



**International
Journal of Society, Culture & Language
IJSCL**

Journal homepage: www.ijsc.net
ISSN 2323-2210 (online)

Turn-Taking and Preferring Silence in Synchronous EFL Online Classroom Interaction

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ARTICLE HISTORY:

Received April 2023
Received in Revised form June 2023
Accepted June 2023
Available online July 2023

KEYWORDS:

Language teaching and learning
EFL online learning
Psychological aspect
Turn-taking
Silent learning

Abstract

This study aims to classify the turn-taking types used by students and to assemble the students' reasons for choosing silence in online classroom interaction. Using a case study design, we obtained the data from observations and interviews. The observation was conducted by using CLOUDX Meeting in EFL setting with 142 high school students. Meanwhile, the interview process was employed through WhatsApp free call with nine focused participants. The results revealed that students applied 'taking over' and 'yielding the turn' types. Specifically, in taking over, students did interrupting and overlapping. Another finding reported that the dominant reasons for participants preferring negative silence were categorized as psychological aspects which students undergo, such as language anxiety, unwillingness to communicate, and a lack of interest. Hence, it is necessary for EFL teachers to conduct teaching practice in more meaningful and interactive ways, such as using multimodal learning resources.

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<http://dx.doi.org/10.22034/ijsc.2023.1972605.2839>

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1. Introduction

The transition of education, which required educators to move away from face-to-face into online learning, is a new challenge because of the unfamiliar space for Indonesian. This transition also forces every school to implement e-learning, correspondence education, external studies, flexible learning, and massive online classes, as well as face-to-face learning (Rasmitadila et al., 2020). Moreover, educators fall back on replicating familiar face-to-face practices because teachers have to find out or determine the best tools and methods for running their online learning (Henriksen, 2020).

However, creating an online class to be active is a big challenge for teachers. It is also discussed (Sugeng & Suryani, 2019) that in online learning, the lack of engagement of students has become a general problem faced by teachers. Specifically, not all students have the ability to participate in online class interaction (Hamdany & Picard, 2022). For instance, some students prefer not to speak in the discussion forum. This condition is contrary to the notion telling that students' participation is needed to develop a good interaction between teachers and students (Stecula & Wolniak, 2022). Students fall into three distinct groups in their online class participation (Taylor, 2000); First, the participants who actively participate in the online classroom interaction; second, those who read messages but do not post any; and third, those who are mostly in a "read and hear-only mode".

In consequence, it is stated that teachers need to emphasize each of the three dimensions of interaction (i.e., student-teacher, peer-to-peer, and interaction with technology) within their Internet-based courses and develop methods to facilitate them in the interest of making the online class more interactive (Arbaugh, 2000). In this point, many teachers have already applied the three dimensions in different ways, such as written lectures, quizzes, interesting class discussions, in-class exercises with attractive methods, and collaborative projects to make an interactive class (Battalio, 2007).

Regarding this topic, numerous studies have been undertaken. One of them is a study conducted by Hittleman (1988) which investigated the silent participants in the classroom. The study showed that there are many possibilities and

reasons why students prefer silence in classroom interaction. Next, Sedova and Navratilova (2020) and Remedios et al. (2008) analyzed silent students with various levels of students' intelligence in the classroom. The results showed that the silence from high achievers reflects their understanding of certain material; meanwhile, being silent by the low achievers showed that they lack comprehension of the lesson. On the other hand, Remedios et al. (2008) reported that student's choice to be silent is a consequence of multiple constraints, personal, contextual, and cultural, and that silence should not be taken to signify a lack of learning. Thereafter, the relationship between turn-taking and silent learning among students has also been investigated (Karas, 2017). The study resulted that the participants use a variety of turn-taking mechanisms in order to enter classroom interaction, but many of them lacked verbal contribution, so they turned into silent learners (Sukirman et al., 2022).

From the findings above, it is concluded that previous studies mostly focused on analyzing turn-taking and silent learning in face-to-face or offline classroom interaction. Hence, this present study attempts to fill the gap by analyzing turn-taking and silent learning in online classroom interaction among EFL students in Indonesia. Specifically, this study is an endeavor to categorize the types of turn-taking appearing in EFL online classrooms and find out the rationales for choosing silence from the eyes of students. It is expected that this study may be helpful for the instructors to find out the best method for their online class learning in increasing students' participation and also to fix their passive online classroom situation as a deep self-evaluation.

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1. Turn-Taking

Turn-taking deals with controlling and regulating interaction by means of the notion of interruptions and overlaps that systematically occur by the speakers due to familiarity within a cultural context (Thornbury & Slade, 2006). This condition is reflected when people are engaged in the interaction. In the online classroom setting, turns almost always begin and end smoothly, with short lapses of time between them (Cassell et al., 1999). Most online classroom interactions start and are completed

by the instructor; then, the students just follow along with the interaction (Alexa et al., 2022). When turn-taking already occurs in the online classroom interaction, the students follow along with the interaction. It means that students may remain silent or choose to be silent learners rather than take turns.

The general term for students' silence is communication apprehension. It is a situational-specific social difficulty for many students (Hittleman, 1988). Because spoken activity is essential to learn, students learn through talk (MacIntyre & Scott, 2022; Wells & Arauz, 2006), and their academic performance can be largely attributed to the quality of class discourse. Silent students suffer from a clear academic handicap because their behavior is misinterpreted as low intelligence, alienation, or lack of skills. The degree of uneasiness or fear experienced in communication, known as communication apprehension, can potentially be influenced by various factors, including power distance, age, and gender. This suggests that power distance may play a significant role as a preceding element in the overall communication process (Albuquerque et al., 2023).

However, although silent students may struggle to participate and do not provide a verbal contribution to the whole classroom interaction, not all non-verbal behavior is negative. Since silence in the classroom can imply many different things, it shouldn't be interpreted negatively. Since they also contribute to co-constructing the learning in the setting of the classroom, silent students who actively listen, write, and/or participate in discussions should be acknowledged as dynamic participants (Chung, 2021). According to Bao (2014), many students prefer to learn silently and have various creative ways to enhance language acquisition without contributing to speaking. There are many possibilities for why students prefer to remain silent during learning. The quiet ones may have a lack of interest, shyness, language anxiety, social alienation, unwillingness to communicate, ethnic or cultural divergence, or low intellect (Hittleman, 1989). This phenomenon of turn-taking and its relation with silent learning provides the researchers' with reasons to conduct this study in an attempt to figure out which turn-taking types are used by the students during online classroom interaction and also to find out silent students' possible reasons why

they prefer silence rather than turn-taking in the online classroom interaction.

2.2. Preferring Silence

Preferring silence refers to the inclination or tendency of an individual to choose silence as a preferred mode of communication or response in various situations (Albuquerque et al., 2023). It is the deliberate choice to remain silent rather than speaking or expressing oneself verbally. This preference for silence can be influenced by various factors, such as personal communication style, cultural norms, introversion, or a desire to reflect or observe before engaging in verbal communication.

The majority of participants thought it was much better to remain silent, consider what they had learned, and then share their minds rather than truly expressing their opinions only to risk being judged by others (Chung, 2021). They also believed that the professors would understand their silence and that this was how they learned if they remained silent. The participants also believed that maintaining silence was a good way to maintain harmony in classroom dynamics.

For educators aiming to create an equal classroom built on open, reflexive, and honest discussion, silence might be the greatest impediment (Kaufman, 2008). Silence not only prevents individuals from expression, but it also hinders the development of collective knowledge, understanding, compassion, and empathy. Particularly, it happens when learners and teachers feel inhibited from giving voice to their experiences when they feel uncomfortable naming their world to others, and when they worry about the interpersonal repercussions of contributing to the discourse. This places the classroom as a site that does not support students to have good social communication.

2.3. Synchronous EFL Online Classroom Interaction

In a synchronous EFL Online classroom interaction, students are more engaged. As an instance, in the self-directed MMS (Multimedia Messaging Systems)-based communicative tasks (Wrigglesworth, 2020), students feel that they are directly given the room to interact and participate in the class. For example, they can communicate with their peers, share ideas with one another, and express their opinions. Another

report also reveals that students enjoy learning on some platforms in synchronized online learning, such as Kakao talks. More than that, a study undertaken by Saeed et al. (2021) reports that there are lots of technological tools used by teachers during the Covid-19 pandemic, aiming to maintain students' engagement and participation. Specifically, this study, conducted in a university in the KSA (Kingdom of Saudi Arabia), found that engagement was maintained in a multidirectional and multimodal manner. With their peers and the teacher, it gave students a chance to talk about their work. The perceived value of contact was impacted by several elements and difficulties associated with learners and technology, despite learners' high perception levels. In order to cultivate and maintain student involvement in online language learning courses, including writing classes, the study recommended that instructors and teachers make appropriate use of technology combinations.

3. Methodology

3.1. Participants

Two different types of participants are involved; an English teacher and senior high school students. The 46-year-old English teacher is a professional teacher who has been certified, active in the teacher forum, and also regularly involved in some teacher training and workshops. In the classroom, she usually used English as the main language though the students mostly employed their mother tongue. In addition, the participants were EFL tenth graders (15 to 16 years old) coming from social science and science majors in one of the public senior high schools. The participants were chosen because they had learned English for three years since they were in Junior high school and had experienced the online learning process since the pandemic had started.

3.2. Instruments

This qualitative study is in the form of a case study with observations and interviews as the instruments. The participant observation was deployed in order to find out more information in real activity so that the data yield actual results. Participant observation is a more "natural" and much less intrusive, reactive, or unnatural form of inquiry than many other forms of research (Jorgensen, 2015). However, because of the pandemic, it was conducted online with

three times observations, but it only took one observation to be further analyzed because of the similar results from each observation. The observation was recorded into videos and then transcribed to determine the conversations which contained turn-taking aspects.

The semi-structured interview was chosen in order to be able to narrow down the topics or themes more closely related to the research questions (Gill et al., 2008). Each student was interviewed and audiotaped for around 15 minutes. To put them at ease, it started with questions about school or online learning outcomes (Lyonga, 2022) before going into the research topic. The researcher first checked to ensure that the participants ever took a turn and chose to be silent in the classroom interaction. After that, they were asked the reason why they took the turn. Afterward, the student's answers were connected to psychological aspects. The psychological aspects used to guide the answers were lack of interest (Ainley et al., 2002), unwillingness to communicate (Gregersen & Horwitz, 2002), language anxiety (Mathew et al., 2022; Young, 1991), and shyness (Zimbardo, 1986).

3.3. Procedure

3.3.1. Data Collection

Here is the data collection procedure for this study.

- 1) First, one of the researchers carried out three-time observations and recorded them. All of them were conducted in CloudX Meeting during the pre-service teaching program for the purpose of delivering materials. The observations used a teacher-centered approach, or the process was led by one of the researchers as a teacher.
- 2) Second, the researchers watched all the observations and recorded them.
- 3) Third, the researchers took one of the three recordings and transcribed it. The length of the observation, which was transcribed, was around 60 minutes. However, it only took one transcript from three observations process because of similar results.
- 4) Then, after the observation data was collected, the researchers started to collect the interview data. Two of the researchers contacted all the participants via WhatsApp, explained the research and what they were supposed to do, then asked them to help with

the interview process. When they were willing, they immediately set up a schedule for the interview.

- 5) Next, the researchers conducted interviews according to a predetermined schedule. Each interview was recorded in the form of an audio tape.
- 6) Last, after all the data were collected, the researchers analyzed the observation data to classify the turn-taking types and then analyzed the interview data to collect students' reasons.

3.3.2. Data Analysis

As has been mentioned, this study attempted to analyze the types of turn-taking and uncover the reasons students use silence in the classroom. The observation data were analyzed by using the theory of Mey (Mey, 2001) to classify the turn-taking types into mechanisms consisting of taking the floor (starting up, taking over, interruption, and overlapping), holding the floor, and yielding the floor, which was mostly used by students in online classroom interaction.

4. Results

The first finding showed that students used two types of turns: Taking the turn (taking over, interruption, and overlapping) and yielding the turn.

4.1. Taking the Turn

From the data, it is recorded that students employed turn-taking involving interruption, overlapping, and taking over.

As an example,

Teacher: *"You are welcome. Those who are not on cam, let's turn on the cam first. You must turn on the cam; those who do not turn on the camera will...—"*

Student: *"Miss mohon maaf saya sedang tidak di rumah jadi kamera nya tidak dinyalakan tapi saya akan mendengarkan." (I'm sorry Miss., I'm not at home now so I can't turn on the camera yet I'm still listening to you).*

Teacher: (still talking while the student interrupts) *"-yang tidak on cam Miss akan anggap tidak hadir loh." (Those who turn off their camera will be considered absent).*

Teacher: *"You must turn on the cam okay. Gapapa gak harus keliatan keseluruhan*

mukanya, nongol dikit juga ga papa." (That's ok if you only show up a little).

Student: *"Oh baik Miss." (Alright Miss).*

The interruption from the student and the way the teacher kept talking until finished caused overlapping because the student and teacher were talking together. Overlapping is a moment when the participants talk at the same time together (Mey, 2001). However, in this case, the reason why the student interrupted and overlapped with the teacher was that he was afraid the teacher did not admit him to the online class meeting since he didn't turn on his camera, so he hurried to speak, then caused interruption and overlap.

(Taking over)

Teacher: *"Miss wants to know, maybe science and social science majors have own opinions, come on representatives from each majors, give your opinions, mungkin MIPA akan setuju jika itu terus berlangsung dan terjadi di Indonesia juga, dan IPS tidak setuju karena akan sulit mendapatkan pekerjaan dan lain lain, atau mungkin sebaliknya. Coba Miss pengen tau." (The science class may agree if that is continuously going on; meanwhile, the social science ones disagree since getting a job is hard, or on the contrary).*

Student: *"Miss, saya ingin mencoba menjawab. Saya C.S. dari X MIPA 8. Menurut pendapat saya sih sangat mendukung Miss apalagi untuk membuat segalanya jadi lebih mudah dan efisien." (Miss, let me answer, I am CS from X science class 8. I think it is helpful especially for making all easy and efficient).*

In this piece of conversation, the teacher asked students to give opinions about the topic. Even though the teacher did not ask directly, the teacher asked indirectly by lowering her tone, which means the teacher finished her speech and gave the students a turn.

4.2. Yielding the Turn

Teacher: *"Okay, before we begin, let's pray together. Ada yang mau memimpin do'a?" (Is anyone ready to lead the prayer?)*

Student: *"Saya Miss. In English Miss?"*

Teacher: *"Okay, boleh, yes in English. What's your name?"*

From that piece of conversation, the student took the turn, then yielded the turn to the teacher by giving the teacher a question back.

The students used those turn-taking types for some reasons. The interview data showed the reason why the student interrupted the teacher and then overlapping happened. Because the teacher and student spoke together when the student didn't turn on the camera and was afraid of not being admitted by the teacher, he was hurried to speak, which caused interrupting and overlapping. In this case, indirectly, the student did not know that it was not his turn, whereas the student who used taking over and yielding the turn really knew that it was his turn because he took the turn exactly at the time when the teacher finished the speech.

As shown in interview data, the student who used taking over said that the reason why she took this turn-taking type was that she really wanted to give her opinion about the topic and quickly took the turn when the teacher lowered the tone at the end of the speech. She quickly took the turn when the teacher lowered the tone at the end of the speech, indicating that she knew that it was her turn. Same as the student who used yielding the turn, he took the turn because there was a marker that the teacher gave a question to the students. In that moment, this participant indirectly knew that it was his turn because of that question marker. However, the reason why he used yielding the turn by giving the teacher questions back was that he wanted to assure the teacher about something.

Rather than taking turns, the second finding showed that the students prefer silence.

QIR2 “Biasanya saya itu kalau gak merespon suka takut gitu masih takut nanya gitu sih Miss” (commonly, I just feel afraid of asking a question). They argue that if they feel afraid from the beginning, they will never ask or say something during the lesson.

QIR3 “Mmm gini Miss, saya itu takut salah, kalau misal si gurunya saya belum tau gitu gimananya, tapi kalau udah sekali nanya terus tau oh gurunya gini gini jadi kesananya pun jadi lebih berani untuk bertanya. Pengen nanya terus gitu. Kalau dari awal gak berani mengungkapkan atau memberanikan diri pasti kesananya jadi gak mau gak mau gitu jadi suka dibiasain dengan cara seperti itu. Selalu mencoba begitu Miss.” (I'm afraid of being

wrong, if, for example, the teacher is still new and I don't know what to do, but if I've asked once and then I know oh the teacher is like this so I go there and I'm bolder to ask. I want to keep asking like that. If from the start you don't dare to express yourself or dare to be there, you don't want to do that, so you like to get used to it that way. Always try so Miss).

The participant said, “*saya takut salah*” which means I was afraid of being wrong. The factor that triggers fear of this participant is when the teacher is new, and the participant does not know yet how the teachers' behavior is. Therefore, the participant is afraid to make mistakes. It is concluded that based on psychological aspects, this participant's reason was categorized as anxiety:

“*Saya itu takut salah, kalau misal si gurunya saya belum tau gitu gimananya, tapi kalau udah sekali nanya terus tau oh gurunya gini gini jadi kesananya pun jadi lebih berani untuk bertanya.*” (I'm afraid, for example, when the teacher is still new, but if you've asked once and then you know 'oh the teacher is like this' so I go there and I'm bolder to ask?).

“*Jadi kaya saya itu masih takut untuk menjabarkannya masih bingung gimana ya nanya nya gitu.*” (So it's like I'm still afraid of describing it, I'm still confused about how to ask it, like that).

The source of personal language anxiety for this participant was a lack of confidence. Personal issues, such as lack of confidence, are probably the most commonly cited and discussed sources of language anxiety in most studies (Young, 1991). The reason is fear of being wrong, making a mistake, or being judged by the teacher because the participant does not know yet about the teacher. By following their fear and ego, they do not want to take a risk that is possibly produced; therefore, this participant prefers silence. As reported by Hawkins (2009), a lack of confidence in students can be factored by protecting their fragile egos, or they do not want to take risks.

It is categorized as a lack of interest or situational interest type because this participant had no interest in following the lessons caused by certain aspects of the home environment. As reported by Pintrich (2000), lack of interest, situational interest type, is a moment when the students have no interest in actually following

the lessons, elicited by certain aspects of the environment.

It showed that the dominant reasons from participants, both the students who always take turns and students who always prefer to be silent, are categorized as psychological aspects of language anxiety, which is a lack of confidence. The main reasons were the fear of being wrong or judged by others. Moreover, because the online classroom meeting was joined by many participants, the participants got lack of confidence. They did not have much bravery to express what they had intended. Besides language anxiety, the data revealed students' unwillingness to communicate and their lack of interest. Since the pandemic, the students have learned at home. The situation at home could affect their mood to join the online classroom interaction. Their bad mood controlled them; therefore, they preferred silence. However, the school subjects also affect them, which is categorized as a lack of interest. If the subject makes them depressed, they will prefer silence.

5. Discussion

The findings revealed that turn-taking types that appeared in the online classroom cover interruption, taking over, overlapping, and yielding the turn.

First, the interruption done by students aims to get clarification from teachers. Moreover, the theory discusses that interruption has more functions rather than just asking for clarification. Specifically, this turn type aims to change the topic, state the disagreement, give assistance, and more (Afrina et al., 2022). This finding is hand in hand with the previous research results that interruption is not always in the form of impolite mode, yet it could be chosen to keep the cooperative purpose in the conversation (Hamad, 2021). In this point, the piece of conversation was unique because the student used two sub-types in the taking the turn type at the same time. The teacher interrupted the student by talking while the teacher was not finished with her speech yet. According to Mey (2001), interruption means speaking without waiting until the speaker really finished speaking. However, the teacher kept continuing the speech until it finished, even though it was interrupted by the student.

Second, taking over was also chosen by students in the classroom interaction. This evidence is

considered good since taking over could help students be aware of the timing of their speaking. More than that, sharing opinions through this strategy also encourages students to be more engaged in the class (Ibraheem, 2017). Technically, taking over can be indicated if the speakers are lowering their tone (Mey, 2001). Particularly, the students took over the conversation by giving their opinion about the topic because they knew that the teacher gave a turn.

Third, the use of overlapping in the classroom conversation reflects that sometimes, students have an expectation of what is said by the current speaker, in this context, the teacher. This result is also confirmed by previous studies, such as Hamad's (2021), that overlapping is an alternative utilized by students in classroom interaction for some reasons. This result is also hand in hand with another study (Rahim et al., 2019) that overlapping is frequently chosen by students when they interact with the teacher. Following the framework of Schegloff (2015), the strategy is categorized as competitive overlapping since the students tend to take the speaking turn to do the confirmation. In other words, the student's perception shows that overlapping is not always a rude/ impolite strategy as long as it is conveyed in a good manner.

Fourth, yielding the turn also appeared in the conversational analysis. This turn was expressed by the teacher when she gave students room to speak. This result is in line with the notion of Mey (2001) that yielding the turn is a phenomenon when the speaker gives a turn with a question to the next speaker because the speaker wants to know the response from the listener. This choice also confirms the previous research that one of the ways to engage learners in classroom interaction is yielding the turn (Amir & Jakob, 2020). It also revealed that male and female teachers prefer to use yielding the turn in taking the students' enthusiasm and participation in the classroom.

Furthermore, there is another type of turn-taking called holding the turn. This turn is discussed by many scholars, such as Stenstrom (1994), saying that holding the turn happens when someone wants to hold the chance but s/he has difficulty determining what to say (Sinaga et al., 2021). Technically, holding the turn is employed through silent pauses, repetition, and verbal

fillers. In other words, the absence of this turn points out that the teacher and students did not have any barriers to convey/ express their thought. Notwithstanding this fact, the teachers have to make sure that the turn-taking done by students supports the success of the learning. They are also required to be aware of the quality of turn-taking in the classroom by establishing good interpersonal relationships with students (Ng et al., 2000).

The reasons for students' silence were categorized into psychological aspects, such as lack of interest, unwillingness to communicate, and language anxiety (Albuquerque et al., 2023). Specifically, students felt that the learning process was not interesting. In addition, students did not have any motivation to talk, supported by their feeling of being wrong to speak up in class. Hence, from this finding, it is inferred that the silence of students is categorized as negative silence (Juma et al., 2022; Rosanti & Mulyani, 2023) since it indicates students' disengagement in the classroom, meaning that it contrasts with Bao's (2014) that silence could indicate the high level of student's comprehension.

Hence, it is worthy of note that EFL teachers need to create more meaningful classroom interaction through some interactive ways of teaching. In this light, the teachers are required to have multimodal competencies in benefiting any mode of teaching, aiming to attract students' interest and activeness in the classroom. For example, teachers use digital media, some teaching platforms, and other supporting tools in their teaching practice. Hence, the classroom activities will vary and develop more turn-taking types and decrease the negative silence of the students. By doing so, it is expected that students will be cognitively, affectively, and behaviorally engaged in the classroom.

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