SILENCE IN JAPANESE-AUSTRALIAN CLASSROOM INTERACTION: PERCEPTIONS AND PERFORMANCE

IKUKO NAKANE

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Department of Linguistics University of Sydney
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Abstract

This thesis examines silence as attributed to and performed by Japanese students in Australian university classrooms. It aims to elucidate processes in which silence can be used and created in intercultural communication in the classroom. The phenomenon of silence is approached from multiple perspectives. The data include interviews, a questionnaire and survey data, classroom observation and video-recorded classroom interactions. The data was collected in Australia and Japan. The Japanese data was included as part of sociocultural contexts where the Japanese students studying in Australia bring with them. The analysis draws on the frameworks of the ethnography of communication and conversation analysis. Micro- and macro- perspectives are combined to investigate how perceptions and performances interact to construct silence in the cross-cultural encounters in these classrooms.

The thesis consists of four parts. The first part, Chapters 1-3, sets the theoretical background to the research. Chapter 1 describes how the research was conceived, and states the aims of the research. Chapter 2 reviews literature on silence, with specific attention to silence in Japanese communication and in classroom contexts. In Chapter 3 the methodological framework and design of this research is described.

The second part, Chapter 4, examines how Japanese students’ silence is perceived, both by themselves and their Australian teachers. The chapter is based on interviews with Japanese students in Australia, as well as findings from a questionnaire distributed to their lecturers. Japanese classroom practices as an aspect of the sociocultural background of Japanese students are also described.

Finally, the third part, Chapters 5, 6, 7, compares actual silence and performance in the classroom with perceived silence. There are three case studies which make up a substantial part of the thesis and provide detailed analyses of classroom interactions, based on video-recordings, observations, and follow-up interviews with key participants.

Chapter 8 synthesises the findings discussed in Chapters 4-7, and concludes with implications for teaching and learning in the multicultural university classroom.
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