

## An Analysis of Silence in English Class

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**Abstract:** Silence is a common phenomenon in daily life and communication, and it also exists in the process of learning English. In class, the teacher speaks alone, and the students are in a state of “silence”, which is not conducive to the interaction and communication between teachers and students, and affects the quality of teaching. Teachers have noticed this phenomenon and are trying to find effective ways to make changes. This paper aims to analyse and comment on the phenomenon of class silence from the perspectives of its basic content, its research history and current situation, its research methods, its existing problems and its development trend.

### 1. Introduction

Silence, like speech, is one of the means of human communication, and both are a sign in nature. Class silence refers to the phenomenon that students do not speak actively, do not participate in classroom communication and remain silent to teachers' questions in classroom teaching activities. Language learning requires students to speak, otherwise it is difficult for students to achieve good results in language learning.<sup>3</sup> In response to the silence of students in English classes, many teachers say the situation makes them feel awkward because they do not know how to ameliorate it. The silence of students not only makes it difficult for students to improve their own learning, but also does great harm to teachers' teaching enthusiasm.

Silence in class is a common phenomenon. Whether students can speak actively in class also affects many aspects on students, not only their character scores, but also their confidence in learning and the above all are laying a foundation for the future. The classroom cannot merely have a few people to be eloquent in speech, which is not much meaningful. Teachers should lay stress on the situation of silence in classes. There are many kinds of categories for class silence. As organizers, guiders and regulators, the teachers in classroom need to observe and record silence in classroom, with a new awareness to understand and analyse the class silence, together with other teachers to explore the truth, and the last to find a way to reduce or even eliminate the phenomenon so as to establish a kind of high-quality and high-efficiency classroom. I believe that through research and analysis, we can pull the plug and dig deeper implications behind silence. We should make ourselves to feel, to reflect, to practice, so as to directly provide theoretical basis for teachers.

Teachers should carefully observe class silence in classes and take corresponding measures to improve it. However, some teachers directly ignore or even condone silence, or take measures but do not improve it. Silence is a common phenomenon in daily life and communication. This phenomenon also exists in the process of English learning, especially in junior high school. In today's English teaching, the junior middle school English curriculum requirements for pronunciation teaching is relatively more, also need to pay attention to pronunciation and intonation and oral English teaching.<sup>1</sup> Oral English teaching in the class need to be relatively abundant, giving students more opportunities to open mouth. However, there are few classes are speaking-oriented classes. Teachers often emphasis on listening, reading and writing, because the exam is not targeted at speaking, so teachers generally all speak Chinese in class, and the students answer the questions in Chinese, leading to less oral practices. Consequently, after graduating from junior high school, students are with poor pronunciation and intonation, which is not conducive to high school English learning. Because junior middle school English learning is a threshold of English and is also an

important transition of a high school learning, in order to lay a solid foundation for future learning and conform to the requirements of the standard of teaching, in the classroom, teachers should attach importance to speaking and pronunciation teaching and lay great stress on the phenomenon of classroom silence. It becomes particularly important to let the students open their mouth more.

## **2. The Research History and Current Situation of Class Silence**

English class silence affects the teaching efficiency and has become the focus of many researchers. The researchers found and put forward the solutions to the understanding of English classroom to form system through classroom observation to the phenomenon of classroom silence. There are many aspects about silence, such as silence in grammar class, silence in students' communication, the cause and the countermeasure analysis of silence, reflection on and review on active and silent classes and how to make the classroom vivid, etc., reflecting the serious treatment for students' silence phenomenon from contemporary scholars. Some scholars believe that compared with introverted students, extroverted students are livelier and more extroverted in personality, and are better at acquiring language knowledge and skills through communication with others, so extroverted students are easier to break the silence.<sup>2</sup> Some scholars believe that the phenomenon of silence is caused by improper teaching methods of teachers, not only due to personality factors, but also due to the fact that many teachers still use traditional English teaching mode to guide the class, such as mechanical translation teaching method, resulting in students lack of interest and silence in class.<sup>4</sup> Some scholars believe that silence in class is due to the teacher-student relationship. Due to incorrect teaching and disrespect for students, the teacher-student relationship is rigid and students are unwilling to listen to the teacher.<sup>3</sup> Some scholars think that silence is due to life background, student relations<sup>1</sup> and so on.

There still not have enough research in the current study for silence phenomenon, and the research at present is not in-depth. Some elements, such as the grades between different classes and grades between good and bad classes, between boys and girls, between morning and afternoon classes and so on, are related to the study of English class silence phenomenon, and they have not been researched and compared before by scholars, which is a huge project in quantities and I believe it would have a nice development in the future gradually. Silence is a common phenomenon from junior high school to senior high school, even university and graduate school. It seems that the older the grade is, the less students are willing to speak up. This is a problem worth pondering.

## **3. Analysis of the Research Methods on Class Silence Phenomenon**

Many literatures show that scholars tend to use observation method to study English class silence phenomenon, followed by the survey method. This method is convenient and effective use, cost savings, but there will be some deviation on the analysis of the data estimate, because there will be a student performance distortion, resulting in large differences between observation or investigation results and the actual conditions. The following is the process of using observation, investigation and interview.

Survey method: some researchers, as for the research problems, developed a questionnaire to the student. The general problems in the questionnaire are speech times in a day, the reason why to speak, subjects you are willing to speak and so on. It is estimated that students would be very serious while they are filling the questionnaire due to the privacy of the questionnaire, but maybe some of them would fill in this uncarefully because this questionnaire has nothing to do with learning, so some students also only perfunctory. According to the survey report, the majority of students think they would like to give speech on the subjects they like and this is the reason why they are silent in other classes with other subjects, and they make speeches once a day or less, which not only indicates that students make fewer speeches, but also indicates that students are more serious and active about their favorite subjects. It also reflects that the teacher-student relationship affects the occurrence of silence in class. The survey method has the advantages of

achieving large number of subjects, easy statistics, cost saving and so on. It is a good research method.

**Interview method:** The interview method is to make up for the lack of flexibility in the questionnaire survey and the small scope of questions in the questionnaire survey. Some questions cannot truly reflect the real feelings of the respondents. Through in-depth communication with teachers and students, the interview method can understand their real thoughts and serve as an important reference for the survey results. The interview method can investigate the inner thoughts of students and teachers and make the survey results more credible and vivid.

**Observation method:** This is a relatively common research method. By observing the same class for many times, scholars record relevant phenomena and problems, and videotape the whole class for repeated research. The observation method aims to observe the students' real performance in class and make timely records according to the time. The observation method is carried out after the interview method and questionnaire method, mainly to summarize and supplement the results of the above two studies, from theory to practice, observe the classroom silence in real class and students' performance in real class, verify the theoretical knowledge and deepen the study of classroom silence. The following is a recorded report by a researcher (the first line is marked with class time):

0-10min	10-25min	25-40min	40-45min
At the beginning of the class, the students were very enthusiastic. The teacher asked questions on the platform about the homework left last night. Maybe because of the preparation, everyone spoke up actively.	The teacher began to teach new lessons and explain grammar, but the students didn't understand at the beginning. There was no response from the teacher and only one or two people whispered, which indicated that this grammar was probably difficult for the students to accept.	Practice time: the students began to do the exercises according to the teacher's guide. The teacher told them if they do not understand they can raise hands to ask. The class has a lot of students with confusion, and some of them have learned the knowledge points then to show off around the students and some of them have not learned so to ask everywhere, and also some of them have not learned but do not ask so they do the exercises randomly and disorderly.	Summing up time: the teacher asked that whether there is still someone do not understand the grammar, and there is no one to raise his hand, so the teacher assigns homework and leave the classroom. The students complain and be busy saying that this knowledge point so difficult.

Above is of a high school English sophomores observation notes, the note is relatively single, which can be unilateral to show that students more active for the knowledge points that they understand, but be silent for the knowledge points they don't understand and also dare not ask teachers and students. This goes to adolescent psychological characteristics, which is afraid that if I asked some questions easy enough for others, then other people would comment he or she is not clever, reflecting individual character characteristic. Many other scholars have observed students' silence in class, most of which are related to personality, teacher-student relationship and teaching methods as I mentioned before. The observation method has the advantages of being meticulous, can be confirmed repeatedly, and is more real. It is widely used.

#### 4. The Solved/Remained Problems and the Development Trends

Up to now, English classroom silence phenomenon research still have long way to go. Many researchers put forward the problems and solutions, so far, have to solve the phenomenon of silence with task-based teaching, also have to solve the problem by discussion method. Some good results were obtained in the experiment, but in fact are temporary, and that English classes can't always use task-based teaching or discussion method to proceed. Nowadays, new teaching development proposed the new challenge to teachers, students' psychological development is also the need for long-term efforts to resolve for teachers. Students and teachers should establish "you and I" model of the new relationship between teachers and students. Teachers should take care of students with

love, to make the students feel good in the heart so as to enable students to like English subject and make the class active.

## **5. Conclusion**

The contemporary studies of English class silence is somewhat little, mostly is the study of university students' classroom silence phenomenon, I think there are many problems to be solved and practice, such as the research direction should be diverse, the research can be studied from the aspects ignored by most researchers such as the relationship between the silence phenomenon and gender and the relationship between the silence and age, and comparable with the relationship between the good classes and the poor classes, the relationship with the class time, etc.. While many research investigation and observation are tedious, but in order to find and solve the problem of activating English classes that often appear silence, we should attach importance to it, for as soon as possible to stop the bad situation.

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