

Silence in the ESL Classroom: What is The Role of Teacher Positioning of Learners? A Qualitative Case Study of English Department Students' Lack of Interaction in an Undergraduate ESL Classroom in Sri Lanka

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Abstract – Despite the importance given to interaction in second language learning, many students remain unresponsive and passive in their ESL classrooms. To date, numerous studies focusing on learners have been conducted to understand students' non-participation. However, the present qualitative case study, framed by positioning theory, focused on the role of teacher positioning in students' silence. The study was conducted in a mixed-ability ESL classroom in the Department of English Language Teaching in a well-known state university in Sri Lanka. The class was taught by two ESL teachers. After two weeks of observation, two English Department Students (EDS; students who followed English and Literature as a main subject in the university), who were noticeably silent in whole class discussions, were selected for closer examination. Classroom observations, in-depth-interviews, stimulated recall interviews, field notes and audio recordings were employed to collect data over a month's period. The study utilized the constant comparative method (Merriam, 2009), and Strauss and Corbin's (1990) coding strategies to analyze data. The results of the study showed instances where the EDS were silenced by the positions offered by the teachers and the institution. Interestingly, the results further unveiled that a deep analysis of "the paradoxical properties of silence", power and limitations (Glen, 2010) will be helpful in understanding the various underlying causes for these two students' silence. Accordingly, deliberate silence, self-in positions with the less proficient students, effect of other students' turn-taking behaviors in interaction were identified as possible contributing factors to the silence of EDS.

Keywords: Teacher positioning, Advanced Learners of English, Classroom interaction