

## ***Foreign English Teachers in the Chinese Classroom: Focus on Teacher-Student Interaction***

**Liumei Wang**

*Jiaying University, China*

This exploratory study involved 25 foreign English teachers and 99 Chinese students at a Chinese university, empirically examining their interaction in the Chinese classroom. Based on questionnaires and interview data, this research explores foreign English teachers' and Chinese students' perspectives on classroom teacher-student interaction. The author also explores the reasons: the differences of Socratic methods and Confucian methods. The foreign English teachers attributed the factors affecting the interaction to the cultural, linguistic, approach, and psychological/affective factors. However, students attributed the factors affecting the interaction to the motivational and cultural factors and learning habit. Finally, the author identified some pertinent implications for foreign English teachers, the students, and the universities, with a view to improving the quality of classroom teaching and learning.

**Key words: teacher-student interaction, foreign English teachers, Chinese students**

### **INTRODUCTION**

In order to encourage international exchange and cooperation, and to create an authentic context for students to learn English, many universities in China recruit foreign teachers to teach English. Currently, China annually recruits

more than 100,000 foreign experts to teach English as a foreign/second language<sup>1</sup>. Seemingly many foreign English teachers do not anticipate any problems between students and themselves and come to China with high expectations. For example, they come with their own thoughts and expectations because they think they are going to teach their own languages, thus, they assume Chinese students are similar to English language learners from their own countries. Nevertheless, they do encounter difficulties, as can be generally seen when in-class communicative clashes eventually give way to frustration and conflict, because of cultural differences and because foreign teachers usually bring their own cultural perspectives, values, hopes, dreams, prejudices, stereotypes and assumptions to the classroom (Banks & Lynch, 1986).

In any culture, teacher-student interaction is influenced by norms of behaviors, values, and beliefs that exist in that culture (Watkins and Biggs, 2001, p. 78). This implies that the interaction between foreign English teachers and Chinese students might differ from the teacher-student interaction previously studied because when foreign English teachers and Chinese students come into one classroom, the types of teacher and student behavior that are valued in each of their own cultures will present misunderstandings and even cultural conflicts (Heidi, 1999 cited in Zhao, 2007, p. 1). The reasons are that they are from different countries and present different classroom behaviors. In each culture, teachers and students have very strong expectations about what normal classrooms are like (Stubbs, 1983 cited in Zhao, 2007, p. 4). Therefore, it's crucial to explore foreign English teacher-student interaction in the Chinese classroom to see whether the present study will be in accord with the previous findings: students are generally unresponsive and avoid interaction with the teachers in class.

---

<sup>1</sup> [www.chinatefl.com](http://www.chinatefl.com)

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Generally speaking, interaction is the collaborative exchange of thoughts, feelings or ideas, between two or more people. According to Liu and Zhao (2010), the interaction between teachers and students plays a significant role in all classroom activities because through the interaction with teachers, students can increase their language store and use all languages they possess. Through the interaction, students have opportunities to understand and use the language that was once incomprehensible. Additionally, they could get more input and more opportunities for output.

Interaction is an important concept for English language teachers as well. Therefore, since the 1970s, researchers have come to realize that successful language learning depends heavily on the type of interaction that takes place in the classroom (Ellis, 1985). Studies such as Gass and Mackey (2007), Mackey (2007a, 2007b), McDonough (2004) show the interaction processes, like negotiation of meaning, provision of feedback, and production of modified output that would promote L2 development. The development and success of a class depends on a greater extent to the interaction between the teacher and students (Tsui, 1995). Long (1996) argues that interaction facilitates acquisition because of the conversational and linguistic modifications that occur in such discourse that provide learners with the input they need.

A large number of relevant studies depict students in the Chinese universities as inactive when it comes to interacting with teachers, which has worried teachers from the west. For example, Hammond and Gao (2002) described Chinese classroom interaction as tending to be “fragmented, linear, competition oriented, and authority-centered” (p. 228). Watkins and Biggs (2001) indicated that in the Chinese classroom, the teachers spent most of the lesson time in direct teaching and questioning. The high percentage of questioning showed that interaction was in general encouraged in the context of teachers-centered activities, which, indeed, were the major components. Liu and Littlewood (1997) also ascribed Chinese students’ non-participation

to the teacher-centered format to the fact that students had been accustomed to operating in formal schooling, in which they are not allowed to make noise. The Chinese students' cognitive style was summarized as learning through listening, not doing. Students seldom initiated questions or challenged teachers, which did not necessarily mean that they were passive. In fact, they were engaging with the content of the interaction non-verbally. Zhang and Zhou (2004) also claimed that Chinese students' interaction in the classroom tended to be nonverbal. Valiente (2008) found that Chinese students used unspoken agreements and conventions as a manifestation of respect, 'face', and deep social harmony. This leads to students' being reluctant to interact in the classroom, which is, of course, non-beneficial for language learning. Comparing U.S. students and Chinese students, Roberts and Tuleja (2008) found a marked difference in modes of interaction in the classroom. Usually, Chinese students expected, and were more comfortable with maintaining a higher level of formality than was the case with their U.S. counterparts. Zhang and Wang (2009) made a comparative study of native English teachers and non-native English teachers interaction in Chinese context and found that for both groups of teachers, classroom interaction is dominated by teacher talk. Holmes (2004) stated that many Chinese students regarded volunteering answers, commenting, interrupting, criticizing, asking questions, or seeking clarification as overly bold and immodest. Chan's (1993) and Biggs' (1996) findings (Cited in Watkins and Biggs, 2001, p. 108) revealed that in the Chinese universities, despite the relatively little interaction and lack of response to the teachers in the classroom, conversely, there was much teacher-student interaction outside the classroom, with a lot of informal discussions and collective activities.

To sum up, as we can see from the above review, in most of the existing literature, Chinese students are impressive by the researchers because they are reluctant to participate in classroom activities; they hardly volunteer replies; they seldom answer, let alone initiate questions; even if they answer, they give brief replies; they seldom speak up about their opinions even if they have one; and they hold back from expressing their views (Cortazzi & Jin,

1996; Jackson, 2002). Based on these findings, many western researchers have set out to discover what holds Chinese students back from participating in classroom interaction. For example, lack of opportunity to use English for communicative purposes and their lack of English proficiency and confidence (Jackson, 2002; Liu & Littlewood, 1997). Some other examples are: students' fear of mistakes; teachers' intolerance of silence; uneven allocation of turns (teachers target the better students because they can avoid periods of silence or confusion for teachers in class); and incomprehensible input (Tsui, 1996 cited in Nunan, 2001, pp. 233-235). In addition, culture and context of learning have a profound impact on the way teachers interact with their students (Watkins & Biggs, 2001). In order to find out some solution, Liu and Zhao (2010) suggests teachers should employ a lot of interactive devices such as repetition, prompting, prodding, and expansions, which would evoke more interaction between teachers and students.

The present study discusses teacher-student interaction in the Chinese classroom from both foreign English teachers' and students' perspectives. The research questions are: (1) What is foreign teacher-student interaction like from the point of foreign English teachers' view? (2) What is foreign teacher-student interaction like from the point of students' view? The author believes this study will help foreign English teachers and students to be aware of teacher-student interaction in order to make teaching and learning more effective.

## **DESIGN**

Before describing the research design, the author would like to briefly talk about how the author was motivated to conduct the study. The author has been a Chinese teacher of English in Jiaying University since 2003. Besides being a teacher, the author has been a Chinese coordinator of foreign teachers for seven years in the School of Foreign Languages of the University. In her communication with foreign English teachers, especially new-comers, she

has learned a lot about cultural differences in the Chinese classroom because she often receives complaints. Therefore, the author had opportunities to notice some differences in classroom behaviors of Chinese students, Chinese teachers, and foreign teachers.

The study employed qualitative and quantitative methods through the use of questionnaires and narrative inquiry because “the classroom interaction of native English speaking teachers has not received much empirical and observational study” (Zhang & Wang, 2009, p. 92).

### **Research Setting and Participants**

The University, located in Meizhou, Guangdong, China, is a public provincial undergraduate university established in 1913. Meizhou, where the university is located, is a famous historic city, which has been given the titles of “China's Excellent Tourism City”, “The Hakka Capital”, “Homeland of culture”, “Homeland of football” and “Homeland of overseas Chinese”. Meizhou is a mountainous city with few foreigners/foreign trade enterprises. The University has formed a multi-level and multi-type system, with undergraduate education being the core, supplemented by junior college education, adult education and international education. The university's Hakka Research Institute is a key provincial-level research base in humanities and social sciences as well as the research base of Guangdong Hakka studies, and its School of Hakka Studies is the first of its kind in China. The university is not a key university and has few foreign students and teachers. Therefore, students seldom have opportunities to experience foreign culture.

This study involved 25 foreign English teachers and 99 Chinese students. At the time of the study, the teacher participants were all teaching English at the university. The length of their teaching in the university ranged from one month to ten years. Among them, twelve were from the USA, five from the UK, four from New Zealand, two from Canada, one from Australia and one from South Africa. The five foreign English teachers interviewed by the

author were from the UK, Australia and the USA, respectively. The student participants were from three classes of the university: one class consisted of 50 sophomores majoring in Biology and the other two classes were made up of 49 juniors majoring in English. All of the students have been taught by foreign English teachers from the university.

**TABLE 1**  
**Distribution of the Foreign English Teachers**

Nationalities		USA	UK	New Zealand	Canada	Australia	South Africa
		12	5	4	2	1	1
Genders	Male	9	4	4	1	0	1
	Female	3	1	0	1	1	0
Degree	PhD	2	1	0	0	0	0
	Master	6	3	3	1	1	1
	Bachelor	4	1	1	1	0	0
Duration of teaching in the university	0-2 Years	8	3	3	2	1	1
	3-5 Years	3	1	1	0	0	0
	5 Years above	1	1	0	0	0	0

### Data Collection

The data was collected through two questionnaires and two interviews. The author subsequently asked all the foreign English teachers to fill in a closed questionnaire. This questionnaire was to find out to what extent foreign English teachers agree with the statements concerning the teacher-student interaction. The author then interviewed five of the twenty-five foreign teachers individually. The interviews that were audio-taped, transcribed, and analyzed by the author, were conducted in order to provide an in-depth exploration into the reasons for teacher-student interaction from a foreign English teacher's perspective. After the interview, in order to obtain data from the students, the author asked 102 students to complete the same

questionnaire, and interviewed fifteen of them. The student questionnaire was to ascertain whether or not the students agreed with the statements put forward in the teacher-student interaction and how they felt about the concerns raised in the subsequent in-depth, exploratory interviews. All the questionnaires were collected. The author deleted one participant's questionnaire, which was incomplete, and two participant's questionnaires that had multiple answers to the same statement, so the number of valid student questionnaires was 99.

## **RESULTS AND DISCUSSION**

The questionnaires and interviews show that students often are very reluctant to give feedback or ask the teacher a question when a teacher seeks interaction in the classroom even if students understand the question and know the answer, and are able to produce the answer. This is also supported by the author's own observation and experience. The author examined foreign teacher-student interaction, largely on the evidence of statements collected from both foreign English teachers and students. This part also explored the reasons from different points of view.

### **Foreign English Teachers' Views Concerning Classroom Teacher-student Interaction**

Foreign English teachers in this study generally say that most students do not participate in classroom teacher-student interaction actively, and therefore, they miss the opportunities to train the students' thinking abilities by asking and answering questions. They made statements such as:

“Students tend to be passive, tending to avoid answering questions actively and also tending not to ask questions.” “The students hardly ever answer questions voluntarily, i.e. they are not generally active and outgoing.” “Too few questions and answers during class! Students do not ask enough

questions or volunteer enough information.” “Many students are not encouraged to speak up during the class or ask many questions of their teachers.” Therefore, foreign teachers either have to “point or select a student for an answer to be given” or “would ask students a few times, which takes more time”. Foreign teachers even feel confused about students’ silence when students are asked questions because they are not sure whether students understand or not. For example, “The students would not tell me if they don’t understand my English”. “I would ask them a few times in the class, if everything was clear, or if there are any questions, but to no avail”.

Foreign teachers feel shocked and uncomfortable with the above situation because of the following reasons. Firstly, in foreign teachers’ opinion, it is students’ job to ask questions if they don’t understand. Students’ above classroom behavior means that they are neither interested nor paying attention. Therefore, foreign teachers seem to feel very much hindered in their teaching. Secondly, foreign teachers are unaware of the diverse range of cultural backgrounds, which are the Socratic and Confucian methods. According to the Socratic Method, knowledge is generated within interaction and inquiry-based learning, verbal communication is central through constant questioning and evaluating. Analytical and critical thinking are highly valued. Power and experience are shared. Students contribute and make proposals. Learning is constructed, connected, emergent, creating future, encouraged collaboration (Hammond & Gao, 2002). However, Confucian methods believe knowledge is from authority through transmission. Teachers hold power and know all. Students follow instruction. Learning is transmitted, fragmented, fixed (ibid.). Most foreign English teachers have been used to Socratic methods. This implies that those who hold Socratic methods probably would get the truth by having dialogues or asking questions. “Dialogue is at the heart of the Socratic method” (Scollon, 2001, p.15), even in the Western classroom today, because much of western education is preparation for such events as oral dissertation, defenses, other examinations, and ultimately job interviews. Therefore, in classroom settings, the students like the question-and-answer sequence, and the main role of the teacher is to

communicate with students. However, Chinese students are used to Confucian methods of teaching, which is focused on classical text or written text. The students have seldom experienced activities like critical thinking and interactive learning. In addition, students have an inherited, deeply rooted influence: students are not interested in questioning or reluctant to disagree with the teachers.

These differences cause confusion for the foreign teachers. This finding is also supported by the author's interview with the five foreign teachers: *"When I first taught Chinese students, I thought they were all just lazy and did not care to answer any of my questions."* *"In western countries, in the foreign language teaching class, teachers have interaction with students easily. They use interactive teaching in class, while in the Chinese classroom students ask fewer questions and are shyer in answering questions than students in my country. It is hard to get discussions going."*

From the foreign teachers' point of view, getting the Chinese students to engage in asking and answering questions in the class was difficult, especially initially. Yet as studies by Swain (1985) and others have shown, language learning is far more effective when learners are pushed to use the target language in productive tasks. Swain's research highlighted students who are passive and reticent in class and have fewer opportunities to practice the language and therefore make slower progress. The slower the progress they make, the less likely they are to perform well when called upon to speak.

The findings of the foreign English teachers involved in the present study are consistent with the previous studies (for example, Cortazzi & Jin, 1996; Jackson, 2002; Xie, 2010). Littlewood (2000) claims that the passive behavior of Asian students is not innate but has been instilled into them by growing up in a cultural and educational environment which discourages independent thinking and regards the teacher not as a facilitator of learning but as a person in authority. In the present study, the foreign teachers have attributed students' inactiveness to the cultural, linguistic, approach, and psychological / affective factors which are:

### **Cultural Factors**

This may be due to rather big class sizes in the Chinese classroom, thus making it difficult to establish a personal relationship. In addition, Chinese students are afraid of standing out from the crowd; Chinese students expect that the teachers' role is to transmit information rather than engage students in dialogue and challenge students to think. The interviewed teachers made statements as follows: *"Students here tend to be fairly shy and reserved. They are very polite and listen carefully to the teachers, but often the class is so quiet because students are hesitant to speak."* That Chinese students dislike being singled out for attention to ask and answer questions may have something to do with Chinese culture, which favours a collective approach rather than an individual one, such as *"at times, the whole class will answer a question together but I am not sure why they are not active in raising their hands when I ask a question."* However, to the foreign teachers' surprise, they discover something interesting, namely: *"Chinese students prefer to practice English alone rather than speaking with a classmate or friend"*.

### **Linguistic Factors**

Students are used to learning English by focusing on grammar and form, rather than on meaning. Therefore, they experience difficulty in transferring meaning from Chinese to English; they may lack familiarity with the cultural or social knowledge required to process meaning, or maybe encounter difficulties with the pronunciation of the native-speaking teachers. They may, also, lack an understanding of an appropriate vocabulary usage or pattern they have learned. Students have often been used to mechanical learning environment, such as in collective grammar practice classes, rather than learning in more authentic environment, such as in a student-centered creative language class. In addition, the level of oral English is very different and therefore, the better students are bored whereas the weaker students still do not understand. This may be further indication of the reasons why students

are not able to interact with teachers in the class.

### **Approach Factors**

Foreign English teachers may think that Chinese students are accustomed to learning English by repeating words/phrases and memorizing them. Many students learn vocabulary this way but may not know how to use it in interaction. In addition, students are used to learning English which involves listening to the teachers or audio tapes, and doing written exercises. Finally, most students have been taught in schools where speaking out was simply not encouraged, which means students are taught to listen and not to question a teacher in class; Chinese students have little or no experience in in-class interaction with the teacher, such as questioning, commenting, or giving feedback. Students are usually taught to be quiet and respectfully listen to the teacher to explain the answers. This is contrary to the nature of language learning--there is no single correct answer to the issue. Different people have different interpretations of the text. Students should analyse the situation to find their own answers, although the answer couldn't be absolutely right, but they find it through their own thinking and reasoning.

### **Psychological/affective Factors**

Most students are afraid of making mistakes and therefore lack initiative to talk openly or discuss any topic raised. Chinese students are afraid of 'losing face' in front of their classmates. One foreign teacher said in the interview, *"Of course, this tendency is not restricted to Chinese and Asian students, but more pronounced amongst Asian students."* This opinion is in accordance with Littlewood (1996, cited in Gardner & Miller, 2002, p. 42), who said Asian students are "reluctant to 'stand out' by expressing their views or raising questions" and are "very concerned to perform well and correctly in what they do in class". The concept of "mianzi" (or "face") is very different for Asian students and western students, although the importance might be

similar, the manifestation might be different. Foreign teachers should pay attention to this difference so that they do not publicly embarrass their students.

Thus far, focus has been placed from a foreign English teacher perspective; therefore, it is appropriate, also, consider research from a student viewpoint.

### Students' Views Concerning Classroom Teacher-student Interaction

As shown in Table 2, 80.8% of the students strongly agree or agree to "Feeling difficult about interacting individually". 57.6% of students strongly agree or agree that they "have little opportunity to use English" in the class. In addition, more than half (Item 3: 53.5%; Item 4: 59.6% and Item 5: 51.5%) of the students admit that they are not actively involved in interaction with the teachers in the class unless they have to do so.

**TABLE 2**  
**Students' Agreement Concerning Classroom Teacher-student Interaction**

No.	Items	SA	A	NADA	D	SD
1	Feeling difficult about interacting individually	33.3%	47.5%	6.1%	11.1%	2.0%
2	Having little opportunity to use English	15.2%	42.4%	22.2%	17.2%	3.0%
3	Being not active to answer the questions	19.2%	34.3%	17.2%	21.2%	8.1%
4	Being not active to ask questions	15.2%	44.4%	21.2%	14.1%	5.1%
5	Waiting for the teachers to ask my name to answer the questions	22.2%	29.3%	29.3%	15.2%	4.0%

Note: SA=Strongly Agree; A=Agree; NADA=Neither Agree or Disagree; D=Disagree; SD=Strongly Disagree

When the teachers ask questions to the class as a whole, students often do not answer in class. They are very reluctant to give feedback or ask the teacher questions in front of the class. Some of them "perceived themselves

less competent and less knowledgeable than some of their more proficient peers, and thus they feel vulnerable when expressing an opinion in front of the whole class.” (Leger & Storch, 2009, p. 277). Students also felt threatened by publicly displaying their level of skills and knowledge (ibid.). As a consequence, students worried about the linguistic accuracy and tried to hold back interaction in the classroom. Comments such as *“My oral English is poor”* or *“I am not confident in speaking, especially as I do not want to be laughed at when I make mistakes”*, were common. Besides, students liked the peer interaction rather than class discussion because students feel safer and more comfortable to communicate. For example, *“As for me, I do not want to ask and answer questions voluntarily in class even if I have my own opinion. However, I prefer to talk with my partners.”* Finally, students think other discussion mediums, such as reading and writing, are easier for them than oral interaction because they have time to think and prepare their discussion points. *“We prefer to do exercises such as reading or writing than answer questions orally, especially we do not like to ask questions even if we don’t understand. However, we are happy to ask questions or say out disagreement by writing down anonymity.”* Therefore, it is difficult for students to feel at ease to say out argument and controversy orally in class because they think it conflicts with their values.

Based on the questionnaire and interview, students have attributed the factors affecting classroom teacher-student interaction to the motivational factors, cultural factors and learning habit which are:

### **Motivational Factors**

Most students are interested in English, but not because they see much use for it in their lives. Instead, they view English in instrumental terms: as something they have to learn to pass examinations, such as CET4/CET6, TEM4/TEM8 and others, or because English is important for them to find a job. *“When I was in primary and junior middle school, I was very keen on English. As time went by, I felt it was boring to learn English. Now,*

*considering the fact we are facing many difficulties, especially in the job market, I have decided to learn English well.*” Learning English does not bring much joy for many students. It is a compulsory burden for them. They are so test / job-driven that they do not understand the true joy of learning English. Besides, they are rarely encouraged to make use of their language skills in the real world. This does not motivate them to interact in the class. *“It is really not important whether we are active to ask and answer questions in class; the most important thing is whether we can get high scores in the examination. The performance in class has nothing to do with the scores.”* Besides, they are rarely encouraged to make use of their language skills in the real world. This does not motivate them to interact in the class.

### **Cultural Factors**

Teachers in traditional Chinese schools are considered authorities and superior. Students are taught to respect, obey, listen, and follow their instruction. Students are only allowed to talk when they are asked questions by the teachers. *“In senior high school, the teachers do not like those students who are active in class because the teachers think this will interrupt classroom order. The teachers always like those who are quiet and obedient. The teachers do not support and give positive feedback to those who are active in class.”* Students are taught not to speak in class unless they are asked. Students have to listen to the teachers and are generally not brave enough to speak out in the class. They are shy and afraid of embarrassment in front of their classmates. Usually, they wait until someone else speaks first. This leads to students lacking confidence. *“I dare not ask questions, because I was always afraid of being laughed at because my classmates might judge me, whether my questions are silly or smart. So I will hesitate in mind whether the question is worth asking or not.” “I think my English level is not good, so I am shy to speak English ...” “My English is poor. I don’t know how to say it in English...”*

### **Learning Habit**

The Chinese students and the foreign teachers rarely share the same views on the nature of the teaching and learning process. Chinese students' learning habit will be influenced by their previous social and educational background. Comments such as *"We are used to the teaching method in senior high school, which is test-oriented education. At that time, we were taught to be well behaved and silent in class so we could listen to the teachers."* *"Usually, we want the answers, not the questions."* *"In class, we only have language input, no output"* were common. Moreover, students usually have to rely only on the textbook as an aid to English learning. Most students think teachers and textbooks have the knowledge. In order to acquire it, it is sufficient for students to commit it to memory. Therefore, the most widely viewed way of learning English in China is memory-based. This is indicative that teachers should show students how to use a large English language media in the classroom, both locally produced and imported English radios stations, newspapers, TV, films and internet sites, or provide access to chat-rooms and email with people from other cultures, both with native speakers and non-native speakers of English. In other words, it is essential for teachers to incorporate the above ways into classroom teaching. This may be a good area for further research in the future.

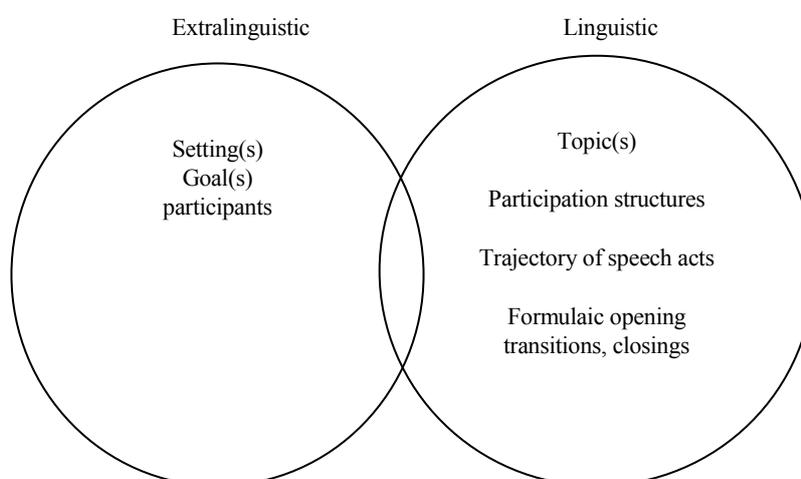
From the above discussion, it can be seen that motivational factors, cultural factors and learning habit may result in the fact that few questions are asked and answered in the Chinese classroom, which has hindered students' English learning and foreign teachers' teaching.

### **CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS**

Given the experience by foreign English teachers at the university concerning teacher-student interaction and the explanation, the author suggests that both foreign teachers and students should not only be aware of

these cultural differences but also make the effort to adapt to them as much as possible so as to have more effective teaching and learning. Moreover, this experience might be a very useful aid for foreign teachers in their future teaching experiences and could be a part of their own learning process. That is to say, this experience may help them to adapt themselves to the teaching practical needs of local context, e.g. as foreign teachers said: *“Students’ shy behavior can hinder my teaching sometimes. I like to choose activities that require students to speak a lot.”* *“Show students how you can help them to learn the things they have been doing all their lives; English is no different, help them with confidence, allow mistakes and encourage, with praise, and comments, if you can do it!”* This implies that teachers should try to understand what languages would be more efficient in creating an environment in which students feel more comfortable and more confident and become more involved in interactive activities in the classroom. In addition, teachers should be aware that students’ classroom behaviors such as anxiety, silence, unwillingness, quietness can be eliminated by encouragement and building good relationships with them. One foreign teacher said: *“Students respond much more actively when a bond of trust has been established and when they are given the time to think about new concepts from a Chinese viewpoint.”* It is suggested that if students feel more respected, they will become more confident and active to participate in interaction. Moreover, Sowden (2007) suggests, expatriate teachers must take account of all these cultures and how they influence the attitude and study styles of their students. Instead of trying to impose cultures of their own, they must work with the culture that they encounter, which implies that it will be better if foreign teachers can be informed about local cultures and adapt their teaching styles accordingly. Of course, foreign teachers need to be aware not only of the cultures that they themselves bring to the classroom but also of the cultures of their students and their environment in order to get students to use English more naturally by interacting with others, sharing ideas, telling people their experiences, expressing their wishes, and desires. Finally, foreign teachers should be aware of the notion that interaction depends on extralinguistic and

linguistic factors (See figure 1) such as the kind of class it is, the topic being discussed, the goals of the class, the way that the teacher initiates an interaction, the number of people present, the formality of the situation and the topic of discussion.



**FIGURE 1**  
**Frame of Analysis: Features of an Interactive Practice (Hall, 2001, p. 146)**

The university should provide language laboratories for classes; the possibility of using Internet resources, magazines, journals, newspapers, corpus, or videotaped materials would make students' English learning more interactive, colorful and interesting. Dividing big classes into smaller ones is another good idea, thus making it easier to establish personal relationships to further motivate students. It might also be good for the university to have a foreign teacher education program focusing on classroom teaching orientation or program of cooperation between Chinese teachers and foreign teachers, which might help foreign teachers select methods compatible with Chinese context so as to improve the quality of classroom teaching and learning.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful and insightful comments on the earlier drafts of this paper. I am also grateful to all the foreign teachers who participate and provide great support and valuable suggestions throughout the development of this article.

## THE AUTHOR

*Liumei Wang* is Lecturer in the School of Foreign Languages, Jiaying University, Meizhou City, Guangdong, China. Her current research interests cover culture and language learning. Her recent publications include *An exploration of the reasons of culture shock experienced by foreign teachers in the classroom* (2010) and *An experimental study on foreign teachers and chinese students towards the satisfaction of verbal interaction in English class* (2010).

Email: [jyuwlm@126.com](mailto:jyuwlm@126.com)

## REFERENCES

- Banks, J. A., & Lynch, J. (1986). *Multicultural education in western societies*. Eastbourne: Holt, Rinehart and Winston.
- Cortazzi, M., & Jin, L. (1996). Cultures of learning: Language classrooms in China. In H. Coleman (Ed.), *Society and the language classroom* (pp. 169-206). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ellis, R. (1985). *Understanding second language acquisition*. London: Oxford University Press.
- Gardner, D., & Miller, L. (2002). *Foreign language autonomous learning: From theory to practice*. Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Language Press.
- Gass, S., & Mackey, A. (2007). Input, interaction and output in SLA. In J. Williams & B. Van Pattern (Eds.), *Theories in second language acquisition* (pp. 175-199). Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum.

- Hall, J. K. (2001). A prosaics of interaction: The development of interactional competence in another language. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Culture in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 137-151). Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Languages Education Press.
- Hammond, S., & Gao, H. (2002). Pan Gu's paradigm: Chinese education's return to holistic communication in learning. In X. Lu, W. Jia, and R. Heisey (Eds.), *Chinese communication studies: Contexts and comparisons* (pp. 227-244). Westport, CT: Ablex.
- Holmes, P. (2004). Negotiating differences in learning and intercultural communication. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 67(3), 294-307.
- Jackson, J. (2002). Reticence in second language case discussions: Anxiety and aspirations, *System* 30(1), 65-84.
- Leger, D. S., & Storch, N. (2009). Learners' perceptions and attitudes: Implications for willingness to communicate in an L2 classroom, *System*, 37(2), 269-285.
- Littlewood, W. (2000). Do Asian students really want to listen and obey? *ELT Journal*, 54(1), 31-35.
- Liu, N. F., & Littlewood, W. (1997). Why do many students appear reluctant to participate in classroom learning discourse? *System*, 25(3), 371-384.
- Liu, Y. F., & Zhao, Y. Q. (2010). A study of teacher talk in interactions in English classes. *Chinese Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 33(2), 76-86.
- Long, M. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In W. Ritchie and T. Bhatia (Eds.), *Handbook of research on second language acquisition* (pp. 413-468). New York: Academic.
- Mackey, A. (2007a). Introduction: The role of conversational interaction in second language acquisition. In A. Mackey (Ed.), *Conversational interaction in second language acquisition* (pp. 1-26). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Mackey, A. (2007b). Interaction as practice. In R. Dekeyser (Ed.), *Practice in second language* (pp. 85-110). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- McDonough, K. (2004). Learner-learner interaction during pair and small group activities in a Thai EFL context. *System*, 32(2), 207-224.
- Nunan, D. (2001). *Second language teaching and learning*. Beijing: Foreign Language Research Press.
- Roberts, R., & Tuleja, E. A. (2008). When west meets east: Teaching a managerial communication course in Hong Kong. *Journal of Business and Technical Communication*, 22(4), 474-489.
- Scollon, S. (2001). Not to waste words or students---Confucian and Socratic discourse in the tertiary classroom. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Culture in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 13-27). Shanghai: Shanghai Foreign Languages

Education Press.

- Sowden, C. (2007) Culture and the 'good teacher' in the English language classroom, *ELT Journal*, 61(4), 304-310.
- Swain, M. (1985). Communicative competence: Some roles of comprehensible input and comprehensible output in its development. In S. Gass and C. Madden (Eds.), *Input in second language acquisition* (pp. 235-256). Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Tsui, A. B. M. (1995). *Introducing classroom interaction*. London: Penguin.
- Valiente, C. (2008). Are students using the 'wrong' style of learning?: A multicultural scrutiny for helping teachers to appreciate differences. *Active Learning in Higher Education*, 9(1), 73-91.
- Watkins, D. A., & Biggs, J. B. (2001). *Teaching the Chinese learner: Psychological and pedagogical perspectives*. Hongkong: Comparative Education Research Centre, University of Hong Kong, China.
- Xie, X. Y. (2010). Why are students quiet? Looking at the Chinese context and beyond. *ELT Journal*, 64(1), 10-20.
- Zhang, Y., & Wang, J. (2009). A comparative study of NEST and NNEST classroom interaction in Chinese context. *Teaching English in China*, 32(2), 92-102.
- Zhang, Y., & Zhou, D. J. (2004). Study of students' participation pattern in college English classroom. *Foreign Language World*, 6, 28-33.
- Zhao, Y. Q. (2007) Cultural conflicts in an intercultural classroom discourse and interpretations from a cultural perspective. *Intercultural Communication Studies*, 16, 1-8.