

# Analyses and Solutions of Students' Reticence in New-Type English Listening and Speaking Classroom in China

Haijun Wang<sup>1</sup>, Guangfei Feng<sup>2,\*</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Foreign Language School, Northeast Normal University, Changchun, China

<sup>2</sup>Jilin University of Finance and Economics, Changchun, China

Wanghj512@nenu.edu.cn

\* The corresponding author

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**Abstract:** The students' reticence in English classroom is a long-existed problem in Chinese Universities. Many Chinese scholars did various researches on this phenomenon for the purpose of improving English teaching. With new techniques such as multi-media and internet permeating and being applied in the English classrooms, the phenomenon does not seem to get better but worse, the former researches need to be put forward in order to meet with new situation. This article followed and observed English listening and speaking classrooms assisted by new techniques, collected data via questionnaire and interview among both the teachers and students in order to analyze the cause factors and propose proper solutions for this new situation.

## 1. Introduction

The students' reticence in college English class in China is a long-existed and disturbing problem to many teachers and students; it is especially obvious in listening and speaking class. In accordance with the communicative teaching method, the speaking class needs students' active participation and should focus on oral output, while many Chinese students lack enthusiasm in classroom participation and even have rejection tendency, which is even obvious in new-type class assisted by modern teaching means, compared with traditional type of class.

There are varieties of reasons for students' reticence in traditional classrooms, on which Chinese scholars did various researches. Generally speaking, the reticence can be categorized into two kinds-positive reticence and passive reticence (Jian Wang & Jing Zhang, 2008), the factors of which include classroom environment, national culture, students end and teachers end, etc. With the development of educational reform in China in recent years, new types of teaching means occur with multi-media and internet permeating and being applied in classroom teaching, and the former researches on students reticent are not specific for this condition. Compared with reticence in traditional classes, what difference does the one in new-type class have? What are the factors? Are there any appropriate solutions?

For these reasons, this article specifically did some observations and researches on this new-type English listening and speaking classroom, analyzed the causing factors via questionnaire survey and interview, pointed out the connections between the type of classroom and students' reticence, and suggested some solutions for teachers and students.

## 2. The Type of Classrooms

While there are different categorizations for the type of classrooms, for example, according to communicative approach, there may be communicative classroom, collaborative classroom, task-based classroom, etc., this article mainly focuses on the teaching means for the purpose of this research. And for this consideration, the new-type classroom is defined as the classroom with modern teaching means such as multi-media and internet, classroom without these means is considered as traditional classroom.

## **2.1 Traditional Classroom**

Without consideration of the teaching measures guided by different theories, the traditional classroom in this article is defined as the classroom with only blackboard and chalk as teachers demonstrating and teaching means mainly through which teachers knowledge delivery and students acquisition can be realized. The communication and exchanging between students and teachers are rather direct without other intruding factors. Compared with new-type classroom, traditional classroom has defects such as low efficiency and limited amount of information.

## **2.2 New-type Classroom**

On the contrary, the new-type classroom in this article is defined as classroom with many other electrified means besides blackboard and chalk, such as multi-media, internet, language lab system, even computers at the students' end. The teacher-student communication and exchanging is realized by these means, with higher efficiency of information demonstration and larger amount of information. Compared with traditional classroom, the new-type classroom has defects such as indirect communication and more distracting factors.

## **3. Research Design**

### **3.1 Research Questions**

The research object of this article is non-English majors of Northeast Normal University(NENU) enrolled in 2017, who must have two terms of compulsory English courses in the first grade and continue English learning via optional courses since grade two. Students must meet high requirements in English learning at the end of university (College English Curriculum Requirements (for trial implementation), Ministry of Education of China). In the process of English teaching, the university focuses on cultivation of students' output competence, that is the improvement of writing and speaking ability, among which speaking is rather important. So lots of teachers adopted communicative measures in classroom teaching.

NENU had great investment in English teaching reform, all English classroom have been networked and equipped with modern multi-media devices. The students are all well aware of the importance of English and have good motivation in English learning. With modern means of information demonstration devices at the teachers end and positive subjective initiative at the students end, it is reasonable that there shouldn't be reticence in the classroom, but most teachers reported that there are passive response in listening and speaking classroom, and the students reticence is a common phenomenon, still there are some students complaining about it, that is to say, the reticence is a phenomenon both teachers and students are not willing to see in classroom. Since the two main subjects in classroom are both rejecting reticence, why does this phenomenon still exist? Considering this, this article proposed the following research questions:

- 1) What are the main causing factors of the reticence in new-type English listening and speaking classroom?
- 2) Are there any correlation between students' reticence and new type of teaching means?
- 3) What solutions can students and teachers could refer to?

### **3.2 Research Methods**

This research observed generally the 2017 enrollment of NENU, then did case study on typical individuals, collected data by questionnaire and interview, verified the data by the classroom observation (Qiufang Wen, 2004) for the purpose of finding out the cause factors of students' reticence in new-type English listening and speaking classroom and then proposing appropriate solutions.

#### **3.2.1 Classroom Observation**

This research randomly followed and observed ten grade-one English speaking and listening classrooms for one term. According to the teaching arrangement, the class is scheduled once two

weeks, 1.5 hours one time, the total observing time of the term is 120 hours. Natural observation was adopted with no intervening in the classroom and no explanation for the observation so that the observation objects could not be distracted and the data collected could be surely objective and effective.

### **3.2.2 The teachers' questionnaire and interview**

The objects include 43 teachers in college English department of NENU (2017)

### **3.2.3 The students' questionnaire and interview**

The objects include grade-one non-English majors enrolled in 2017 (first term), totally number is 328 and 326 effective returned; the interview is among the monitor, English monitor, and a randomly selected student of each lass.

## **4. Main Causing Factors of Reticence in New-type English Listening and Speaking Classroom**

Based on the former researches on reticence in college English classroom, this research chose to ignore the irrelevant factors such as students' individuality, emotion, confidence, anxiety, and educational background and teachers' classroom management and questioning strategy but to focus on the classroom type and teaching means in order to set forth the main factors of reticence in new-type English listening and speaking classroom.

### **4.1 Factors of Information Demonstrating**

95% of the students' questionnaire take the information demonstrating as the main factor; students' description in the interview can be concluded as the following three aspects:

#### **4.1.1 Too much**

One factor is that the information demonstrated is too much. It is well known that it is better that the delivery end and the receiving end of the knowledge information in classroom be synchronous, so that the receiving end could have proper understanding and respond reasonably. Although the blackboard handwriting in traditional classroom is low efficient, its amount could meet students receiving and responding process. While the multi-media classroom goes to another extreme-the teacher cares too much about demonstrating relevant information but ignoring students receiving capability, resulting in most students not knowing what to do, even the teachers teaching intention. The amount of information the teacher demonstrates goes beyond the students, which leads to their common response of filtering, selecting among these over-loaded amount of information in their brain and struggling in pondering. The observable behavior of this process is reticence which is different from positive and passive reticence (Xiangqian Liu, 2005), the author would like to call this forced reticence.

#### **4.1.2 Too varied**

Another factor is that the information demonstrated is too varied. Because of the convenient teaching means, the information demonstrated is so extensively quoted, complicated, and distracting that the students tend to be dazzled and puzzled [3]. One example in point is observation of a teacher teaching a class topic of which is dieting, the information demonstrated is kinds of snacks all over the world. The teacher explained that it is for the purpose of making the class fun, but obviously the cost of this is that the class loses its orientation and the students get lost in it with all sorts of reverie in their minds, the observable behavior of which is reticence and lack of response to teachers questioning and task arrangement. Most interviewed students have the same response to this because the college students have divergent thinking and too varied information may lead them into lots of associations so that it is easy for them to deviate from the teaching and keep in silence with no response, even get into a state of wandering thought during the whole class. The author would like to call this orienting reticence.

### **4.1.3 Too fast**

Still another factor is that the information is demonstrated too fast. The multi-media means of teaching has an advantage of high efficiency and time saving, it can demonstrate much more information than blackboard handwriting in the same amount of time. While most teachers demonstrate information at the speed faster than that of students receiving and processing the information that the students have to be faced with new information without processing the former one and responding, result of which is that they could only keep in silence. For example, in the class observation a teacher turns the slides at the speed of 15.8 seconds, while each slide contains quite a lot information for the students to process. The interviewed students report that they could hardly finish reading the slide even know what the content is. The teacher explains that she considers the teaching design and progress of the class. The teacher ignores the students' capability while designing the teaching software and arranging the class progress, only focus on an excellent teaching design. While the intention is good, the result is not satisfying. The class designing should not neglect the essential but should focus on the students whose receiving speed and acceptability should be taken into consideration, leaving them enough time to process and respond, avoiding reticence. The author would like to call this responding reticence.

### **4.2 Factors of Technique**

This factor refers to the technique obstacles students have to face while studying in new-type English listening and speaking classroom and applying internet and multi-media means in studying. Some students in the classroom observation were found to be unfamiliar with the multi-media demonstrating means, not knowing how to keep in step with the teacher. Two of the observed classrooms are computer labs with students' end, some students in the classroom are so busy with the computer manipulation that some of them even choose to quit following the teacher and set themselves in silence. Some interviewed students report that some of the previewing and reviewing tasks set by the teacher demand computer work, while some of the students are not familiar with computer manipulation, or there may be defects in the learning system, which may hinder their preparation and even cost them large amount of time. This result in students' psychological repulsion and behavioral retard, observable behavior of which in the classroom is lack of response and classroom reticence.

## **5. Correlation between Reticence and New-Type Teaching Means**

According to the above analysis, it is not difficult to observe that there are certain correlations between students' reticence and new type of teaching means. The interviewed teachers are all experienced and well qualified in both traditional and new-type classrooms, 92% of whom reflected that the students' reticence is long-existed and the one of new-type classroom is even worse than that of traditional classroom. The interviewed students had contact with traditional classroom before college, most of whom reflected that they would like to look and listen in the new-type classroom not because they wouldn't like to speak but because the time doesn't permit. On the contrary, they could have enough time in traditional classroom to compose their ideas and they are more willing to speak out. Based on this, the author has the idea that the teacher should exert the teaching means properly and adopt appropriate strategies in new-type classroom so that the problem of students' reticence could be solved.

## **6. Solutions Students and Teachers Could Refer to**

Correspondingly, the teachers could at least adopt certain strategies at present to solve the problem of students' reticence in new-type classroom. For example, they should at first make clear the teaching objectives, around which they should circle closely when choosing materials to design the teaching software, avoiding too divergent and distracting materials for students; second, teachers should take into consideration the students receiving and accepting limitation and control the speed of demonstrating, leaving the students enough time for processing so that they could give

reasonable response as expected; then the teacher should also care about the students computer manipulating techniques and certain defects in the learning system, not depending too much on the means of computer and internet but adopting the means properly according to physical situation. While the students should try their best to get familiar with the computer manipulation and the teaching system and mode of the new-type classroom, appealing to the teacher for slowing down and further explanation in order to get back to the topic and keep in step with the teacher.

To conclude, although the new-type classroom is an inevitable trend in teaching, exerting modern teaching means properly can really improve the teaching efficiency and quality. Teachers should not depend on it excessively, teachers and students should be considerate for each other and exchange in time so that they could collaborate gradually. Especially, the teacher should keep following and recording the teaching record, according to which they can make proper teaching adjustment, figure out reasonable percentage of exerting the new-type teaching means and design the class accordingly to get ideal effect.

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