# A Study of Students' Silence and Teachers' Questioning Strategies in College English Classroom

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## Abstract

With the development of English language teaching, teachers have paid more and more attention to communicative language teaching and made efforts to encourage classroom interaction. However, many college students are in the habit of keeping silent which discourage teachers and restrict the effective communication between teachers and students. As one of the biggest problems, it has attracted much attention from more and more researchers. This paper here aims to investigate the major causes of students' silence by means of questionnaire and class observation. Through a detailed description and analysis of the collected data, students' learning motivation and reasons for silence in classroom are made clear, anxiety being the main cause triggering students' silence. Meanwhile on the basis of analysis of teachers' teaching mode, the paper points out that teachers' questioning strategies have large influence on students' silence in class, and improper teaching mode are bound to make students feel anxious. Finally, suggestions about improving teaching strategies are put forward for the purpose of lessening students' feeling of anxiety and decreasing their silence in classrooms.
**Key words:** Silence; Motivation; Questioning

## INTRODUCTION

In college English classroom, teachers are often considered having the largest power, dominating the whole teaching process, and all of the students are active and willing to follow his instructions. However, in a practical English teaching class, English teachers are often involved in an embarrassing condition of silent classroom, where most of students are likely to keep silent, with no expression on their face from the beginning to the end of the class. When teachers ask questions, most of them like to lower their heads and keep silent, only a few of them are willing to answer questions actively. Obviously, this state has negative influence on our teaching effect, and under such circumstances, the exploration of the reasons why students keep silent may play an important role in improving our teaching effect.

## 1. RESEARCH REVIEW

Virtually, Chinese students' silence in English class has caught many scholars' attention, and many of them, including foreigners and Chinese,have searched for the main reasons for silent English classrooms from the perspective of Chinese traditional culture and negative education methods. Many of them believed that learning motivation and anxiety are the main reason why students keep silent in college English classroom. Learning motivation has been studied in the field of educational psychology for a long time. Both foreign and Chinese researchers believed that learning motivation is a critical factor for students to learn English well, which help to determine the level of proficiency achieved by different learners.The most extensive research into the role of motivation has been made by Gardner and Lambert. They defined motivation in terms of L2 learner's "overall goal or orientation", and considered that there were two kinds of motivation: integrative and instrumental motivation.

In their mind, the former occurs when the learners wish to identify with the culture of the L2 group, and the latter occurs when the learners' goals for learning the L2 are functional. At the same time, Gardner and Lambert pointed out that "the integrative/instrumental distinction reflects a continuum, rather than alternatives" (Rod Ellis, 1985). Based on Gardner and Lambert's research, Brown (1981; see also Rod Ellis, 1985) identified three types of motivation: global motivation, situational motivation and task motivation. He pointed out that "the intrinsic/extrinsic continuum in motivation is applicable to foreign language classroom around the world ", just as Rod Ellis(1985) argued that " the most successful learners will be those who have both a talent and a high level of motivation for learning". As for anxiety , Brown(1994) argued that foreign language anxiety can be distinguished from other types of anxiety and that it can have a negative effect on the language learning process". According to Krashen's Affective Filter hypothesis, a number of affective variables play a facilitative but non-causal role in second language acquisition.These variables include: motivation, self-confidence and anxiety. In his view, learners with high motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety are better equipped for success in second language acquisition. Low motivation, low self-esteem, and debilitating anxiety can combine together to improve the affective filter and form a "mental block" that prevents comprehensible input from being used for acquisition. In other words, when the filter is "up", it may impede language acquisition. On the other hand, positive affect is necessary, but not sufficient on its own, for acquisition to take place. Obviously, anxiety can influence learners' learning attitude and motivation negatively. It is notable that many researchers consider the negative influence of Chinese traditional culture to be a key factor in the silence of the classroom. In their mind, Chinese learning culture still takes root in the ideas of Confucius and the concept of collectivism. Influenced by these thoughts, students have been accustomed to receive knowledge passively. However, just as Brick has pointed, a particular part of a culture, especially behavior and habit, can change quickly. At present, as times develop, the traditional learning viewpoints are no longer deeply ingrained; students' learning motivation and attitude may change to some

degree because of social development and innovation. Just as Kortazzi&Jin (Zhang, 2016) have said, "Chinese students seem to learn not under the pressure of the ideas of Confucius because the cognition and understanding in Chinese education have changed slowly, which can have impact on beliefs of teaching and learning from students and their parents". Therefore, it can be inferred that the main reason for students' silence in English classroom is not the problem of learning motivation and attitude, but possibly the problem of learning anxiety, which is associated to teachers' classroom domination strategies. Teachers' questioning is the most common and effective teaching method. It is the bond between teachers and students in an communicative classroom, and provide the necessary foundation stone for their communication. An effective questioning in a class must depend on the proper strategies. According to Brown (1994), strategy is carefully prepared, including a series of predetermined plans designed for completing established targets. It can be used to guide teachers to ask different questions and decide how to modify questions, and without strategies, questioning may become a series of simple and casual conversation without continuity and purpose. As a result, many researchers, both in foreign countries and in China, have studied a lot in this field. Some of their research are based on the first class and the second class in foreign countries, and others have been conducted in domestic universities and middle schools such as Wang hengnian,1993; Zhao xiaohong, 1998; Zhouxing,2002. Theses researchers have different ideas about taxonomies of questions. Teachers' questions are one topic that has attracted many researchers' attention these days (Nunan, 1989). Much that defines questioning lies in the features of questions and of their purpose in classroom interaction. "Much of the work, on questions has centred in developing taxonomies to describe the different types" (Ellis, 1994). Several ways of distinguishing on question types have been developed by researchers in the seventies and eighties and they are still being developed. One of the taxonomy is the framework of Long &Sato (Ellis, 1994). It has seven sub-categories under two headings of types. In fact, both Chaudron (Chaudron, 1988) and Nunan (Nunan, 1989) cited in their books a general taxonomy of question types, which is given in Table 1.

**Table 1**
**Taxonomy of Question Types**

| Question type | Explanation | Noted by |
|---|---|---|
| Closed | Have a short, fixed answer, for example "What day is it today?" | Barnes (1969) |
| Open | Typically require a longer, less limited response, for example "What did you do yesterday ?" | |
| Display | Those to which the questioner already knows the answer and is merely testing the respondent's knowledge or understanding. | Brown (1994a,pp. 165) |
| Referential | Those to which the questioner does not know the answer and is genuinely seeking information. | |
| Procedural | Relate to classroom, lesson and student control processes such as "Who is absent today ? | Richards and Lockhart(1996,186-7) |

Continued

| Question type | Explanation | Noted by |
|---|---|---|
| Convergent | often have short answers which "encourage similar student responses" and require low level thought processing, for example "Can you ski ?—"Yes, I can", "No, I can't". | |
| Divergent | necessitate more wide-ranging, longer responses with higher level thought processing for example " Why is the Beatles' music so popular in Japan ?" | |
| Rhetorical | those which the questioner answers him/herself. | |
| Interaction | Comprehension: elicits assurance from the listener that a message has been received correctly. | Chaudron (1988,130-1) |
| | Confirmation checks: assume a positive response and *"allow the speaker to correctly interpret reactions by the listener"* | |
| | Clarification requests: similar to confirmation requests but with a more open answer. | |
| Instructional | Any question presented in the classroom. Presupposes that the question is intended to solicit learner production. | Van Lier(1988,pp.223) |
| Conversational | Any question asked outside the classroom. | |

Display refers to questions for which the teacher knows the answer and which demand a single or short response of the low-level thinking kind. Referential questions, by contrast, demand more thought and generate longer responses and for which the teacher does not know the answer in advance. Richards and Lockhart (Richards and Lockhart, 1996) divide questions into three useful categories: procedural related to classroom procedures such as "Do you know what to do?"; convergent, which requests a short answer around a specific theme such as "Do kids help out with the housework?"; divergent questions, the last, are like referential questions as in "Sally, what do you think?". Their categories differ from the simple display/referential variety in that convergent questions include those to which a teacher may not know the answer but which narrow the range of possible responses, most notably closed questions demanding a yes or no answer.

After questioning, modifying strategies are bound to follow, which is an indispensable part of the whole process of questioning. Among others, Krashen (1982a) quoted in Larsen-Freeman and Long

(Larsen&Long, 1991)has coined the term *comprehensible input* and teachers often modify their speech on the assumption that this enhances comprehensibility. Chaudron (Chaudron, 1988) argues that this heightened comprehensibility maintains communication. After that, other writers, such as Nunan (Nu, 1991), Richards and Lockhart (Richards and Lockhart, 1994) and Larsen-Freeman and Long (Larsen & Long, 1991) have based their own discussions on Chaudron's analysis. The chief work available which reviews and collates research on modification techniques is Chaudron (Chaudron, 1988), who gives a taxonomy of modification techniques, including modified pronunciation, pauses, repetition , rate of speech and so on.

But use of different measures or methods has often led to contradictory findings on the efficacy of modifications.

For example, it is unclear whether modified length of utterance aids comprehension because utterances have been variously measured as words per utterance, sentence or T-unit (Chaudron, 1988; Holland & Shortall, 1997 ).

Research on repetition and rephrasing, the most commonly employed modifications (Chaudron, 1988), also appears to give little consensus. The former was found to aid immediate recall (Cervantes, 1983; see also Chaudron, 1988), though immediate recall may not equate to comprehension. There are also doubts as to the efficacy of the latter (Chaudron, 1988). Chaudron (Chaudron, 1988) concluded from his analysis that: Although more research is clearly called for, with more explicit tests of syntactic complexity in L2 listening comprehension, the current results do not look promising. The other factors involved in simplification of input, namely, elaborations by the way of redundancy - restatements, repetition, synonyms, and so on - need to be more extensively examined.

Wait-time is a type of pause in the teacher's discourse and research has found that increased wait-time can be beneficial. Firstly, learners have more time to process the question and to formulate a response (Chaudron, 1988). Secondly, more learners attempt to respond (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). Also, "the length and complexity of the response increases" (Holley & King, 1971, see also Nunan, 1991).

## 2. DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY OF THE PRESENT STUDY

### 2.1 Research Questions
This study aims to explore the answers to the following research questions:

(a)What are the students' learning motivations?

(b)May students have the feeling of anxiety in class? If yes, what are the reasons?

(c)To which degree may students keep silent in

classroom? Why?

(d)What types of questions do teachers often ask? How may different questions influence students?

(e)Which modifying strategies do teachers often use to motivate students to take part in the classroom more actively so as to multiply classroom interaction and improve teaching effect?

## 2.2 Hypothesis

As a college English teacher for about 20 years, the following hypotheses are put forward with regard to the research questions based on my teaching experience:

(a)students' learning attitude and beliefs have changed a lot as the society develops, and they have various learning motivations, most of which focus on passing the Band-4 and Band-6 examination, satisfactory employment, and barrier free communication.

(b)Most of students feel anxious to some degree in the classroom, and low English proficiency and lack of confidence are the main reasons, which is also one of reasons for students' silence in the classroom.

(c)Not all students are willing to keep silent. Most of students hope to become active in the classroom and want to take an active part in class activities, which needs teachers' positive guidance.

(d)Many types of questions exist in classrooms. Display questions may dominate for various reasons. Teachers have already known the answers, and they only want to check if students have mastered what they have learned. But some students are not interested in simple questions. Referential questions accounted for only a small proportion of all questions partly because that these questions need students' high English level and long time to consider. In addition, no matter which type of questions, teachers' wait-time is often very short, and students have no enough time to think about questions. This questioning strategy can't arouse students' interest in output of language, which may be the key reason for students' silence in classrooms.

## 3. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

### 3.1 Data Collection

The data were collected in three college English intensive reading classes of non-English majors in Qingdao University of Science and Technology where the college English teaching and learning has always been the center of attention because of college English test Band 4. As a teacher of college English, the study of college English classroom questioning and students' response is of great interest to me in that I want to know what really goes on in our own classrooms and what I can do to improve college English teaching and learning.

In order to obtain a real and reliable data concerning classroom silence in the specific learning atmosphere, it is necessary to combine quantitative (questionnaire) and qualitative research method (face-to-face interview) together. Thus questionnaire, interview, classroom observation are adopted to ensure the accuracy of the data.

The questionnaire consists of many questions which focus on students' learning motivations, learning anxiety and teachers' questioning methods. Anonymous system of questionnaire has been used. Questions are designed in the form of multiple choices and Likert 5-point scale. Part I aims to investigate students' motivation of learning English and their oral English proficiency. Part II intends to explore if learning anxiety will result in silence, and Part III tries to comprehend students' feeling about teachers' teaching strategies and their ideal English class in their eyes.

The questionnaire was given out in the class time and the response rate was 100%. In order to ensure the validity of the students' answers, all the students were told to choose their answers according to their classroom experience.

In the face to face interview, researchers asked 9 students some prearranged questions about learning motivations, and at the same time, researchers can question more according to students' responses so as to obtain additional information. Because interview can trace thoughts, explore answers, and investigate motives and feelings, making students develop ideas and discuss about questions more extensively, this method has an advantage of adaptability which may not belong to questionnaire. In order to enable the interviewees to express their ideas clearly and accurately, all the interviews were carried out in Chinese. In the process of interview, students were numbered in sequence, and the whole interview was recorded, and then discourse analysis followed.

Nunan (Nunan, 1989) said " there is no substitute for direct observation as a way of finding out about language classrooms", therefore in this study, researchers came into the classroom personally to observe.

The three classes which were observed and recorded from March to June were band 1 college English classes from different departments with about sixty students in each one. The majority of the students have studied English for 6 years although there is considerable difference in level because they came from different places with different level of English teaching. The three teachers in these classes had 5-6 years of teaching experience. The text book used was "New Horizon College English " which is designed to train students' listening, speaking, reading, writing, translating ability with the reading ability as a priority. So the classes chosen here are all intensive reading classes.

The observation was conducted in six classes; about 5 hours (50 minutes for each class) were observed and recorded, which were transcribed and used for analysis, allowing as many patterns of behavior and inconsistencies as possible to emerge. After class, the

author had an interview with the students, knowing more about their ideas and feeling about their teacher and class. Consequently, in order to collect quantitative and qualitative data needed for the analysis, the method employed was that of ethnographic research, and audio recording and field notes were applied as well.

## 3.2 DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

### 3.2.1 Results and Discussion about the Questionnaire

Part I is designed to see students' motivations of learning English. Gardner and Lambert draw a basic distinction between an instrumental motivation and integrative motivation (Gardner&Lambert, 1972 ). Instrumental motivation refers to motivation to learn a new language in order to achieve instrument goals, while integrative motivation refers to learner's desire to integrate themselves within the culture of the target language community and to assimilate in the community. Lambert concluded that integrative motivation played a larger part in successful language learning than instrumental motivation. Table2 lists the students' motivations to learn English.

**Table 2**
**Motivations to Learn English**

| Motivations to Learn English | Frequency ( N=90 ) | Percent ( % ) |
|---|---|---|
| I am interested in foreign language | 57 | 63.3 |
| Passing CET-4&6, obtaining diploma and finding a good job after graduation | 88 | 97.7 |
| Improve my communicative ability and communicate with foreigners fluently | 84 | 93.3 |
| It is a compulsory course | 86 | 95.5 |
| I hope to understand the language and culture of English-speaking countries | 34 | 37.7 |

It can be seen obviously from the Table 2 that students' choices mainly focused on the motivations of passing CET-4 & 6, obtaining diploma and finding a good job after graduation, and finishing the compulsory course set by university with the frequency of 97.7% and 95.5% respectively. As to the motivations of communicating with foreigners and interest in foreign language, the percentages are 93.3% and 63.3% respectively. The item of understanding the language and culture of English-speaking countries accounts for the lowest percentage: 37.7%, which is understandable in my mind? Anyway, they don't major in English. In these non-English majors' eyes, English is only a kind of tool. As a result, we can come to a conclusion that motivations of most college students are instrumental. Their goals are to pass various examinations, achieve high scores, getting certificates of CET 4 & 6 and communicate with foreigners fluently, but knowing about the language and culture of English-speaking countries are relatively low. On the basis of the above analysis, we found that students learning motivations are specific and active, and they have a strong desire to learn English well to achieve their own targets and realize their own dreams. Consequently, we can conclude that learners' motivations and attitudes are not the main reasons triggering their silence in English classroom.

Part II is designed to demonstrate students' performance and feelings in their English class, intending to explore if anxiety, nervousness, making mistakes and lacking of confidence will result in students' silence in classrooms. The result is listed in Table 3:

**Table 3**
**Response Frequency** [Equivalent Percent (%)]

| Item | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| A | 88.9 | 7.8 | 3.3 | 0 | 0 |
| B | 61.1 | 33.3 | 5.6 | 0 | 0 |
| C | 55.6 | 11.1 | 22.2 | 11.1 | 0 |
| D | 60 | 32.2 | 5.6 | 2.2 | 0 |
| E | 11.1 | 61.1 | 10 | 17.8 | 0 |
| F | 0 | 5.6 | 11.1 | 44.4 | 38.9 |
| G | 5.6 | 14.4 | 22.2 | 38.9 | 18.9 |
| H | 70 | 24.4 | 5.6 | 0 | 0 |

(1 strongly agree; 2 agree; 3 neither disagree nor agree; 4 disagree; 5 strongly disagree)

As can be seen from the above table, the percentage amounts to 88.9% in item A, which shows a large majority of students keep silent in English class. In item B,C,D and E,H, the results indicate that affective factors such as anxiety, nervousness and lack of confidence have exerted certain influence on students' silent behavior in the class. They feel unease because they don't think they can perform well enough to satisfy teachers' high expectations

for them. They are worried to lose face after they made mistakes. In item F and G, the percentage of students' disagreement account for 44.4% and 38.9% respectively, which shows that students' cognition have changed greatly and most of them can't be affected by traditional learning culture, and this also demonstrates on the other hand that most of students had a strong desire to speak English , and if the teacher can guide them properly and make them relaxed, most of them may be willing to communicate with teachers and his classmates.

In conclusion, Most of students keep silent in English class, and

students' affective factors such as anxiety, nervousness and lack of confidence are one of the key reasons for students' silence in English class.

The design of Part III involves students' evaluation on their English class, aiming to explore students' feelings about teachers' class design and their expectations about an ideal class, and based on the result, researchers hope to find if teachers' teaching mode can have certain influence on students' silence in class. The result is listed in the Table 4.

**Table 4**
**Response Frequency** [Equivalent Percent (%)]

| | Item choices | Frequency ( N=90 ) | Percent ( % ) |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1 | 1) | 23 | 25.6 |
| | 2) | 67 | 74.4 |
| | 3) | 0 | 0 |
| | 4) | 0 | 0 |
| 2 | 1) | 0 | 0 |
| | 2) | 46 | 51.1 |
| | 3) | 44 | 48.9 |
| | 4) | 0 | 0 |
| 3 | 1) | 62 | 68.9 |
| | 2) | 20 | 22.2 |
| | 3) | 8 | 8.9 |
| | 4) | 0 | 0 |
| 4 | 1) | 63 | 70 |
| | 2) | 0 | 0 |
| | 3) | 22 | 24.4 |
| | 4) | 5 | 5.6 |
| 5 | 1) | 2 | 2.2 |
| | 2) | 88 | 97.8 |
| | 3) | 65 | 72.2 |
| | 4) | 15 | 16.7 |
| | 5) | 58 | 64.4 |
| | 6) | 88 | 97.8 |
| 6 | 1) | 3 | 3.3 |
| | 2) | 86 | 95.6 |
| | 3) | 0 | 0 |
| | 4) | 0 | 0 |
| | 5) | 82 | 91.1 |
| | 6) | 85 | 94.4 |
| | 7) | 10 | 11.1 |

As demonstrated in Table 4, in item 1, 74.4% of the students think that their class is traditional teacher-centered teaching mode, in which the teacher occupied almost the whole class, and only occasionally communicated with students. In item 2, the high percentage of 51.1 and 48.9 shows that most of students are satisfied with an active and interactive class, in which they are given more chance to talk and express their own ideas. In item 3, 68.9% of the students believe that an interactive class may inspire them to learn English well and only 8.9% of students think it will not. In item 4, 70% of the students hold the opinion that teachers should provide more opportunities for students to communicate with others, and try to make a relaxing classroom atmosphere in which students are willing to become active and communicate with teachers and classmates. This result is in accordance with the results of item5 and item 6. In item 5, interactive teaching mode is welcomed by a large majority of students, among which a class with more interactive activities and more chance to speak English accounts for 97.8%, and as for specific activities, compared with group discussion (64.4%), questioning the whole class makes up 72.2%, which shows that most of students still prefer a relaxing atmosphere in which they can play an active role to communicate with others. In item 6, 95.6% of students think that the improper teaching mode triggers their silence in English class, besides, anxiety caused by fear of making mistakes and losing face etc. and lack of confidence accounts for 94.4% and 91.1 respectively whereas past learning habit and traditional education only account for 11.1% and 3.3%, and it is noteworthy that no student attributes their silence to lack of learning motivations and no interest in English.

From the above results, we can make a conclusion that most of students show their preference for an interactive teaching mode instead of a teacher-centered mode, and they want to play an active role instead of a passive receiver of knowledge. If teachers can make a relaxing class atmosphere with proper teaching strategies, most students will be likely to take an active part in class activities, and the phenomenon of class silence will be bound to decrease greatly. In a word, teachers' class control strategies can exert great influence on students' silence in class.

### 3.2.2 Results and Analysis About the Class Observation

#### 3.2.2.1 Types of Questions

With Nunan' idea "there is no substitute for direct observation as a way of finding out about language classrooms", researchers came into the classroom personally to observe. According to the taxonomy of question types mentioned above, questions were counted and multiple-coded. For example, "who is absent today" can be both procedural and referential. The result of the data analysis is shown in the the Table 5-8.

**Table 5**
**Frequency and Percentage of Question Types in Class One**

| Question type | Frequency of use | Equivalent percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Open | | |
| Closed | 7 | 15.56% |
| Display | 13 | 28.89% |
| Referential | 6 | 13.33% |
| Convergent | 18 | 40% |
| Divergent | | |
| Rhetorical | | |
| Procedural | 1 | 2.22% |
| Interaction | | |

**Table 6**
**Frequency and Percentage of Question Types in Class Two**

| Question type | Frequency of use | Equivalent percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Open | 1 | 3.45% |
| Closed | 5 | 17.24% |
| Display | 8 | 27.59% |
| Referential | 5 | 17.24% |
| Convergent | 9 | 31.03% |
| Divergent | 1 | 3.45% |
| Rhetorical | | |
| Procedural | | |
| Interaction | | |

**Table 7**
**Frequency and Percentage of Question Types in Class Three**

| Question type | Frequency of use | Equivalent percentage |
|---|---|---|
| Open | | |
| Closed | 8 | 17.02% |
| Display | 15 | 31.93% |
| Referential | 4 | 8.52% |
| Convergent | 20 | 42.55% |
| Divergent | | |
| Rhetorical | | |
| Procedural | | |
| Interaction | | |

**Table 8**
**Target of Teacher's Questioning**

| | Whole Class | Individual volunteer roll call | | Total |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Class one | 71.05% | 0 | 28.95% | 100% |
| Class two | 85.7% | 0 | 14.3% | 100% |
| Class three | 82.11% | 0 | 17.89% | 100% |

The above tables show that during instruction teachers used procedural, open, closed, display, convergent and referential questions. Appendix B gives examples of procedural, convergent use (Lines 1, 10 and 12 respectively). Lines 30 and 44 exemplify questions which are both closed and display because there is only one correct response and at the same time the teacher knew the answers. Several such questions appear, but in line

with Chaudron (Chaudron, 1988)，they generated only the briefest and simplest of possible responses, sometimes even no response, dialogues in lines 31, 45 are highly typical.

Referential questions also account for certain percentage even if lower. Although referential questions may encourage students to try harder to respond (Nunan, 1989), counter to Chaudron (Chaudron, 1988), this additional effort does not necessarily lead to higher quality communication if the question is also convergent in appearance, yielding highly similar, brief, relatively undemanding responses, which can be seen in the following example:

( the teacher in class three is explaining the text)

T:　In paragraph 2, there is "internet purchase supplier". Could you translate?

PP:　(silence)

T:　It means "wang shang gong huo shang (Chinese)". Ok, Do you think it's convenient to shop online?

PP:　Yes.

T:　Do you often shop online?  ( pause) Do you often shop online? Yangxue (Chinese name)

P1:　No, I don't.

T:　Yes, No, I don't shop online.  Do you often shop online? And Yangxue(Chinese name) answered "No, I don't.". Please answer the same question. Do you often shop online?   Wang pengfei(Chinese name)

P2:　No, I don't.

T:　No, I don't. The same answer. Couldn't you tell us more?

Obviously, the question "Do you often shop online?" is a convergent question in appearance, but in nature, it is also a referential question. The teacher attempted to generate more language from the student, but he failed.

This finding also illustrates how the multiple coding of questions can provide additional information and may be a useful tool in future research.

In conclusion, the overwhelming frequency of convergent and display questions shown in tables 5-7 and the great amount of closed questions among them is remarkable. The numbers suggest teachers' questioning strategies are less "natural", and demand lower-level thinking and provide less comprehensible input to students than divergent questions would have. It can also be inferred that the teacher exercises a strong control over what and how much is being said.

In terms of target of teacher's questioning, as can be seen from Table8, whole class activities dominated in all these three classes. Choral response was a fairly frequent event in the classroom perhaps for the reason that all these three classes were large classes of about 60 students in which it was impossible for all the students to have an opportunity to speak in public. Thus teachers tended to ask the whole class to answer them together. When

questioning was directed against individual students, they almost always kept silent, unwilling to respond to the teacher. Sometimes teachers gave answers by themselves; if teachers insisted on getting students' answers, then roll call was needed. We have also noticed that during the instruction, display and convergent questions dominated, even if there existed referential questions, they are not absolutely genuine questions which really seek information, because teachers mostly aimed at eliciting language from students, therefore in most cases answers are easy to find if students can devote themselves to the class, which can be shown by the fact that most of nominated students could give correct answers. As a result, the passive and unwilling phenomenon is probably because students' negative attitude toward speaking English in front of others due to the fear of making mistakes. From this point, teachers should take effective measures to encourage students and relax them, solving their psychological problem, then more interaction between teachers and students may appear in English classrooms.

### 3.2.2.2 Teachers' Modification Technique

According to the taxonomy of modification techniques mentioned above, data collected were analyzed. The result is shown in the Table 9-10.

**Table 9**
**Frequency of Question Repetitions**

|  | Frequency of repetition | Total numbers of questions | Percentage |
|---|---|---|---|
| Class one | 2 | 38 | 5.26% |
| Class two | 3 | 23 | 13.04% |
| Class three | 3 | 39 | 7.69% |
| Mean frequency of repetition |  |  | 8.66% |

**Table 10**
**Mean Wait-Time for Questions**

|  | Wait-time in raw data(seconds) | | Mean wait-time |
|---|---|---|---|
| Class one | 0,3,0,4,3,5,7,0,5,6,4,0,2,2,2,4,6,4,5,3,2,5, | 2,4,0,0,4,3,0,3,0,5,2,2,2,3,2,4 | 2.71 |
| Class two | 5,4,4,7,3,3,0,4,0,2,0,3,5,3,4,2,0,3,2,5,3,2,2 | | 2.86 |
| Class three | 4,2,2,4,5,0,2,2,4,3,6,2,2,6,2,4,5,4,3,2,2,0,4, 3,3,5,5,3,0,2,3,5,2,0,4,3,3,2,0 | | 2.84 |

As shown in the above tables, the main techniques employed in the class included repetition and pauses. During instruction, the mean frequency of repetition makes up 8.66%. The copious repetitions of "Do you often shop online?" were intended not only to increase comprehensibility but also to maximize the opportunities for students to produce English. With only 8.66% of questions being repeated, this was counter to Chaudron's result of research (Chaudron, 1988) "predominant modification technique". This was probably because (a) most of questions are very easy to understand, so it is unnecessary to repeat; (b) there is much work to do in class, and the teacher wants to save more time to complete the task.

A point of interest here is that the teacher also repeated very easy questions, such as "what does 'enhance' mean?". This may have been a way of attracting students' attention or a way of avoiding unwanted silence in classroom.

Wait-times shown in table10 illustrate teachers' intention to give students more processing time for more difficult questions, for example, the question "could you express in English?"(Appendix B) waited for six seconds. But such long wait-time is very few as shown in table 10 with 2.71 seconds in class one, 2.86 seconds in class two, 2.84 seconds in class three. Obviously, wait-times in these classes observed were shorter than in other teaching contexts (Holley and King proposed 5 seconds or more (Chaudron, 1988) .The reason for this is perhaps that (a) teachers need more time to finish their large amount of planned work keeping pace with teaching plan. (b) Just as we mentioned above, most of students were inactive when needed to speak English in front of their classmates, even if extended wait-time couldn't encourage greater learner production, which is in line with Holley and King (Chaudron, 1988). Lines 20-22 in Appendix B are a case in point. The teacher's question "what does the sentence mean?" should be easy to answer for most of students, because the sentence "people applauded lively for the president's speech" is not difficult with the word "applaud" in the new word list. But five seconds later, students still kept silent. Since teachers knew their students well, long wait-time is unnecessary, and shorter wait-time in this study is then understandable. Nevertheless, one of our teaching purposes is to improve students' spoken English. Therefore in our English classrooms teachers should overcome difficulties and take effective measures, trying their best to activate students into communication instead of indulging their keeping silent.

In a word, two types of modification techniques were employed here, which have played an active role in helping students to participate in class activities to some degree, but it is not enough because it can't arouse students' communicative desire and promote their language output effectively, which is one of the main reasons for students' silence.

## 4. INSPIRATION FROM THE PRESENT STUDY

Based on the research above, the following strategies are suggested for college English teachers to refer to for the purpose of lessening students' feeling of anxiety and decreasing their silence in classrooms:

(a)Teachers should ask more "referential" questions and give "positive" feedback.

The study result tells that referential questions accounted for only about 13.03% on average, showing teachers requested much more false information (86.97%) than genuine information (13.03%) in asking questions, and it indicates that the communication between teacher and students was more of the false communication instead of real communication. Therefore, teachers should intentionally resort more to "referential questions" in which students can have more opportunity of giving more information and talking more.

(b)Teachers should try to take effective measures to maximize opportunities for students' participation in classrooms.

The above data analysis tells us it was the teacher who was dominating the classroom. The teacher did the most talk and controlled the topic. In this way the students were passive---they answered questions and got information passively from the teacher. The teacher should bear in mind that it is students who are learning language; therefore maximizing opportunities for students' participation is very necessary and important. Teachers should change their role in teaching, playing the role of a guide, a facilitator, an organizer instead of a complete lecturer. As a teacher, he should give students more clues and more wait time to encourage students to express their own ideas. Such target can be reached by such activities as role-play, storytelling, debating, holding seminars and making presentations etc. In a word, enlarging students' portion in classroom and letting the learners dominate their own classroom, with the teachers only playing the role of a guide and an organizer is a challenging but beneficial aim, which is also the direction to which teachers in college English classrooms are working.

As a college English teacher, you can refer to these above strategies to activate more students into communicative teaching activities in classrooms for the purpose of improving college English teaching and learning.

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# APPENDIX A

The Questionnaire about students' performance and feelings in college English classrooms

**I What are your motivations about learning English?(multiple --choices)**

    A  I am interested in foreign language

    B  In order to pass CET-4&6, obtaining diploma and finding a good job after graduation

    C  In order to improve my communicative ability and communicate with foreigners fluently

    D  It is a compulsory course

    E  I hope to understand the language and culture of English-speaking countries

**II Your performance and feelings in your English classrooms are described in the following:**

| 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| strongly agree | agree | neither disagree nor agree | disagree | strongly disagree |

    A I always keep silent in most cases.

    B I am not confident about my English，and I fear to make mistakes when communicating with other

    C I feel nervous when I speak English before many people

    …………………………

    H I like to say something when we have free discussion,because I don't fear losing face when making mistakes

**III The following is about your evaluation on your teachers' teaching as well as your hope for your class**

    1) Which teaching mode has been adopted by your teacher?The teacher dominated the whole class and I only listen and sometimes make notes.

    2) The teacher occupied almost the whole class,sometimes he may ask us some questions.

    3) The communicative activities between the teacher and students dominate the class

    4) The communicative activities between students and students dominate the class

    2. which teaching mode are your most satisfying?

    1) The teacher continues speaking with students only listening

    2) The teacher occupied almost the whole class, and sometimes he may ask some questions.

    3) The communicative activities between the teacher and students dominate the whole class

    4) The communicative activities between students and students dominate the class

    3. May interactive activities in classrooms inspire you to learn English well?

    1) Certainly

    2) maybe

    3) may not

    4) Certainly not

    …………………

    6. Why do some students keep silent in classrooms in your mind?(multiple choices)

    1) The result of Chinese traditional culture and the ideas of Confucius

    2) Teachers' improper teaching mode

    3) Students are not interested in what the teacher is talking about

    4) Lack of learning motivations

    5) Lack of confidence

    6) Anxiety triggered by fear of making mistakes and losing face

    7) Past learning habits and experiences

# APPENDIX B

<div align="center">

**(Lesson in class one)**
</div>

    I 1  T: Monitor, who is absent today?

    R 2 P1: Liu huixin.

    I 3  T: Do you know the reason?

    R 4 P1: Yes,他病了，这是他的假条。

    ……………

    I 10 T: Look at the second line in the first paragraph. Have you found the word "chill"?

    R 11 PP: Yes.

    I 12 T: Obviously, "chill" here is a verb, meaning "make cold",使变冷，冷藏。For example, "chill the fruit plate before eating" Could you please translate?

13 PP: (silence)

…………

F 20  T: Ok, next paragraph. The word " applaud", for example " people applauded lively for the President's speech" [ the teacher turned back and wrote it down on the blackboard]

I      What does the sentence mean?

21 PP: (silence)

Ib 22  T: Li hui

………………

I 30  T: And also there is the word "remark". What is its noun form?

Ib     它的名词形式是……

R 31 PP: 原形.

…………………

Ib 40 T:  Sorry, I can't. Liu pei，  what about you?

…………………

45PP: ( silence)

…………………

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## APPENDIX C

**(The lesson in class two has just started)**

1.  T: Ok, class begins. Last class, we finished learning Section A. Have you finished exercises in this passage?

2.  PP: Yes.

3.  T: Ok, good! Let's check to see how well you have done. Number one, in the first line in paragraph one, the word "cautious",Zhao Man, what does it mean?

4.  P1: 小心的

5.  T: Yes, 小心的,谨慎的. When are you often cautious?

6.  P1: (silence)

7.  T: When are you often cautious?

8.  P1: When I walked in the street at night.

9.  T: Good. You mean "When you walked in the street at night, you are cautions". The second one, "portly", could you find its synonym? 同义词? Yang fengying

10. P2: fat

11. T: Yes, fat. Do you like to be a portly girl?

12. P2: No, I don't.( laughter)

13. T: Why not?

14. P2: eh…

15. T: Certainly you want to be slim; you want to look pretty. Right?

16. P2: Right! (Laughter)

17. T: Ok, Let's go on, the sentence "contriving as I did so to toss my keys", Li liang, "contriving to toss", do you know its meaning?

18. P3: 努力扔掉

19. T: Good. 努力扔掉. Could you explain in English?

20. P3: manage to do; try to do

21. T: Good. You did well. But I'm sure you know the difference between " manage to do" and " try to do" .Right?

22. P3: Right, "manage to do"

23. T: Ok, That's right. Before our final exam, what do you plan to contrive to do? Especially with many new words in this book?

24. PP:(silence)

25. T: You should contrive to remember as many new words and phrases as possible. Do you think so?

PP: Yes!

T: That's true. Large vocabulary is very important for you, especially in the first year. Ok, next. "as if attached to unseen wires",Meng xuemei, could you translate the sentence?

P4: 好像接在看不见的电线上.

T: Good. "be attached to"，"接在……上". Do you think it has other meaning?

P4: "依恋……"

T: Good. "依恋……", for example?

P4: He is attached to his mother.

T: Very good. The last one "hold dear", can you still remember this phrase? Jiang xuelian

P5: Yes, 珍视,重视.

T: In English?

36. P5: (silence)

T: "Value". What do you value now most?

P5: Eh…

T: Do you think we should hold dear our present life?

P5: Yes. We should because peace is important to us.

T: Very good. Ok, next, Let's talk about Reading Skills in SectionB.

.............................