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# **Silence and Silencing in the Classroom of Portuguese as a Foreign Language in Macau: Identity and Interculturality**

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## **Abstract**

The paper focuses on an intriguing element that most Western teachers face in language classrooms in China: the called “Silence of the East”. Here I shall share some scenes from Portuguese as a foreign language (PFL) classes in Macau, China. Based on this, I discuss issues such as intercultural interaction and construction of identities: two aspects that have direct implications for the process of construction of knowledge. Specifically, I focus on (i) the silencing process that takes place at the primary context between a Chinese teacher and Chinese students, and on (ii) silence that appears in the tertiary classroom and provokes a conflict between a Western teacher and Chinese students. I assume both aspects as constructed interactionally by the discursive performances of teachers and students and argue that they are culturally and also locally built on a process of negotiation. Therefore this study refuses the essentialist perspectives that characterize and imprison the Chinese student as silent. In an opposite direction, I stress that the world is in movement and the interactions are the site for “focusing on” these ongoing discursive processes that (re)build paradigms, beliefs, identities and allow us to overcome conflicts and achieve successful intercultural interactions. In order to analyze these scenes, I work from the perspective of Interactional Sociolinguistics, an interdisciplinary field that uses discourse analysis to inter-relate discourse, culture and society.

**Keywords:** Portuguese as Foreign Language, Macau, Silencing, Intercultural Interaction, Identity

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# Silence and Silencing in the Classroom of Portuguese as a Foreign Language in Macau: Identity and Interculturality<sup>1</sup>

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This study is primarily a teacher's speech in dialogue with other educators, sharing the path we have been pursuing in Macau: the adventure of living in a different socio-cultural environment, which is a rich context for learning, teaching, and researching the Portuguese language.

Despite having taught Portuguese as a foreign language for over ten years in Brazil before coming to Asia, my interaction with students from an apparently distant culture was extremely different and even bewildering at times. This culture clash and difference led me not only to stay in Asia but also to choose Macau to live in and carry out my research over the past eight years.

From this experience this article was produced. The paper focuses on an intriguing element that, at least initially, most Western teachers face in China in language classrooms: the so called "Silence of the East"<sup>2</sup>.

This silence in Chinese classrooms is usually understood from the socio-cultural point of view of the teachers and normally from essentialist perspectives on society, culture, and language. These perspectives normally create a restricted and stereotypical identity of Chinese students as silent and hence passive.

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1 A Portuguese version of this paper is to appear in Teixeira E Silva, Roberval (ed.). (in press) *Contextos de formação de novas gerações de falantes de português no mundo: perspectivas em política, história, língua e literatura*. Coleção Encontros da Língua Portuguesa. Escola Superior de Educação de Santarém e Universidade de Macau.

2 It is a commonly held belief, especially among teachers from west countries, that Asian students are passive. The silence is one of the main traits used to construct such image. Therefore, there is this generalized stereotype that students from Asia are silent.

However, instead of merely associating this silence with an oriental passiveness, we would like to discuss silence as a process that occurs in specific interactions and thus can only be analyzed after considering the context in which it was created.

Therefore, I will argue that silence i) is a co-construction between interactants; ii) is the result of a cultural and also a local construction that happens inside the interactions; iii) has different meanings in the East and West, meanings that can produce conflicts in intercultural interactions between Western and Chinese teachers/students.

In order to undertake our investigation, we adopt the perspective of Interactional Sociolinguistics (Gumperz, 1982a, 1982b; Ribeiro e Garcez, 2002; Schiffrin, 1996; Goffman, 1959, 1967, 1974) – an interdisciplinary field that inter-relates discourse, culture, and society in a discourse analysis framework. This approach provides a powerful theoretical instrument that can give us new perspectives both for planning and analyzing interactions inside the classroom (Teixeira e Silva, 2010).

We will analyze two excerpts from primary and tertiary classroom contexts. The scenes under focus will supply us a range of resources in order to discuss issues such as intercultural interaction (Teixeira e Silva & Martins, 2011; Scollon & Scollon, 2001) and construction of identities (Gumperz, 1982b; Moita Lopes, 2006 [1998]), two aspects that have direct effects for the process of knowledge construction.

But first, we will give some brief historical information about Macau and describe the current situation of the Portuguese language in this region.

## **1. The Portuguese language in Macau**

In 1557, Portugal established the first European settlement in Macau. Since then, the presence of the Portuguese language and culture and the cross-cultural contact with the Chinese community created an

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idiosyncratic environment.

Technically, Macau was not a colony, but a place administered by Portugal with the consent of the Chinese government. In practice, however, the relations among the local and the European people were as colonial as in any other Portuguese colony, but with differences and interests related to the Asian context.

Historically, the organization of power was oriented by three principal groups: the Chinese, the Portuguese, and the Macanese (roughly speaking: children of the miscegenation between Portuguese and Asian people). However, from a cultural and social point of view, nowadays many other ethnic-linguistic groups (such as those from the Philippines, Thailand, Pakistan, Australia and from other Portuguese-speaking countries) collaborate to create this multicultural environment (Bodomo & Teixeira e Silva, 2012).

In spite of the long Portuguese presence in Macau, the teaching and imparting of the Portuguese language has only recently become a central concern. As Teixeira e Silva & Martins (2011, p. 233) state:

Language policies for Macau had been nonexistent until the 80s, the period when Portugal and China signed the Handover Joint Declaration. With very little tradition for teaching Portuguese as a Foreign Language, or even as a Second Language, Portugal launched a campaign of teaching Portuguese in primary and secondary schools in the territory, especially in Luso-Chinese schools<sup>3</sup>. The lack of expertise in the field of SLA led to a rather deficient start of the language teaching programme in Macau.

Partly because of (but certainly not limited to) this, the Portuguese language could never be a widely used language in Macau. It was always employed in very specific contexts. In 1999, the People's Republic of China took over the administration of the territory, which

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<sup>3</sup> Luso-Chinese schools were created by the Macau Government in order to enable children of families with low income to study for free. The original ambition of these schools was to provide students with a semi-bilingual environment.

now is called Special Administrative Region of Macau. During the process of the Handover, the presence of the Portuguese language in the territory seemed to be in jeopardy. However, in today's post-colonial period, Portuguese is increasing in daily use, has been enriched with new characteristics, and is gaining more political acceptance.

The latest wave of research on and about the Portuguese language, developed especially in the area of language studies in Macau<sup>4</sup>, has shown these new characteristics, revealing the Portuguese as a transnational language (Teixeira e Silva, 2013, forthcoming). A transnational language is one spoken by individuals with unpredictable linguistic and cultural heritages, a typical feature of superdiverse contexts (Vertovec, 2007), like that of Macau.

Therefore, the status of the Portuguese language has changed in the past decade. Now more and more people, especially from Mainland China, are interested in learning it. The major reason behind this change is the economic development and visibility of some Portuguese-speaking countries, especially Brazil and Angola, and the importance of China's trade with them.

Our study takes place within this context.

## **2. Silence, silencing and production of identities**

In the process of socialization, we are exposed to a series of socio-cultural references that instruct us what to be and how to act. In general, these references appear as social, cultural and linguistic stereotypes; for example, well-defined and fixed concepts of "Brazilian society", "Chinese culture", and "Portuguese language". These concepts elaborated as fixed entities go against a basic principle: the world is always in movement (Bauman, 2001; Hall, 2006; Moita Lopes, 2013; Fabrício, 2013). The world and everything that constitutes it are

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<sup>4</sup> Teixeira e Silva, 2012, forthcoming; Bodoimo e Teixeira e Silva, 2012; Teixeira e Silva e Lima-Hernandes, 2010.

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processes continually in flux. Even so, in this globalized, post-colonial, post-structural period, we deal with contradictory concepts that Bauman (2000) “metaphorizes” as liquid and solid: on one hand, we face a world in movement and on the other hand we try to freeze that same world. The underlying assumption of our analytical approach is that there are no fixed identities<sup>5</sup> for anybody or any group. Hence it is inappropriate to “imprison” Chinese students to a unique and specific identity. Teachers should see the world as a process. From this perspective students are not predictable, so teachers should not stereotype them.

The process of “learning how to be/how to perform appropriately” in a society has the context and the otherness as references (Moita Lopes, 2006 [1998]). We learn how we should act, according to the frames constructed by different contexts. That is why we elaborate different identities in order to perform different roles/positions such as students, sons, friends, boy/girlfriends and so on. In the same process, our identities are co-built in each interaction, taking into consideration the other: our interactants. The otherness gives us the cues that guide us to position ourselves. All these movements are reasoned by discourses, especially by discourses of authority. These discourses produce identities, they teach us how to perform<sup>6</sup> in particular settings. Therefore, in the school context, students, teachers, principals, parents, and staff are constructed by these discourses of power that, in general, are disciplinarian (Foucault, 1972), ensure homogeneity and control, and take on the voice of the subjects.

In a classroom, silence – the focus of our discussion – is constructed by different discourses and has different meanings in different frames (Goffman, 1974). Silence in a classroom can signalize resistance, boredom, respect, discouragement, disinterest, thoughtfulness, or such interactional strategies as denial, agreement, request, warning, command, threat, confirmation (Saville-Troike, 1985). Therefore, one of the best ways to understand the meanings of silence is to analyze interactions as they occur.

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5 Bauman (2001) states that we should not use the concept of identity, but of identification.

6 This process has fixed references about different roles in society such as student/teacher, man/woman, etc.

Silence has been studied from different approaches. A concise overview of studies of silence, as a material/acoustic resource of the language, is the one offered by Ephratt (2008, p. 1910). He refers to two paths:

One was the chronometrical analysis of speech, where quantitative chronometrical data on speech rates were collected to show the ratios of speech to non-speech, etc., in isolation or in relation to personality variables (as early as Chapple, 1939; Goldman-Ersler, 1958; Hawkings, 1971; Crown and Feldstein, 1985; Adell et al., 2007). (...) The second path, which began to be trodden about the same time, was discourse analysis (then a new branch in linguistic pragmatics). Sacks et al.'s (1974) paper, "The simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation", perceived silence as the interactive locus of turn-taking (...). Throughout linguistics literature (speech-rate and turn-taking) silence and pause are used interchangeably (sometimes within the same sentence: e.g., Goffman, 1981, p. 25, fn. 17; Crown and Feldstein, 1985, p. 33; but see section 1.1).

We will tread the second path. As Laplane (2000) and Morato (2001) affirm, silence is a component of interaction and acquires different meanings which are highly dependent on context:

Entendendo o silêncio como um tipo particular de interação e como veiculador de sentidos, uma das tarefas a que Laplane (2000) se lança em sua reflexão é precisamente extrair do termo sua polissemia e sua discursividade inarredáveis: silêncio, silenciamento, implícito, subentendido, exclusão, resistência, opressão (Morato, 2001, p. 201).<sup>7</sup>

Some studies analyze both positive and negative aspects of silence. Tannen (1985, p. 94) explains that the perception of the negativity or positivity of silence is explicitly different when confronting individuals from different cultures, and she stresses its ambiguity.

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<sup>7</sup> Understanding silence as a particular type of interaction and a disseminator of meanings, one of the tasks that Laplane includes in her reflection is to extract from the term its polysemy and its irremovable discursivity: silence, silencing, implicit, implied, exclusion, resistance, oppression (Morato, 2001: 201).

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The positive and negative valuation of silence is a facet of the inherent ambiguity of silence as a symbol (...). The ambiguous value of silence can be seen to arise either from what is assumed to be evidenced or from what is assumed to be omitted.

Silence is understood as a contextualization cue (Gumperz, 1982a) and therefore it functions as a discursive element in the construction of identities. Some studies consider silence as full of meaning and productive for language (Orlandi, 1995, p. 70):

o silêncio é a condição da produção de sentido. Assim, ele aparece como o espaço ‘diferencial’ da significação: lugar que permite à linguagem significar.<sup>8</sup>

In the construction of identities, both silence and voice are significant traits, and since this process is relational and takes place in relations of power, “Os que ocupam posições de maior poder nas relações assimétricas são, conseqüentemente, mais aptos a serem os produtores de outros seres (Moita Lopes, 2006 [1998], p. 308)”<sup>9</sup>. In the classroom interaction, the institutional discourse – usually the discourse of authority – appears in different ways such as the speech of the teacher and the students<sup>10</sup>, the didactic resources and so on. This discourse is one of the discourses responsible for the production of identities (Gumperz, 1982b) in a pedagogical context.

In language classrooms and especially in situations in which Western teachers are engaged with Eastern students, silence can acquire connotations of a cultural barrier. As King (2012, p. 2) comments, there is a stereotype, from an essentialist and manichean vision, that contrasts “the silent East versus the talkative West”.

The process of silencing has also received academic treatment from a

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<sup>8</sup> Silence is the condition for the production of sense. In so being, silence appears as a “differential” space for signification: a locus that allows linguistic meaning to occur (Orlandi, 1995: 70).

<sup>9</sup> Those who occupy positions of higher level of power in asymmetrical relationships are therefore more able to be producers of other beings (Moita Lopes, 2006 [1998]: 308).

<sup>10</sup> For example, students can usurp the discourse of authority in order to show commitment and agreement with the educational system to which they belong (Moutinho, 2012).



range of scholars (Leander, 2002; Orlandi, 1995). It involves the use of a discourse of authority not only to stop or prevent someone from speaking, but also to oblige someone to talk. Therefore we are talking about a question of choices, a question of freedom. As Hymes (1996, as cited in Juffermans & Aa, 2011, p. 2) comments, the voice is freedom:

freedom from denial of opportunity due to something linguistic; and freedom for satisfaction in the use of language. In other words: freedom to have one's voice heard, and freedom to develop a voice worth hearing.

Voice and silence can be understood as a choice of being in the world in different ways.

In a classroom, the discourse of the school normally creates an organization of power in which students are requested to behave in a patterned way to keep order. Thus this discourse produces a process of silencing.

In this study, we will observe the process of silencing in a primary education context where a Chinese teacher is in interaction with Asian students, and in a tertiary education context where a Western teacher interacts with Chinese students.

Based on these two classroom scenes, we examine how the process of silencing in elementary schools contributes culturally to the onset of silence in the university. On the other hand, we will emphasize that silence in the tertiary context is not only culturally motivated, but also a consequence of the local organization of the interaction.

### **3. Methodological aspects**

Our data come from a one year ethnographic study<sup>11</sup> (Erickson, 1996)

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<sup>11</sup> Project "Interações em sala de aula de português como língua estrangeira e a construção da competência textual: o contexto de Macau", sponsored by the University of Macau and coordinated by us.

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that took place in an official school and a university, both in Macau. The interactions between teacher and students and between students and students are our object of study. Therefore we will analyze two contexts of teaching-learning Portuguese as a Foreign Language (PFL)<sup>12</sup>.

## **3.1. Primary school context**

### **PARTICIPANTS:**

#### **Students (First year):**

- 22 Chinese students, about six years old, native speakers of different Chinese languages/dialects, such as Cantonese or Mandarin; one Filipino student, about six years old, native speaker of Tagalog.

#### **Teacher of Portuguese (Roberta):**

- A Chinese teacher, native speaker of Cantonese, 25 years old, with about five year of teaching experience and advanced proficiency in oral Portuguese

#### **The researcher (Rui):**

- A Brazilian teacher, native speaker of Portuguese, 41 years-old, with about 10 year of teaching experience in foreign language classes.

### **LOCATION:**

One of the official Luso-Chinese schools in Macau.

### **DATA:**

Transcription of the video recording (fifth class of the school year).

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<sup>12</sup> The theoretical problem of concepts such as foreign language, second language, heritage language or native speaker that are rather complex if we put them under the perspective of super-diversity and post-multiculturalism will not be discussed here (Vertovec, 2007, 2010).

**PEDAGOGICAL RESOURCES:**

- Pictures/Images;
- A puppet (a piggy);
- Audio-Cassette.

**3.2. Tertiary school context**

**PARTICIPANTS:**

**Students (Third year of BA in Portuguese):**

- 18 Chinese students, about twenty years old, fluent speakers of Mandarin, native speakers of different Chinese languages/dialects, such as Cantonese and Mandarin.

**Teacher of Portuguese and researcher (Rui).**

- A Brazilian teacher, native speaker of Portuguese, 41 years old, about ten years of teaching experience in foreign language classes.

**LOCATION:**

A university in Macau.

**DATA:**

Video-recording classroom.

**3.3. Transcription**

In our data, when the teacher and students are speaking in Portuguese we have a regular transcription. When the teacher or students speak in

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Cantonese, the transcription (which is a translation from Cantonese) is made in ***bold italic font***.

Transcription conventions:

Word	text in standard format	Speech in Portuguese
Word	<b>bold italic font</b>	Speech in Cantonese (translated)
/	slash	fragmentation of intonational unit before completion of intonational contour designed; mark of abrupt cut
-----	hyphenation	syllabication
°word°	signals of degrees	speech in low voice
[]	brackets	simultaneous or overlapping speech
(3)	numbers in brackets	silence (in seconds and tenths of seconds)
( )	empty parentheses	speech segment that cannot be transcribed
(word)	speech segment in parentheses	transcription doubtful
((looking at the students))	double parentheses	description and comments about non-verbal activities

\*Adapted from Teixeira e Silva (2007), Teixeira e Silva (2008-2012), and Garcez (2006).

#### 4. Scenes from classrooms of Portuguese as a foreign language: constructing meanings for silence

The scenes that we have analysed will help us to discuss how classroom discourse promotes the construction of different meanings for silence.

##### 4.1. Socio-discursive construction of silence in a primary classroom of PFL: taking the voice of students

This section analyzes, how institutional discourse constructs a process of silencing in a primary school classroom.

The first example comes from the beginning of a class. The teacher and the students were organizing themselves in the classroom.

Example 1:

1		((Ruído dos estudantes))
2		((Roberta está a arranjar os lugares dos meninos))
3	Roberta	<b><i>Ora, agora ponham /</i></b>
4		<b><i>Ponham os livros debaixo primeiro.</i></b> ((debaixo da mesa))
5		( )
6		Sim, todos põem o livro lá/ ((indica embaixo da mesa)) debaixo
7		Guardem o livro, agora não é preciso o livro, guardem, sim!
8		Põe debaixo, põe debaixo, põe debaixo.
9		Põe debaixo
10		( )
11	Aluno	<b><i>Professora, quero fazer xixi.</i></b> ( )
12	Roberta	<b><i>Não faz mal, só sentamos aqui, não escrevemos.</i></b>
13		<b><i>Ah, Wang, está bem, senta-te.</i></b>
14		Tá bom, eu vou ver quem é falador?
15		((a professor põe o dedo nos lábios em sinal de silêncio))
16		“Falador” <b><i>significa as pessoas que gostam muito falar.</i></b>

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1		((Students Noise))
2		((Roberta is arranging the boys' seats))
3	Roberta	<b><i>But now put /</i></b>
4		<b><i>Put the books under first.</i></b> ((under the table))
5		(        )
6		Yes, everyone put the book there / ((indicates under the table)) under
7		Put the book away, now you don't need the book, put it away, yes!
8		Put it under, put it under, put it under.
9		Put it under
10		(        )
11	Student	<b><i>Professor, I want to pee.</i></b> (        )
12	Roberta	<b><i>Never mind, just sit here, we are not writing.</i></b>
13		<b><i>Ah, Wang, okay, sit down.</i></b>
14		Okay, I'll see who is talkative?
15		((the teacher puts her finger in her lips as a sign of silence))
16		<b><i>"Talkative" means people who like to talk a lot.</i></b>

Within the asymmetrical classroom relations, the teacher normally assumes the institutional discourse, the discourse of authority, as well as the full range of her didactic resources. What is conveyed through this discourse is generally taken as "the Truth", the ultimate authority in the classroom.

At the beginning of class, the teacher starts to create interactive behavior patterns, such as "what the students can or cannot do in class". She says in lines 14 and 15, "Okay, I'll see who is talkative? ((the teacher puts her finger in her lips as a sign of silence))". As we can see in the example, the teacher asserts that people who are talkative are "people who like to talk a lot" (line 16). Therefore, the students are expected to learn that people who "talk a lot" (line 16) in the classroom are not welcome.

Presented at the beginning of the school year and at the beginning of the class, this teacher's statement strongly connotes her standard for the interactional environment of this classroom. She is stressing an

important rule for the class: to be silent. Her performance by giving contextualization cues for the students to build meanings related to silence starts a process of silencing.

We can take this as a metaphor that will be present throughout the entire class and that will be one of the bases for the construction of these students' identities (Moita Lopes, 2006 [1998]). In the process of training, students are led to understand that (in this context) in order to be a good student (Teixeira e Silva & Moutinho, 2009), it is necessary not to be talkative, to “dislike talking”, in classroom situations.

This example illustrates social practices in classrooms that promote the students' passiveness not only in this Chinese context but throughout the world. This passiveness, however, is not intrinsic to the students, but a cultural demand. In fact when the Chinese students keep silent in a classroom, they are not being passive, but rather acting according to cultural indoctrination.

Therefore, this institutional discursive practice relationally builds the identities of these students not as active subjects, but as passive individuals, through direct and explicit propositions. However most of the propositions are not explicit. The majority come from more subtle discursive strategies that we will present in the next examples.

During the lesson, the teacher presents the poster below with the expression that she wants to teach.



(Good afternoon)

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It is important to note that these students have almost no literacy in Portuguese. Since they cannot read the expression “Boa tarde” on the card, the only cues that they have come from the picture. Let us read.

Example 2:

77	Roberta	<i>O que significa esta expressão?</i>
78	Roberta	<i>Já aprendemos.</i>
79	Roberta	(        )
80	Alunos	Professora
81	Roberta	[Professora?]
82	Alunos	[Boa tarde.]
83	Roberta	Boa tarde.
84	Roberta	Boa tarde?
85	Roberta	Vamos ouvir!
86	Aluno A	Bo-a [tar-de]
87	Roberta	<i>[Vamos ouvir] se está certo.</i>
88	Aluno A	Boa tar°de
89	Cassete	Dois. ((o número do exercício))
90	Cassete	Boa tarde.
91	Roberta	[Bo-a tar-de!]
92	Alunos	[Yeah! Yeah!] ((Os alunos ficam animados porque alguns deram a resposta certa.))

77	Roberta	<i>What does this expression mean?</i>
78	Roberta	<i>We have already learned.</i>
79	Roberta	(        )
80	Students	Teacher
81	Roberta	[Teacher?]
82	Students	[Good afternoon.]
83	Roberta	Good afternoon.
84	Roberta	Good afternoon?
85	Roberta	Let's hear it!
86	Student A	Good [after – noon]
87	Roberta	<i>[Let us hear] if it is right.</i>



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88	Student A	Good after <sup>o</sup> noon
89	Cassette	Two. ((the number of the exercise))
90	Cassette	Good afternoon.
91	Roberta	[Good - after - noon!]
92	Students	[Yeah! Yeah!] ((The students get excited because some gave the right answer.))

After the teacher asks the meaning of the expression in the poster, the first answer that is provided by the students is “teacher” (line 80). Then the teacher creates doubt regarding the students’ answer by saying “Teacher?” (line 81). Then, another answer is attempted by the students: “Good afternoon (line 82)”. This was the right answer. The teacher, however, does not confirm the response of the students. Thus, she does not authorize their answer as an appropriate contribution. By saying “Let’s hear it!” (85), she indicates that the voice of authority for providing the correct answer cannot come from the students; it has to come from an institutional discourse, expressed in her own voice and in her pedagogical tools.

A student raises a voice of resistance (Foucault, 1972), and tries to have his answer heard: “Good [after – noon]” (line 86). The teacher interrupts his speech in order to reaffirm, in Cantonese now, that the one who has the voice of authority is the recording voice on the cassette, not the students: “*[Let us hear] if it is right.*” (line 87). Nevertheless, also in an attitude of resistance, a student attempts to speak again, but he gives up and slows down his voice: “Good after<sup>o</sup>noon”, (line 88).

86.	Student A	Good [after – noon]
87.	Roberta	<i>[Let us hear] if it is right.</i>
88.	Student A	Good after <sup>o</sup> noon

Then the voice of authority - now the teaching material, the tape - gives the answer: “Cassette: Good afternoon.” (line 90). After the cassette, the teacher herself – another voice of authority in the classroom – speaks very slowly: “[Good - after - noon!” (line 91).

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89.	Cassette	Two. ((the number of the exercise))
90.	Cassette	Good afternoon.
91.	Roberta	[Good - after - noon!]

In line 93, the teacher uses translation in the classroom to make sure that the students understand the content. It is a strategy that points out how the teacher understands what language is, what teaching a language means. We can see that she adopts the traditional concept of teaching, stressing the role of grammar, vocabulary, and translation.

Throughout the sequence, the cycle is repeated.

### Example 3:<sup>13</sup>

93.	Roberta	<i>O que é significa</i> “Boa tarde”?
94.	Aluno	<i>Almoço!</i>
95.	Roberta	<i>[Almoço?]</i>
96.	Aluno	<i>[Boa tarde!]</i>
97.	Roberta	Boa tarde! <i>Vamos ver:</i> Boa/
98.	Alunos	<i>Boa tarde!</i>
99.	Roberta	<i>Vamos ouvir se está certo?</i>
100.	Alunos	<i>Boa tarde!</i>
101.	Roberta	<i>O nosso porquinho, ora o nosso porquinho.</i>
102.	Cassete	<i>Boa tarde!</i>

93	Roberta	<i>What does</i> “Good afternoon” <i>mean?</i>
94	Student C	<i>Lunch!</i>
95	Roberta	<i>[Lunch?]</i>
96	Student D	<i>[Good afternoon!]</i>
97	Roberta	Good afternoon! <i>Let’s check it:</i> Good/
98	Students	<i>Good afternoon!</i>
99	Roberta	<i>Let us hear if it is right.</i>
100	Alunos	<i>Good afternoon!</i>

<sup>13</sup> In Line 101 the teacher (Roberta) refers to a pig puppet that she occasionally uses to interact with her students.

101	Roberta	<i>Our little piggy, now our little piggy.</i>
102	Cassette	<i>Good afternoon!</i>

When the teacher, in line 93, asks in Cantonese: “*What does “Good afternoon” mean?*”, the students cannot get the meaning of the expression written in Portuguese. They answer “Lunch” (line 94). The teacher, then, repeats their answer in question form: “Lunch?” (line 95). One student attempts another answer, which is correct: “Good afternoon” (line 96). Once more, the teacher does not give authority to the student’s response/voice. Again, she gives authority to a pedagogical resource, the cassette: “*Let us hear if it is right.*” (line 99). Then, in the line 102, the cassette states “*Good afternoon!*” as the right answer.

Through these discursive performances of the teacher, the students are slowly realizing that their voices are not significant, that their voices have no weight in classroom interaction. In this classroom interaction, the students are not recognized as producers of meaning. They just have to repeat, i.e. to speak the voice of others and not to speak with their own voices.

As Juffermans & Aa (2011, p. 2) state, “In plain words, voice is about who says what in which way to whom”. In the next example, we can see how students learn exactly who has the right to speak and who has to listen in the classroom.

Roberta is teaching another expression.



(Can I leave?)

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### Example 4:

339	Roberta	Yung Ho San, tu sabes? <i>Como se diz "Posso sair?"</i>
340	Yung Ho San	Er....
341	Roberta	<b><i>Tu não sabes.</i></b>
342	Roberta	<b><i>Ora!</i></b> Kung Meng.
343	Kung Meng	Posso sair?
344	Roberta	Posso sair? Posso sair?
345	Roberta	<b><i>Vocês concordam?</i></b>
346	Alunos	<b><i>Não</i></b>
347	Roberta	<b><i>Não? Vamos ouvir. Está bem?</i></b>
348	Alunos	<b><i>Está bem.</i></b>
349	Roberta	<b><i>Vamos ouvir como se diz "posso sair?"</i></b> .
350	Roberta	<b><i>Ouçam, vamos ouvir.</i></b>
351	Cassete	8. Posso sair?
352	Roberta	<b><i>Está certo?</i></b>
353	Alunos	<b><i>Sim!</i></b>
354	Roberta	<b><i>Ora! Vamos elogiá-lo</i></b> ((elogiar o aluno Kung Meng))

339	Roberta	Yung Ho San, you know? <i>How do you say "Can I leave?"</i>
340	Yung Ho San	Er ....
341	Roberta	<b><i>You don't know.</i></b>
342	Roberta	<b><i>Well!</i></b> Kung Meng.
343	Kung Meng	Can I leave?
344	Roberta	Can I leave? Can I leave?
345	Roberta	<b><i>Do you agree?</i></b>
346	Students	<b><i>No.</i></b>
347	Roberta	<b><i>No? Let's hear it. Okay?</i></b>
348	Alunos	<b><i>Okay.</i></b>
349	Roberta	<b><i>Let's hear how to say "Can I leave?"</i></b> .
350	Roberta	<b><i>Listen, let's hear it.</i></b>
351	Cassete	8. Can I leave?
352	Roberta	<b><i>Is that right?</i></b>
353	Students	<b><i>Yes!</i></b>
354	Roberta	<b><i>Now! Let us praise him</i></b> ((praise the student Kung Meng))

As we can see, the teacher asks a question, in Cantonese, to a specific student: “Yung Ho San, you know? *How do you say “Can I leave?”*” (line 339). The student hesitates (line 340). The teacher states: “*You don’t know.*” She decides to ask another student, who gives the right answer: “Can I leave?”. The teacher repeats the answer twice in question form ([Can I leave? Can I leave? – line 344) and asks the class if they agree (line 345). The students say: “No” (line 346).

It is possible that the students do not know the “right” answer; therefore, they would not know if the classmate was right or not. However what attracts our attention here is the fact that all the students denied the possibility that a colleague could be right. All of them said “no”, which means that they also felt that their classmate’s answer had no authority.

343	Kung Meng	Can I leave?
344	Roberta	Can I leave? Can I leave?
345	Roberta	<i>Do you agree?</i>
346	Students	<i>No.</i>
347	Roberta	<i>No? Let’s hear it. Okay?</i>

Foucault draws our attention to the fact that “the way in which the disciplinary power has been installed in institutions (schools, for example)”<sup>14</sup> is so strong that it leads to “the point that individuals in these discursive practices are constructed to exercise power over themselves (Foucault, 1977)”<sup>15</sup> (Moita Lopes, 2006[1998]: 308).

This is what we see in this extract: students assume and accept the fact that they have no voice. They are showing that they are learning how to become competent members of this social group, in which being talkative is forbidden. Therefore, they become silent.

In consequence of this interaction, it is possible to notice how

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14 Original in Portuguese : “o modo como o poder disciplinar tem se instalado nas instituições (em escolas, por exemplo)”.

15 Original in Portuguese : “a ponto de que os indivíduos nestas práticas discursivas são construídos para exercer poder sobre si próprios (Foucault, 1977)”.

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obligations, responsibilities, and rights of students and teachers are strictly designated in this classroom, i.e., the identities of students and teachers are rigidly fixed. This seems to be the Chinese cultural view of the classroom (Teixeira e Silva & Moutinho, 2009).

Finally, within the context analyzed, the process of silencing is motivated by a concept of education that places the teacher – and all discourses of authority – as the center of the teaching-learning process. The procedures correspond to what Freire (2000) calls “banking education” in which the teacher, the only one who has the knowledge, deposits this knowledge “into” the students and will later audit it through assessments. This procedure matches a pedagogical choice that deprives the interactions of the necessary space for the joint construction of the desired knowledge. The underlying concept here is that language is the form/structure (and not the use) and that the unit of work in the language teaching-learning process is the word or the sentence (and not the text or the discourse).

### **4.2. Socio-discursive construction of silence in a tertiary classroom of PFL: the ambiguity of silence**

It is important to stress one point: these six year-old children show remarkable enthusiasm in the classroom. The many times that they say a happy “Yeah” during class is just one indication that they are participative and collaborative in classroom interaction. But this “Yeah” disappears as their school years pass.

The consequence of this silencing process is that the institutional discourse will eliminate the students’ own voices from their classroom identities. This devoicing process eventually produces the materialization of silence in classroom: the absence of sound.

Let us make a comparison with one scene<sup>16</sup> from a tertiary classroom. In this classroom, unlike the previous examples, a Western teacher and Chinese students interact. The students are at the beginning of their

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<sup>16</sup> This scene was analyzed with another approach in Teixeira e Silva & Martins (2011).

third year in the Portuguese Studies B.A. Program. They have, in general, an intermediate to high-intermediate level in Portuguese, so they can interact comfortably listening and talking in Portuguese. This excerpt comes from the second month of classes: the students and the teacher already have achieved a good level of classroom contact.

**Example 5:**<sup>17</sup>

1	Professor:	Bom, senhores, (10 segundos) ((ele está organizando os papéis para começar a aula))
2		Vocês:::
3		Bom, alguns/ alguns mostraram uma certa preocupação
4		que parece ser a preocupação de todos
5		relativamente às nossas apresentações
6		Bom, a princípio nós combinamos que...
7		eh... vocês iam pensar e hoje a gente escolheria <b>ou</b> faria sorteio. Sortear é escolher.
8		eh... os dias de apresentação.
9		Cada um tem mais ou menos 7 minutos para falar, não é isso?
10		Sobre um assunto específico e assim por diante.
11	Professor:	Bom, então::: o que vocês têm a dizer sobre isto?
12		(04 segundos) ((os alunos não se mexem nas cadeiras))
13	Professor:	Nada?
14		(02 segundos)
15	Professor:	Então, a gente faz tudo como ficou combinado?
16		(12 segundos)
17		((um aluno fala em chinês com outro no fundo da sala e o professor reage: ))
18	Professor:	Português!
19		((Vários os alunos riem e todos sorriem))
20		(03 segundos)
21	Aluno 01:	O que é que quer ouvir?

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17 In Portuguese, the use of the word “senhores” (Line 1) referring to all students is a joke: a strategy of involvement. Since we will not take this aspect into consideration, we decided to translate “senhores” into English as “everybody”.

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1	Teacher:	Well, everybody, (10 seconds) ((he is organizing the papers to start the class))
2		You::::
3		Well, some / some of you showed a kind of worry
4		that seems to be the worry of everyone
5		about our presentations
6		Well, at first we agreed that ...
7		eh ... you would think and today we would choose or draw lots. Draw lots means to choose
8		eh ... the days of presentation.
9		Each one has more or less 7 minutes to talk, right?
10		about a particular subject and so on.
11	Teacher:	Well, then::: what would you like to say about this?
12		<b>(04 seconds)</b> ((the students do not move on their chairs))
13	Teacher	Nothing?
14		<b>(02 seconds)</b>
15	Teacher:	So we do everything as it was agreed?
16		<b>(12 seconds)</b>
17		((a student speaks in Chinese to another at the back of the room and the teacher reacts:))
18	Teacher:	Portuguese!
19		((Several students laugh and all smile))
20		<b>(03 seconds)</b>
21	Student 01:	What do you want to hear?

Compared to the primary school students, these college students apparently do not show the same engagement when the teacher talks to them. The silence that arises provokes a conflict between the Western teacher and the Chinese students: it seems that the teacher is speaking alone since nobody says anything.

This silence, constructed by both teacher and students, can be understood in at least three ways:



**As cultural production:** The student's statement "What do you want to hear?" (line 21) can be the result of the process of silencing that we saw in the primary context. It seems that the students do not know how to respond to the teachers' requests. Many statements by Chinese students (Teixeira e Silva & Martins, 2011) show that, in the process of schooling, they learn that they should keep quiet in classroom. Possibly the students' school experience showed them that they do not have the right to speak in the classroom. Therefore silence can be motivated by cultural factors.

**As local production:** The discursive choices of the teacher do not help the students to interact. The features of the teacher's discourse are different from what students are used to dealing with in a classroom. For example, they are not used to answering open questions in a classroom, their previous experience with questions is to be clearly addressed by the teacher. Here the silence is constructed locally by the discursive choices of the teacher. The manner of asking questions makes it easy or difficult to engage students in successful classroom interaction. Therefore silence is not cultural here but rather is produced by this specific manner of interaction.

**As result of the distant cultural backgrounds of the interactants:** The conflict of this interaction can also be viewed as the result of different perceptions of silence. As mentioned before, people from distant cultural backgrounds can evaluate silence in different ways. In this context, the Brazilian teacher does not accept silence and keeps requesting the students' collaboration. Silence, in Brazilian classrooms, among other possibilities, is usually perceived as a lack of interest.

All the elements pointed out above have to be considered. However, what we wish to emphasize here is what we quoted in section 2 referring to King's paper; but here we will rewrite his words. In example 5, we are not facing "the silent East versus the talkative West" (King, 2012, p. 2) but actually facing "the silent tertiary classroom versus the talkative primary context". It is not necessarily a question of Western and Eastern contexts.

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The statement of a Chinese undergraduate student may help us understand this silence that regularly appears in tertiary language classes. We asked another class of third-year students in Portuguese Studies to give their impression about what was going on in example 5. They watched the video, read the transcription and wrote their comments. Here is one very revealing statement.

### **Statement 1:**

A crucial element in Chinese culture that arouses both fear and curiosity of Westerners is silence. However, the same concept is called “peace” by the Chinese themselves, even if more often than not it is only an artificial peace. It is a little awkward to say this, but as a product and an observer of twelve years of Chinese education, I would say that we have been abused since the beginning. Imagine that the first grade boys and girls in primary school are required to behave in a particular way: to sit with their arms crossed behind their back (so they cannot mess around with things on the table), neither to talk in class nor to chat with anyone. “Talk to me after class!” This is the way that the teachers use to command or threaten us. (...) The best strategy that we have found is that silence saves us time, energy and many problems of communication. But this is only one reason for this mysterious phenomenon.

(Ana - 21 years-old)

As we can see, a tertiary Chinese student believes that silence has many meanings: it is defense, resistance, contempt, disengagement, concealment, avoidance of problems, and a survival strategy.

The silence that we can see in this tertiary context has many socio-cultural and local interactional-discursive roots. The final point is: silence cannot be used as a reason to label Chinese students as culturally silent and passive.

## **5. Questions as Final Comments**

As the materiality of the discourse makes apparent, the interactions analyzed above deal with silence and with the process of silencing. We would like to pose some questions here to encourage all of us teachers, to (re)think our interaction with students:

1. Has the motivation that feeds this silencing discourse its roots in macro socio-cultural aspects, in the local organization of the interaction, or in micro didactic-pedagogical concepts?
2. How do these aspects and concepts influence each other?
3. Are teachers aware of the power of their discourses?
4. Are they aware of the silencing processes imposed upon both the students and themselves?
5. Where can we localize Western and Eastern interaction in order to avoid the stereotypes that populate the educational imaginary of relations between subjects from different cultures?
6. How enlightened are teachers about these issues?
7. Which educational projects are being undertaken in the society where these analyzed interactions take place?

One way to think of the society in which one would like to live is to think of the kinds of voices it would have!

(Hymes, 1996, as cited in Juffermans & Aa, 2011, p. 2)

In order to make possible a society in which everybody has the right to speak or to remain silent, we believe that it is necessary to question fixed patterns of behaviour and to embrace as a principle the diversity of our world.

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