From Wait Time to Questioning Strategies

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Abstract

Wait time fulfills students' cognitive processing needs and contributes to a higher quality of discourse. It is an internal part of classroom interaction. However, wait time in the classroom discourse remains to be an understudied area. In this essay, I analyze wait time in an L1 primary literacy class using conversation analysis and Turn-taking. The study results is that wait time is mainly shown after the teacher's question or feedbacks, intending to inspire students to come up with any other answers. Besides, wait time also influence Turn-taking in educational settings. It increases the number and the duration of the teacher's turn. It goes on to present some some suggestions for teachers to achieve their communicative goal of leading students to acquire the correct answer more efficiently. That is, compared to encouraging students, building students' understanding of the question and the study content is more important. Additionally, the teacher has to combine the use of wait time and instruction to guide students to gain the right answer.

Keywords

Classroom Silence; Discourse Analyze; Questioning Strategies.

1. Introduction

Wait time is an internal part of classroom interaction. Students need time to acquire the language they need that is related to the new topic, concept, or idea to develop their communicative ability in the target language [1]. Teachers mean to improve students' participation and foster their deep thinking by wait time [2]. However, wait time in the classroom discourse remains to be an understudied area. There are few studies focused on the function of wait time in the classroom interaction, although it fulfills students' cognitive processing needs and contributes to a higher quality of discourse [3]. In this essay, I analyze wait time in an L1 primary literacy class from the perspective of conversation analysis and Turn-taking. I found that wait time is mainly shown after the teacher's question or feedbacks, intending to inspire students to come up with any other answers. Besides, wait time also influence Turn-taking in educational settings. It increases the number and the duration of the teacher's turn. After that, I provide some suggestions for teachers to achieve their communicative goal of leading students to acquire the correct answer more efficiently. That is, compared to encouraging students, building students' understanding of the question and the content is more important. Additionally, the teacher has to combine the use of wait time and instruction to guide students to gain the right answer.

1.1. Definition and Type of Wait Time

Wait time is defined as the duration between a teacher elicitation and student response or second teacher utterance [4]. For a much broader definition of silence, it is described as the cases where neither participant voiced an intelligible word for more than one second [5]. The reason for the temporal cut-off of 1s is that from Hindman et al and Jefferson's research, the maximum tolerance of silence is usually less than 1s both in ordinary and classroom conversation contexts [6, 7]. Rowe's study also suggests that 1 second of the wait time is positive for both teachers and students in L1 classroom interaction [8] .

There are several types of wait time. In linguistic analysis, wait time is categorized into three types: lapse, gap, and pause [9]. Lapse is the space where no talking occurs between the current speaker has finished and the next person starts to talk. A gap occurs before the current speaker assigns another one to speak or claims further right to hold his floor and there is no one else self-select to be the next speak person [10]. Pause develops within a turn, this is the silence between the original speaker has finished his speaking and the nominated speaker has not started taking yet [11]. Lapse rarely happens in the classroom interaction context because teachers are always obliged to select the next speak person to take the turn while there is silence.

1.2. Literature Review of Wait Time

The interest of the research about wait time is started by the publication of Science, silence, and sanctions in 1969 by Rowe. Her research prompts a series of related studies investigating the potential functions of wait time in classroom interactions during 1970-1980. These researches argue that teachers can remarkably improve the discourse quality by manipulating silence [12]. However, from other researchers' point, the wait time is a deliberate silence that signs discomfort in the classroom discourse, while others saw silence as an unconscious behavior that happens after posing a question. After the late 1980s, it has seen a decreasing number of wait time researches. Currently, the number of studies concerning wait time in classroom interactions is still small, but it covers several disciplines and reveals different roles silence plays in classroom discourse.

Researches regarding wait time cover subjects of social studies, mathematics, and foreign language classrooms. Students observed ranging from pupils, high school students, and postgraduates. Meanwhile, in some of the classes, students share different cultural backgrounds, races, and native language. Types of classes include normal classes, pre-sessional courses as well as one-to-one tutoring. It can be seen that classroom silence wildly occurs regardless of disciplines, students as well as types of classes [13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18].

Researchers study classroom silence from different perspectives, Taylor reads silence through neoliberalism and humanizing lenses, arguing that neoliberalism poses material and ideological barriers to the contemporary classroom silence [19]. Matsumoto combines the study of classroom silence with nonverbal interactional resources and presents that both of them play an essential role in dealing with uncooperativeness in ELF classes under the consideration of politeness [20]. Smith and King investigate the connection between wait time and IRF Turn-taking sequence, demonstrating that wait time favors the IRF Turn-taking sequence heavily [21]. However, extended wait time transform discourse out of IRF sequence into a more student-driven pattern.

Ingram and Elliott observed how wait time can affect classroom Turn-taking behavior, finding that wait time is built into and enables classroom talk with a heavy reliance on IRF (Initiation, Response, Feedback) discourse [22, 23]. They also found that extended wait time often precluded student self-selection because it entails teacher control over pauses and student selection, which can hinder naturally flowing conversation.

As for the function of wait time, some scholars hold a positive perspective towards it. They promote that wait time allows students to have more time for cognitive processing so as to improve the quality and complexity of students' answers [24, 25, 26]. Many researchers link the length of wait time to the question types in the classroom discourse, arguing questions that need a high cognitive processing level calls for extending wait time [26, 27]. They hold the view that high cognitive level elicitation fosters students' achievement and confidence, posing a cyclical effect [28, 29]. However, other researchers dispute the effects of wait time. They suggest that students will feel confused and frustrated because of it. Meanwhile, it may also reduce the efficiency of classroom communication as there might be no production coming

from students after an extended wait time. For students who are not participating in the interaction, wait time means little for them [30].

1.3. Conversation Analyze

Conversation analysis is one of the most essential approaches in analyzing classroom interactions [31]. The purpose of this approach is to comprehend the production of coherent discourse and organized sequences [32]. Conversation analysis (CA) describes and explains the Turn-taking structure by adopting a microanalytic lens towards the interactional behavior of participants. CA is a bottom-up approach with an emic perspective, focusing on speaker coordination, inter-subjective understanding, and interaction flow. It enables researchers to reveal the co-constructed process of talk-in-interactions.

1.4. Turn-taking

Goffmandefines turn as chances to hold the floor rather than what we said while holding it [32]. The structure of Turn-taking is varied in different settings like courtrooms, classrooms, news interviews, and ordinary conversation, regarding speak person, time duration, speaking content and when to speak [33, 34, 35, 36]. McHoul depicted Turn-taking systems in classroom interaction by investigating a geography class [37]. It is shown that classroom Turn-taking has several characteristics as follows. Firstly, the teacher is the only person who claims the right to select the next speaker. Although students can show their willingness to take the next turn by raising their hand, they still have to be nominated by the teacher. Sometimes even if the student doesn't want to be the next speaker, they may still be nominated by the teacher and are obliged to contribute in the class. The case where a student selects the next speaker is rare. Teachers always take the next turn after students have finished their answers. Secondly, teachers always retain the right to hold the floor even if they are not the first speaker. Classroom interaction allows pause within the teacher's turn which would not be interrupted by students. Further, after a student's answer, the teacher always has the right of holding the floor. They can nominate the next student or begin the next activity. These traits minimize the overlap in classroom conversations because students have limited chances of speaking. However, it increases the occurrences of gaps in classrooms because other students can't make the turn without teachers' permission even if the current speaker is silent now. Also, gaps occur when the turn changes from students to the teacher. Turn-taking structure is also influenced by other elements like students' age , cultural differences, and the number of participants [38, 39].

2. Method

I take the class excerpt from the book: Talk in Action: Interactions, Identities, and Institutions [40]. This book intends to use this classroom interaction to demonstrate the sequential structure of IRF (Initiation-Response-Feedback).

It is an English Literacy class of six graders in primary school. Both teachers and students are native speakers of English. This class presents "Time, You Old Gypsy Man" by Ralph Hodgson. In this excerpt, the class is talking about the first several lines of the poem: "TIME, you Old Gypsy man, / Will you not stay, / Put up Your caravan/Just for one day?" In this poem, it compares time to the gypsies, who live in no fixed place. Hoping Gypsies stay means people's hope of keeping time.

Extract1

01 Tea: Okay (.) now then (.) has anyone anything to say (.)

02 What d'you think this poem's all about?

03 (2.9)

04 Tea: Miss O'Neil?

05 Stu: The uh: m gypsyman they want him to stay one day
06 longer.
07 Tea: The gypsyman they want him to stay one day longer,
08 (.) Don't be afraid of making a mistake, if you've
09 got any thoughts you put your hand up. = No one's
10 gonna laugh at ya. = I shall be very grateful for
11 anything you have to say. Miss O'Neil said it's a
12 poem about a gypsyman (.) an' somebody wants him
13 to stay. (0.3) Any other ideas. = She's not right.
14 (3.1)
15 Tea: That's the answer I expected but she's not right.
16 (0.9)
17 Tea: Kate my love what are your thoughts
18 (4.3)
19 Mister Williams?
20 (2.5)
21 Tea: Don't be frightented don't be frightened. This is a
22 - not an easy poem. (1.3) Miss Cotrell my dear,
23 Stu: They want him to com: e (1.0) just come anyway
24 they want him to come and stay [with them.
25 Tea: [Uhr who- they want who to come?
26 Stu: The gypsy.
27 Tea: The gypsy. You say (.) we are talking about a gypsyman.
28 (1.1)
29 Tea: You are arn'tcha?
30 Stu: ((nods))
31 Tea: Well we're not. (1.1) We are not talking about a
32 gypsy living in a caravan, (.) Not really. They-
33 the - the word gypsyman is there and the caravan
34 etcetera etcetera etcetera. (.) But (.) ehr this is not
35 really what the poem is all about.
...
... (Six lines omitted)
42 Tea: Mister Roberts.
43 Stu: Could it be some kind of - pickpocket or
44 something- always on the move so he doesn't get
45 caugh [t
46 Tea: [No::it
47 is not a pickpocket pocket - on the move. (.) Mister Amos?
48 Stu: Is it about a bird that flies around?
49 Tea: About a: ?
50 Stu: A bird that flies [around
51 Tea: [A bird flying around. =No...

3. Results

According to the definition of wait time the cases where neither participant voiced an intelligible word for more than one second, there are 8 wait times recorded in this excerpt [41]. The longest one is 4.3s(10) and the shortest one is 1.0s(23). 5 wait times happen when the teacher is waiting for students to self-select to answer the question. 2 wait times happens within the teacher's turn. (29, 32) One wait time is within the students' turn. It can be seen that the teacher spend most of the wait time waiting for students' reply. Also, the average time of these wait time is longer than those within the teacher's and the students' turn.

Wait time appears after the teacher presents questions for students. The first wait time recorded is the one after the teacher asks the question: what would you think this poem's all about? This question is a comprehension question and needs a high level of cognitive processing. Therefore, the teacher needs to provide more wait time for students to think about it [42]. In this case, the teacher waits for 2.9s and then directly nominates a student to answer it. Similar circumstances also happen in 14, 18, 20, where the teacher simply invites volunteers by asking students' thoughts and calling students' names to answer them. The teacher adopts a simple strategy for questioning. In beginning, she asks what would you think this poem's all about? Following that, she just asks students whether they have something to say such as any other ideas, what are your thoughts, or just picks students by saying their names directly. Nevertheless, the teacher never doubts whether her question is clear or interpret the question. Neither does she provide any clues. She assumes all of the students have understood the question and they have the ability to answer it by themselves. Or it might be she doesn't realize students may need some clues to build their answer. However, the way she calling students has changed significantly. Initially, she says Miss O'Neil and Mister Williams to show that she takes them as an adult and respect their understanding of the poem. Subsequently, she changes that to Kate my love, Cotrell my dear to show a close relationship between them and try to foster students' involvement.

Wait time also happens after the teacher giving feedback to students. (14, 16, 22, 29, 32) In this excerpt, it is shown that the teacher mainly negatively comments on students' answers. After that, she waits for students to answer it. In 07 and 28, the teacher repeats students' words to imply she gets their response and understand their meaning. After that, she directly evaluates their contribution as incorrect.(13,32,33) In 13, she briefly denies the answer by saying she's not right. In 15, She shows she has expected students will make this mistake. In 29 and 32, after waiting for a while, the teacher reassures and further explains why students' answers are wrong. However, she doesn't try to build students' understanding based on their contributions and guide them to get the correct interpretation. In the meantime, the teacher also takes other feedback strategies to foster students' involvement. She encourages students by saying don't be afraid, don't be frightened, I shall be very grateful and no one's gonna laugh at you, intending to eliminate students' scrupulosity of losing face in front of the class or blamed by the teacher. However, these encouragements are too abstract and don't help students to get the right answer. Further, most of these sentences are an imperative sentence, which implies commanding and may put more pressure on them. Although the teacher repairs her word and changes "a difficult poem" to "not an easy poem" (21-22) it still doesn't successfully trigger the right answer.

Teacher's waiting after various questions and feedbacks seems doesn't work. In 03, 14, and 22, no one self-select to be the speaker. In 18 and 20, students who are nominated choose to be silent toward the teacher's questioning. It can be interpreted as their answer is the same as the former student, which is marked as not right by the teacher. Or they are unwilling to participate. In other cases, they may just don't have any idea about this question. After 22, silence from students seems to be less than before. Most of them respond to the teacher's questioning

instantly. However, they appear to be confused and unconfident in their answers. In 23, Cotrell shows her hesitation by the lasting come. After waiting for a while, she completes and further explains her understanding. However, her answer is interrupted by the teacher. Afterward, she stops sharing her thought and uses a nod to reply. In later stages, both Roberts and Amos convey their thoughts in the form of a question, showing that they are not confident about their answer.

In terms of Turn-taking, wait time influence Turn-taking significantly. It increases the number and the duration of the teacher's turn. Wait time always happens when the teacher is waiting for students to self-select to be the volunteer and contribute to the answer. However, in this excerpt, the teacher seldom successfully triggers students' participation by waiting. (03 14, 16, 18, 20, 22) As a result, the turn constantly returns to the teacher. To get a response from students, the teacher has to initiate a turn and nominate students from time to time. Then, in consideration of students rarely give any response; the teacher comes up with various ways of questioning and feedback to encourage them. For example, in this excerpt, she changes her way of calling students from Miss O'Neil and Mister Williams to Kate my love, and Cotrell my dear. Besides, she constantly gives negative feedbacks to students answer, intending to trigger the right answer. She also adopts other strategies to eliminate students' scrupulosity of losing face in front of the class or blamed by the teacher by saying don't be afraid, don't be frightened, I shall be very grateful and no one's gonna laugh at you. These strategies of questioning and feedbacks give rise to a longer duration of the teacher's turn. Eventually, several times of waiting consumes too much time but doesn't bring a correct answer from students, which might cause the teacher to frequently interrupt students' wrong answer to seek the right one and improve the efficiency of the class. The teacher interrupts students' responses three times when they haven't finished their speaking. The first time is when the student says: want him to come and stay with them. (24) The teacher interrupts to figure out what does him refers to. (25-26) The purpose of the second (46-47) and third (51) interruption is to quickly deny student's answers.

4. Discussion

4.1. Compared to Encouraging Students, Building Students' Understand of the Question and the Content is more Important

In this excerpt, the teacher frequently invites students to answer the question. However, students still don't involve actively. There are several cases that students don't give any response and choose to be silent. It might because students don't fully understand the teacher's question: what would you think this poem's all about? Many of the pupils answer gypsy man. Actually, this poem does about gypsy men. However, the teacher expects them to say time, which is the theme of this poem. The teacher doesn't convey her meaning clearly, which leads to a misunderstanding between the teacher and students. Students don't know what they are expected to say and don't understand why their answers are wrong. Thus, teachers need to check whether students understand their question and interpret it or give an example for students if necessary.

In addition, the teacher also wants to improve students' participation by softening students' nervousness. She calls students my love, my dear, and tells them do not to be afraid, she shall be very grateful and no classmate will laugh at them. The teacher holds the view that students don't answer is because they are afraid rather than they don't know how to answer the question. However, it doesn't trigger any willingness of participation but put more pressure on students because the teacher repeats don't be frightened later. The reason she says this might be she observed that students become more nervous. The third-way teacher uses to seek the right answer is to negatively commend former answers. Initially, students' answer mainly comes

from the content of the poem such as gypsy man and caravan. However, the teachers' negative evaluation leads to the confusion of following nominated students, which is shown by the phenomenon that students convey their thoughts in the form of a question. They choose to don't reply or answer something beyond the text. Obviously, their answers become more far away from the theme of the poem. Actually, this poem uses a rhetorical device and compares time to gypsy man. Time is linked to gypsy man. If the teacher can build students' understanding based on gypsy men rather than directly deny their answers, she might be able to guide students to get the correct answer more quickly.

4.2. Wait Time Won't Trigger Students to Answer but Can Foster Students' Thinking

Wait time may not bring students into discussion, but it fosters students' thinking. The teacher has to combine the use of wait time and instruction to guide students to the right answer. The students who choose to be silent initially still stay silent after the teacher waits for several seconds. As a result, after the teacher waits for Kate for 4.3s, she reduces her wait time for Williams to 2.5s as she thinks Williams will not answer this question either. Meanwhile, even though the teacher using several seconds waiting for students to self-select themselves to be the speaker. No one puts up their hands; they are still nominated by the teacher passively.

Wait time fosters students' thinking. It can be shown from the phenomena that students change their direction of answer and begin to reply to the teacher's questioning instantly after several occurrences of wait time. But wait time actually reduce the efficiency of the class as it doesn't necessarily bring the right answer. Although the teacher provides students a lot of time to think, students' don't answer the question correctly. Solely using wait time without providing any clues or guidance might doesn't work well. The teacher has to combine the use of wait time and instruction to help students to come up with the correct answer.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, silence is an integral part of language and plays an important role in classroom interaction. In this essay, through analyzing aN L1 primary literacy class, I found that silence mainly shown after the teacher's question or feedbacks, intending to inspire students to come up with any other answers. However, the teacher's waiting after various questions and feedbacks seem doesn't work. It doesn't improve students' participation or lead to the right answer. Besides, wait time also influence Turn-taking in educational settings. It increases the number and the duration of the teacher's turn. To help teachers achieve their communicative goal, which is to lead students acquire a correct understanding of the poem. I suggest that compared to encouraging students, building students' understanding of the question and the content is more important. Additionally, although wait time can foster students' thinking, the teacher has to combine the use of wait time and instruction to guide students to gain the right answer.

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