

Investigating Learner Silent and Verbal Responses to Tasks

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Abstract

This article reports a study on EFL/ESL learner perceptions of classroom tasks with reference to verbal or non-verbal participation, that is, how much speech and silence would be employed in response to a range of task types. Data were collected from 260 learners from Indonesia and the Philippines. The article begins by explaining why silence and speech are the focus of the discussion. Secondly, it shares the literature review on how silence works in language learning and why it deserves a place in classroom teaching. Thirdly, it highlights classroom tasks that trigger silent processing and explain why this is the case. Finally, there are recommendations for task design in which similar activity types are introduced to assist the learning of reflective students.

Keywords

Task types, silence, talk, response, perception, exposure, learning focus

1. Introduction: Why consider silence in task performance

This section highlights the rationale for considering silence in task performance. By and large, the literature on silence in relation to task performance is extremely minimal, to the extent of almost non-existence. We would like to construct two major arguments to form the foundation of this project, namely the importance of silence in speech production, and why silence matters in tasks. Both of these are drawn from occasional scholarly insights in ELT. that is, from the part of the discourse that seems less commonly known.

We argue that non-verbal in many cases exerts a strong influence over the production and quality of speech. As can be drawn from the relevant discourse, L2 development can be triggered by three important non-verbal factors, namely perception, social surrounding, and interlanguage thinking. The first factor is learners' perception in the mind. There is a logical connection between learners' linguistic insight and their production (Pickering 2012), in the sense that improvement in thinking has potential to

bring out improved verbal output. If the mind is well nurtured to rehearse and develop good processing skills, what the mind produces would reflect on the quality of speech. This internal-external transfer may work effectively with content and linguistic structures rather than in physical and motor performance. For example, it may not happen strongly in the case of accurate phonological production when learners are constrained by difficulty in articulating certain syllable types (Flege, 1981) and pitch level to denote tones (Willems, 1982).

The second factor is comfort with the social surrounding where learning takes place, which plays a role in how well one learns and develops language competence. A study by Hansen (2006) demonstrates that language learners develop L2 proficiency best when they feel contented rather than restless, and that social constraints have a damaging effect on their language development. This understanding suggests that learners who are forced to behave in ways they feel uncomfortable are likely to make slow L2 learning progress as their learning mechanism does not operate naturally.

The third factor is the ability to use interlanguage, that is to say, employing useful features of the mother tongue to improve L2 communication. The mother tongue, which operates in ways inaudible to other interlocutors, may generate resources to process new information in the target language, which means that what learners have in their L1 system as a reasoning device can be used to process information in the target language. Making learners frequently speak out in the target language without allowing this interlanguage processing is to demand L2 production too early and this may take away learners' opportunity for enhancing their learning repertoire.

We would like to emphasise the need to connect tasks with silence rather than with talk alone. Understanding silence with connection to task design is important because, as Stickler, Stickler, Batstone, Duensing, & Heins (2007) explain, task design has a strong influence on the amount of speaking or non-speaking participation. Arguably, the impact of a task can be altered by facilitating or constraining factors in the classroom situation. For instance, allowing time for rehearsal is a supporting factor that would pave the way for more open discussion (Yashima, Ikeda, & Nakahira, 2013). Scholars such as King (2013b); Svalberg & Askham (2013), Yashima, Ikeda & Nakahira (2013), among others, based on empirical research have recognised task design and group dynamics as influential factors over how much students remain silent. For example, tasks might generate silence due to learning difficulty (Svalberg, A. & Askham, J., 2013). In many cases, even when tasks are developed with a spoken focus in mind, classroom situations might change its nature. For example, it might be difficult for a class to share thoughts when students do not know each other well enough (Yashima, Ikeda & Nakahira, 2013) or when peers already know information about each other and there is no need to find out anymore (Carless, 2004); and such silent response might produce a less desirable effect on task aim and L2 development (King, 2013b).

2. Research Design and Method

This article reports a research study that follows up on a previous study to expand knowledge and understanding about the dynamics of learner speech and silence in task performance. The previous project was a qualitative, phenomenological study in which Bao (2020) interviewed 10 East-Asian participants about how they responded to classroom tasks through the use of both silence and talk, with analysis related to when silence and talk occur respectively. The present discussion responds to the appeal for further knowledge, beyond East-Asian students, about the use of speech and silence in tasks. Through a

questionnaire, it investigates the perception of 260 learners of English, including 191 from Indonesia and 69 from the Philippines.

The questionnaire includes 12 task-type items each of which offers four options, namely silence, talk, silence then talk, talk then silence. The main question is: How would you respond to the given tasks? The task types are adopted from a research study by Bao (2020) in which he collated the list from the literature, ELT course materials, his own teaching experience. Below is the list of task types for learners to express their own responses:

1. Fluency tasks – which involve everyday topics such as hobbies, families, hello, planning a trip, etc.
2. Rehearsal activity – preparing a verbal report, working with a team towards an oral presentation, comparing ideas and viewpoints
3. Exploratory tasks - which involve some planning or methods (ex. you and friends are going to live on a desert island for a month: what are things to bring with you)
4. Communication and feedback tasks - which involve mutual support and collaboration (such as producing a poster, a video clip, or a summary of a text)
5. Collaborative projects - such as writing a summary, making a movie, a poster, or joining a trip; game-like tasks which encourage teamwork, competition, and enjoyment
6. Independent tasks – such as reading and answering questions in writing, making a summary of a story, etc.
7. Pre-tasks or preparations – ex. gathering information from the Internet, inviting personal reflection on experiences
8. Post tasks/follow-up tasks – making personal comments, sharing further thoughts, looking for implications (ex. who is your favourite character? Which country would you like to migrate to?)
9. Deductive tasks – ex. form-focused exercises, analytical work, mind-challenging issues, building a framework, constructing logic, identifying gaps, evaluating a policy, etc.
10. Discovery tasks/Inductive tasks – ex. finding a method, noticing or generating rules, developing solutions.
11. Creative/problem-solving tasks – discussing choices, problems, preferences, attitudes, viewpoints, looking for a solution to a challenging scenario, playing with imagination, writing a poem, constructing a story, building a model.
12. Mixed type – group reports, movie or book discussion, forum discussion, excursion, gallery or museum visit.

In responding to each task, each participant has a choice from these four options: talking spontaneously (T), keeping quietly and think much of the time (S), or use both silence and talk during the activity, whether you are silent first and then (ST) or talk first and then silent (TS). After considering their own learning behaviour, participants then noted down their very brief response next to each activity type by using the above initials (S, T, ST, or TS).

Overall, the present study is a replication of a study by Bao (2020) whose findings show three task categories as will be presented in the next section. The three categories include Classroom tasks that trigger silent processing, classroom tasks that elicit verbalisation, classroom tasks that involve both silence and talk. What we wish to find out in our project is whether the outcome of the study would be the same or

different if we implement exactly the same research design on two new populations of participants. While Bao's study (2020) investigate the perception of 10 international students of East-Asian background in an Australian university, this project examines the perception of 260 learners of English from Indonesia and the Philippines (191 and 69 participants respectively). We feel that ours is an exciting exploration because it would illuminate on whether task types can be fixed in generating similar responses from learners no matter where they come from, or whether learners would respond differently depending on their backgrounds and experiences. By looking for the answer, we would be able to decide whether it is possible or impossible to measure the nature of tasks through learner response. Before we present data and discuss findings from our project, we would like to present the finding from Bao's (2020) study. This is important because later, we will need to refer back to these findings for a comparative angle, which is the main reason why we conduct this project.

Today there is an increased tendency for many journal articles to be processed from a larger academic project such as a Master's thesis or a PhD dissertation. When this is the case, readers might need to be informed of where the article positions in the project and which part is taken out from the whole structure. To avoid confusion and to assist reading comfort, we would like to clarify that this article is an independent project on its own and does not come from a thesis. This study is originally designed by the first author and the process of data analysis were conducted by both authors. The result of our study is published for the first time in this journal and not elsewhere. To provide readers with a clear background of our research, we would like to present the findings from the previous study which we follow up as a way of developing new knowledge and expanding the field.

2.1. Main findings from Bao's (2020) study

Classroom tasks that trigger silent processing

Four types of tasks that facilitate the silent learning mode are independent tasks (which allow students to work individually without much exchange of ideas, such as reading and writing work), pre-tasks or preparations (which involve gathering of information from the Internet, reflecting on one's own experiences, making choices based on preferences, and noting downs comments), deductive tasks (which involve written responses to form-focused language exercises), and discovery or inductive tasks (which require observing and thinking to draw on rules, functions, and methods). These types will be coded in *blue* in all the tables presented in this article.

Some common features among the above tasks include offering personal space and wait time, not requiring peer interaction, challenging the mind, inviting personal reflection, asking for a written response, and organising cognitive processing of rules or methods. Such instructions encourage students to work alone and produce output such as a written summary, an idea, an account of experience, and solutions to problems. As one learner reveals: 'Tasks with thoughtful, complex, and demanding content will keep me in quiet thinking; those that require formal presentation in front of the class also prompt me to prepare my ideas in silence'.

Classroom tasks that elicit verbalisation

Five task types that require more talk include fluency tasks (which involve spontaneous responses for verbal skills development), rehearsal tasks (such as preparing a verbal report, working with a team towards an oral presentation, comparing ideas and viewpoints) exploratory tasks (which involve peer discussion), communication and feedback tasks (which involves mutual support), collaborative projects (such as producing a poster, a video clip, or a summary, post-tasks (which follow up a main task for sharing further thoughts). These types will be coded in *pink* in all the tables presented in this article.

The common characteristic of these activities is that they involve collaborating with classmates rather than functioning alone, with clear emphasis on fluency, rehearsal, communication, collaboration, and sharing. They prompt talk by requiring quick, spontaneous answers or reactions, which focus on the process rather than outcome and are often not of a cognitively demanding type. As several participants in this study elaborate, tasks that go well with their knowledge and experience will give them the confidence to speak out more. Tasks of an informal nature that requires no right or wrong answer also make them feel relaxed enough to participate.

Classroom tasks that involve both silence and talk

Mixed-typed tasks that involve both modes of response often contain various layers or components, which require alternation between silence and talk. For example, a rehearsal activity for oral presentation will require silent work to be followed by speech. A problem-solving task might demand some thinking time before good ideas can be shared with peers. Tasks that invite an exchange of attitudes, viewpoints, preferences, and experiences also prompt students to talk to one another. Other group-based activities and team projects, such as making a movie, a poster, or joining a trip, also cannot take place without consulting partners. Compared with activities that require an immediate response, these types demand team cooperation and mutual feedback, as well as involving extended durations of time and multiple steps to be completed. They are of multi-tasking nature due to the focus on both the process and the outcome in students' performance. These types will be coded in *green* in all the tables presented in this article.

2.2. Participant profiles

This section now outlines the participants of our current project. Although all participants are language learners, many of them are also school and university teachers, office workers, business people, researchers, students, and freelancers in between jobs. They are from Indonesia and the Philippines. Being mature adult learners, they were invited to stay in the shoes of language learners to express how they would respond to classroom tasks. The reason for including teachers in this project is because we would like to utilise their classroom experience and educational maturity to make judgement on learning behaviour. We believe that all language teachers, without exception, have been language learners themselves. For this reason, their thinking can switch from a teacher view to a learner perspective, and when they do that, ideas can be enriched with classroom observation and learning experience.

The participants' ages range from 18 to 35 years old, which is the time when many students learn about education and teaching (18 – 25) and serve as teachers in their first couple of years (26 – 35).

Moreover, in both contexts, there are approximately one-fifth of participants that are considered to have served in education for at least ten years (36 – 45) and around one-tenth of them have served at least more than 20 years in general (over 45). This could mean more voices echo from the younger educators or pre-service learners, whose responses and opinions may impact greatly on the results, causing mild tendency towards them and gently overshadowing the perspectives from more experienced instructors.

3. Findings and discussion: comparison among three participant groups

This section discusses the similarities and differences in learner responses from the three groups of participants, namely 10 participants in Australia, 191 participants in Indonesia, and 69 participants in the Philippines. Findings from the first group were already reported in a previous research study (Bao, 2020), while findings from the second and third groups are now presented in this study. The purpose of this comparison, again, is to see the extent to which the findings in Bao's (2020) study might have broader generalisability beyond its own participants and context.

We approached this data analysis with a pragmatic analytical hypothesis. Suppose the responses from the participants in this project prove to be too mutually too different, we would argue that the outcome of the previous study only applied to that case study and its significance is confined within that population of East-Asian participants. On the contrary, if we find striking similarities across the three groups, we would take this to suggest that the findings in the previous project indeed has a wider significance beyond a case study. In this case, the choice of task types would elicit predictable responses from various learners despite various contexts. We believe that the outcome of our study will illuminate the extent to which task design can actually foresees students' verbal and less verbal learning behaviour, that is, whether prediction should be practised when teachers design task. In case we fail to find evidence that can support the need to anticipate learner behaviour, we can then argue that learner decision to speak or remain silent is up to the learners themselves and task choices would be powerless in eliciting speech or requiring silence. Below are data presentation and discussion fort each group.

Table 1. Data from 191 participants from Indonesia

No	Task types	Silence %	Talk %	Silence and talk %	Talk and silence %
1	Fluency tasks	29.3	39.2	27.2	4.2
2	Rehearsal activity	39.7	18.3	35.6	6.3
3	Exploratory task	33.0	27.7	30.9	8.4
4	Communication & feedback tasks	32.5	19.9	39.8	7.9
5	Collaborative projects	30.9	20.9	37.7	10.5
6	Independent tasks	45.0	18.8	30.4	5.8
7	Pre-task/follow-up tasks	43.5	18.8	29.8	7.9
8	Deducative tasks	35.6	28.8	27.7	7.9
9	Discovery tasks	39.8	18.8	34.6	6.8
10	Discovery tasks/inductive tasks	39.3	14.7	38.2	7.9
11	Creative/problem-solving tasks	31.4	20.9	41.4	5.2
12	Mixed type	28.3	27.2	33.5	11.0

Among the twelve task types, it is notable that more participants from Indonesia prefer remaining silent, even when it comes to tasks that usually elicit verbal contributions such as exploratory tasks and follow-up tasks. Furthermore, the second favourable selection of task response is the mode of silence and talk, which is induced by tasks that manifest compatibilities with participants' preferences. On top of that, pure talking response seldom takes place unless it is fluency tasks, and there is no apparent inclination towards talk and silence response. From the variation throughout the responses and tasks, it is assumed that many Indonesian students tend to prioritise silence in response to classroom tasks. Even though some of those tasks require verbal interactions with peers such as exploratory tasks and collaborative tasks, many of them would maintain their absence of sound for some reason before eventually speaking up. This phenomenon may date back to their classroom culture as well as the individualities of participants influenced by the sociocultural setting. Talking and silence response lacks prevalence in students probably due to the lack of reflection process after discussions, besides their priorities with silence. This could mean the pedagogical choices teachers made may have neglected reflective learning, or that students manifest their unwillingness or unawareness of reflecting on knowledge and/or themselves in learning.

Table 2. Data from 69 Participants from the Philippines

No	Task types	Silence %	Talk %	Silence and talk %	Talk and silence %
1	Fluency tasks	20.3	14.1	33.3	7.2
2	Rehearsal activity	27.5	15.9	43.5	13.0
3	Exploratory task	20.3	17.4	50.7	11.6
4	Communication & feedback tasks	29.0	13.0	46.4	11.6
5	Collaborative projects	17.4	21.7	40.6	20.3
6	Independent tasks	44.9	14.5	34.8	5.8
7	Pre-task/follow-up tasks	37.7	17.4	37.7	7.2
8	Deducative tasks	21.7	18.8	44.9	14.5
9	Discovery tasks	29.0	21.7	40.6	8.7
10	Discovery tasks/inductive tasks	37.7	11.6	39.1	11.6
11	Creative/problem-solving tasks	31.9	13.0	43.5	11.6
12	Mixed type	20.3	11.6	50.7	17.4

By comparison, in the Filipino context, students prefer silence and talk response over unmixed response with silence, along with their preference of responding to independent tasks and pre-tasks with silence, which makes perfect sense in this case. However, in highly interactive tasks such as fluency tasks and communication and feedback tasks, students still favour silence in the beginning. Moreover, single-mode with oral contribution and its combination with silence shares fair amount of less partiality. Therefore, it is assumed that students tend to spend some time thinking and/or processing given information before speaking up. This could mean Filipino students considerably value their face fearing making mistakes, classroom culture in the Philippines lay emphasis on accuracy and rigour, the sociocultural setting highlights silence as a form of respect and morality, or the teachers in Filipino contexts are considered as overpowering, intimidating or somewhat neglectable with no force to be respected.

Table 3. Data from 10 International students from Australia (Bao, 2020)

No	Task types	Silence %	Talk %	Silence and talk %	Talk and silence %
1	Fluency tasks	0.0	70.0	0.0	20.0
2	Rehearsal activity	0.0	40.0	10.0	40.0
3	Exploratory task	10.0	70.0	0.0	20.0
4	Communication & feedback tasks	0.0	80.0	0.0	20.0
5	Collaborative projects	10.0	70.0	0.0	10.0
6	Independent tasks	80.0	10.0	0.0	10.0
7	Pre-task/follow-up tasks	80.0	10.0	0.0	0.0
8	Deducative tasks	20.0	50.0	10.0	10.0
9	Discovery tasks	60.0	20.0	0.0	10.0
10	Discovery tasks/inductive tasks	60.0	10.0	0.0	20.0
11	Creative/problem-solving tasks	20.0	20.0	10.0	50.0
12	Mixed type	0.0	20.0	10.0	40.0

Compared to Indonesian and Filipino students who learn over silence when it comes to classroom tasks, the international students in Australia have a clear preference with single learning mode depending on the circumstances. Basically, when the task requires thinking, collecting information or reflecting upon what they learn, they tend to keep quiet; when the task is associated with interactive segments, they tend to speak up and contribute to the group of study. Additionally, it is also notable that they seldom implement silence and talk response and instead always talk in the first place. Thus, apart from their linguistic confidence and sophisticated acculturation that allow them to speak up at any time, exterior factors may also result in the large amount of their verbal contributions in classroom learning, such as the comparatively 'lay' classroom culture in Australia that emphasise ideas and creativity in lieu of rules and order, the smaller class size so that more voices would be valued, the higher tuition fees and the heavier life expenses that stimulate their motivation to make 'sacrifices' pay off, or fierce competition in the labour market as well as in higher academic pursuit that drive them to contribute more so as to benefit the most from classroom learning.

Table 4. Comparing the three groups' responses to one task type: Fluency task

Number of participants	context	Silence %	Talk %	Silence and talk %	Talk and silence %
10	Australia	0.0	70.0	0.0	20.0
191	Indonesia	29.3	39.2	27.2	4.2
69	Philippines	20.3	14.1	33.3	7.2

International students in Australia respond to fluency tasks with more verbal participation (70%) while the Indonesian and Filipino participants obviously consider some thinking time (29.3% and 20.3% respectively). This difference in behaviour makes sense considering if we think about participants' context and experience. Since the former group have spent two to eight years in Australia where they use English on an everyday basis, most have developed both fluency and confidence to some extent.

It is also noticed that the decision of the latter two groups are more similar to each other (29.3% and 20.3%) than the former group, which seems more or less understandable as they both have less exposure to an authentic English-speaking environment.

What does not seem explainable is that compared to Indonesian participants, the Filipino need slightly more reflection time and seem to talk less in response to fluency tasks. However, the Filipino silence does not simply mean that they do not engage in talk at all; instead this group chooses to alternate between talk and silence (7.2%).

In a word, the comparison within this category shows a strong pattern toward spontaneous talk among group members with extended experience and exposure in an English-speaking country; while the distribution of verbal and non-verbal responses to this task type among the other two groups remain fairly mixed, that is, both verbal and less verbal modes would be employed.

3.1. How this project expands knowledge about learner response to tasks

What we draw from these cases of investigation only has a relative illuminative value in interpretation and conclusion as one of the first dialogues in this theme. Based on the above data analysis, we would like to make a few comments with regard to how the choice of task design might predict learning behaviour.

Exposure to English as a factor in the degree of verbal response

The more learners are exposed to an English communication environment, the more spontaneous they would be in verbal contribution during communication activities. By comparison of the data in *pink* across the three tables, there is a strong tendency among international students in Australia to speak out in response to fluency tasks and the like, such as rehearsal, communication, and peer collaboration. On the contrary, the other two groups seem much more cautious about speaking: they prefer to keep silent and delay in participation. We do not have evidence with regard to why these groups do not spontaneously participate as in the case of the international group. The only data we have is the difference in participant profiles, which show contexts. With years of English communication on an everyday basis, the Australian group seems to feel comfortable with quick verbal participation (10% stay silent and up to 80% choose to talk). The Indonesian participants, who are based in the country where English exposure is minimal, exhibit the most silent learning behaviour toward fluency tasks (nearly 40% stay silent), while the Filipinos, who are exposed to both English and the mother tongue, seem to be less silent but only remain cautious in participating too soon (nearly 30% stay silent).

Requirement of high-quality content as a factor in the degree of thought processing

Comparison of the data in *blue* across the three tables shows that data in International students use more silence in idea processing. With tasks that require focus on meaning and high-quality ideas, such as discovery and preparations, the international group would prioritise the need to process information in silence. The other two groups seem quite similar, that is, more diverse, in their decision to speak and remain silent. Among these participants, there is no outstanding patterns as far as any clear prioritisation toward silent or speech is concern. Instead, different individuals to opt for very different combination

between the two modes, as we can see in the distribution of percentage across all columns. Again, we do not have sufficient data evidence to explain why this is the case. We can only, based on reasoning and observation, argue that since academic study in English at an Australian university is stressful and demanding in both timing and outcome, when it comes to produce content for presentations, students need a great deal of processing time to be able to produce high-quality ideas, in many cases affecting assessment outcome. In the meanwhile, English learning in Indonesia and the Philippines may be subject to less judgement toward content or meaning of speech but more emphasis on the process of communication.

Drawn from the above understanding, learners are not independent decision makers but factors such as history of L2 exposure and academic learning requirement would be influential factors in how students cope with tasks. An effective task-designer might like to develop this awareness and consider these elements when introducing classroom activities. Most importantly, there is the need to spell out expectations so that students would know how to handle a task. In particular, task developers might consider providing explicit suggestions for silent processing, verbal responses, or self-talk when necessary. One example provided by Wilkinson & Olliver-Gray (2006) is an instruction that guides students to write down how they feel during exam time and then compare their responses with peers. Stickler, Batstone, Duensing & Heins (2007) suggest that task designers can specify which part of a task does not involve speaking; and can allocate specific moments when students are expected to reflect or silently type their thoughts. Such instructions show the evidence that materials developers can consider including learning strategies to assist students in coping with the learning process.

The challenge of task development is that silence, after all, might not be equally favoured by all members in a learning community depending on who shares the learning environment and its broader social norms. It is therefore important for teachers to handle such diverse preferences, with clear expectations when conducting multiple sub-tasks that allow various learning modes to come into play.

Besides, it is important to note learner differences. In many cases different learners would naturally respond diversely the same tasks. For example, classroom tasks sometimes exhibit a stimulating quality that inspires students' thinking. At other times, they might have a routine and humdrum characteristic. When learners are inspired, some mind find themselves spending more time in silent thinking; while others may prefer to speak out more with others.

Arguably, learners' silent processing might occur quietly or at times it might develop into the occasional verbal articulation. For example, some reflective students prefer to quietly work on a written task, while other reflective counterparts might switch learning modes and share their thought with peers, especially when the task seems to require some exchange of ideas. Some learners experience such moments of adjusting their participation mode. Empirical research has found that peer influence is a factor which governs how much a learner is willing to participate in classroom discussion (see, for example, Bao, 2014). However, findings from various case studies are often so diverse that they show no consistent formula with regards to what personality leads to talk and silence respectively. You might wish to reflect on your individual inclination in working with peers. To some extent, learners' decision to speak out or to remain quite during a discussion might have to do with peers' behaviour.

4. Concluding remarks

The impact of tasks on silence and verbalisation is an extremely complex area. It would be impossible to come up with absolute rules for tasks to dictate the same responsive behaviour in all kinds of learners across all kinds of context. In many cases, it is teachers' flexibility, supportive attitudes, and innovative pedagogical strategies that would improve task design by allowing both mental and verbal rehearsal to reach its optimum. Although many communicative tasks might expect learners to switch to an impulsive learning mode, during the actual classroom process, some learners might choose to handle them in a more reflective manner. This is because some might need more self-monitoring time than others before verbal exchange can take place. When this happens, the quality of classroom tasks should not be measured by how much speaking occurs but by the depth of learner engagement.

Silence as mental rehearsal provides conditions for self-directed learning which may be either connected to or independent from the teaching. Pedagogy founded on a profound understanding of productive silence can liberate learners from the constraint of having to produce impulsive, low-quality participation. Silence needs to be managed with acute awareness of why, how, when and how long a student needs it to support their own learning and when the verbal mode of learning should take over. Obligatory talk can be frustrating when learners are required to publicise their half-baked thoughts when they are unprepared to do so. Silence training should be organised to include reflectivity, concentration, outcome and avoidance of idle, unproductive moments—the same way as talk that needs to be directed to enhance learning rather than become mere social time in the classroom. The structure of learning might fundamentally change when this knowledge is applied so that learners can employ both silence and talk as learning tools in conscious, informed ways.

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