep sense, this may involve our culture and language. Now spoken from the classroom, it is obvious that one is timid in answering one’s own questions, afraid of other people’s negative views on one’s own, also afraid of being criticized by the teacher, worried that one’s answer to the wrong question is not well evaluated or even ridiculed by other students. At this moment, one may have such a situation:

If I do not answer, other people will not think I am very poor. If I answer, if I answer wrong, others will think that I am stupid. I usually don’t take the initiative to answer the teacher’s questions in class, because if I answered them, and then other students answered them more comprehensively and better, I would appear to be very poor and low. In this way, the silent students would think that it would hurt their face. Before answering, I should make sure that I have enough knowledge to answer this question. Otherwise, what I said is wrong is to embarrass myself, which may lead to a laughingstock [6].

If you are not confident enough, you will be afraid of your own answer. If you are wrong, you will lose your face. If you do not answer, you obviously do not have to worry about such consequences. Therefore, even if the teacher earnestly hopes that the eyes of the students be swept over, you will not dare to look at them.

Because you are afraid of been named, after being named, you may take the above risks. If you do not answer correctly, you will lose your face and not lift your head. Those who do not care happen to be the opposite of those who attend. Because they have no interest in the content of English classes, they have neither the fear nor the fear of self-loss. It is obviously the best choice to lower head and work on one’s own. Only when the teacher’s eyes swept or approached can one raise one’s head, so silence in English communication will naturally occur. This is the general expression of deep indifference. Perhaps for them, after entering the university, without the constant supervision of teachers and parents, and without such clear learning objectives as the college entrance examination, those who do not care deeply gradually lose their motivation to learn. In addition, the employment situation of college graduates is even more serious under the background of the expansion of university enrollment and the global economic crisis, which makes them feel confused about their own future, lose their confidence in learning and are also interested in classroom participation [8].
Students who do not Care about Deep and Shallow Layers

Looking at shallow indifferent people, this indifference refers to indifference to answering questions and sharing one’s own views, not indifference to English learning content. This is a highly charged space: students are invariably and strongly motivated to learn, but at the same time desperately anxious to pass whatever language test faces them [9]. They often have nothing to care. The only thing they care about is whether they understand this knowledge or not. There is a kind of attitude that the classroom answers have nothing to do with me. Although they are different from those who do not care deeply, they pay more attention to their mastery of the knowledge. However, the shallow indifference still adds to the silence atmosphere in the classroom to a certain extent, because most of them hold the intention of only understanding rather than participating in the classroom. There is no special meaning of actively responding to the teacher’s questions. They still choose silence in English class, and there is a tendency that they cannot change.

Discussion and Conclusion

According to the above method, the silent groups in English classes currently divided into four groups. We can know that apart from those who lack confidence and those who wait for answers, the other two are relatively calm groups in the classroom. Calmness refers to the understanding of a problem that has reached a new level or does not care about it at all. The latter is due to their low enthusiasm for learning new knowledge, as well as their procrastination and laxity. It is precisely because of the existence of leisurely groups that people gradually form unconscious game psychology, which is similar to conformity psychology. The unintentional generation of game consciousness increases the sense of strangeness and fear of answering questions and discussing non-native language exercises and pronunciations for people who are “born and raised”.

The game means that when a single individual interacts with other individuals in behavior, the process regarded as a game after fully considering the behavioral interests and the strategic methods adopted by itself and other individuals under the action of rationality [10]. There are disagreements about appropriate methods for game thinking skills instruction and assessment, and various individual and situational factors are believed to influence the development and use of such skills [11]. Therefore, in essence, the game is your interaction with others.

At this time, the waiting respondents still did not choose to reply, but waited for other students to answer the teacher’s questions. This is somewhat similar to the “smart pig game” in game cases. Similarly, for game thinkers, the trade-off between advantages and disadvantages is more obvious. Choosing to answer the teacher's question or not will face different situations. Those who wait for the answer are waiting for more hardworking students to first share their views, similar to “piggy”. If they run over and press the switch to put down their food at this time, there is no doubt that their benefits will be minimal, because compared with “big pig”, they will face the situation of time-consuming thinking and wrong answer causing negative effects in their eyes. At this time, the game thinker is even more so, because originally in the game case, if there is a “big pig”, someone will always take the lead in answering the questions. The key is that the game thinker does not have the qualification of “big pig”, is a more cautious “pig”!
Looking at another object, it is obvious that the party with low self-confidence is also waiting, because of the low self-confidence, the factors of low self-confidence that are considered in some aspects will occupy a great influence position, such as the teacher’s opinion, the classmate’s discussion, his own image and face, etc. At this time, the situation of the deep indifferent person is very different from that of the shallow indifferent person. One is to look at the mobile phone by oneself, the other is to pay full attention to the content on the teacher PPT or to browse through the newly borrowed material book sometimes, but there is no desire to answer the teacher’s question. Perhaps only when the student named will he stand up and say his own thoughts. This kind of situation may give false impression to some people who lack confidence in their knowledge of the person, “none of the people who are better than me have answered this question. Obviously, my thinking is still not enough. It would be bad if I answered the wrong question rashly and embarrassedly.”

The result of this small scene is that people who are not confident enough are waiting for those students who know the answer but do not want to answer the questions at the beginning, but they do not know if they want such groups to open their mouths unless are named by the teacher. Those who are lazy and waiting for the answer are also waiting, but those students who think in the game (in fact, they do not realize that they are linking the answer to their own conflicts of interest) are also waiting to start answering first. Therefore, the silence class is gradually formed (assuming, of course, that the students outside the four groups did not answer the questions at first) and a stalemate arises.

After repeated analysis and comparison of major categories of machine learning, some scholars believe that only reinforcement learning with reward/punishment signals can connect brain information as environmental feedback signals with trainees to form a unified multi-agent reinforcement learning system. Moreover, reinforcement learning with feedback information is a learning algorithm widely accepted and used by neurophysiology and psychologists [12]. In the face of this temporarily impossible group, the inducement of reward signals is not enough, and the middle-term blandness will form inertia. Because speaking in a silent silence, the expressive nature of speaking this action greatly exceeds the content of words, so the first person to break the silence must be the person who actively challenges the situation in order to break the silence and not the man who want to avoid being punished. If there is no such “warrior” willing to break the silence voluntarily in an English class, then the silence class is inevitable! At the same time, professor Zhang XueXin [13] of Fudan university initiated a new exploration of the “split-class” teaching mode in the classroom reform, establishing a split-class operation mode, and explaining how to integrate the teaching method and the discussion method in the split-class teaching. This has pointed out a new direction for the college English classroom teaching reform and provided great inspiration for how to solve the silent class problem, too.

References


