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The dynamic of student silence in Japanese EFL tutorial sessions

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ABSTRACT

Multiple studies on Japanese students' silence in second-language education focus on the classroom setting, while one-on-one interactions have been largely overlooked. The current research attempts to explore the silence that emerges in one-on-one writing tutoring sessions. This study was designed as exploratory and qualitative, with two groups of participants, Japanese tutees (N 9) and mostly non-Japanese tutors (N 5). Two main instruments included video-recorded tutoring session observations and interviews with a Stimulated Recall component. The researcher recorded tutoring sessions and conducted Stimulated Recall interviews, showing participants excerpts from the observation recordings. The data from the observations were transcribed using Conversation Analysis, a method that enables the measurement of small pauses and nonverbal responses. The interview and observation data were then cross-referenced and analyzed using a theme-based coding approach. The study found that Japanese tutees tended to be more tolerant of silence compared to non-Japanese tutors. Most non-Japanese tutors reported feeling nervous when they encountered silent behaviors from their tutees, whereas most of the tutees did not perceive the silent behavior as awkward or uncomfortable. The paper concludes by listing suggestions on how to mitigate the possible adverse effects of silence in tutoring.

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1. Introduction

Numerous studies have explored the communicative role of silence in the language classroom context (Crosby, 2024; King, 2013; Rahmi, 2024). However, research on the phenomenon of silence in the context of one-on-one tutoring is still extremely scarce. The current study aims to address this gap by examining the role of student silence in the context of self-access tutoring. Using video-recorded observations of tutoring sessions and participants' first-hand accounts, this study attempted to analyze the profound interplay between silence and communication in tutoring.

2. Literature Review

With the advent of learner-centered approaches, language education has shifted toward promoting autonomy and self-directedness among learners. This goal is often achieved through self-access, an approach that aims to promote learning outside the classroom. To achieve this, self-access facilities organize learners' communities, provide learning resources, and offer one-on-one guidance to students (Mynard, 2016). Students can visit self-access facilities freely and are free to choose how to use the resources and support provided there.

Although there is no shortage of research on silent behaviors in the classroom, the silence in the context of self-access one-on-one tutoring has been largely overlooked. The current study aims to address this gap by examining the interactions between tutors and tutees from the perspective of silence. To understand how silence is used in one-on-one interactions, it is crucial to consider the interplay between cultural norms and expectations regarding silence in both everyday interactions and educational settings.

2.1. Communication and Silence Across Cultures

The perceptions of silence are reported to vary widely across cultures. It has been noted that Japanese culture values silence, framing it as a sign of humility, social discretion, and risk aversion (Harumi, 2001, 2011; Lebra, 1987; Nakane, 2006; Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017). Conversely, speakers from Western cultures are reported to have less tolerance towards silence and often attempt to "fill" silence with small talk (Hofstede et al., 2010; Iwane-Salovaara, 2013; Lebra, 1987; Petkova, 2015). For instance, Ohtaki et al. (2003) found that the doctors in the US feature less silence when talking to patients compared to their Japanese counterparts. These results are corroborated by Yamada (1997), who found that Japanese tend to feature more extended periods of silence during business meetings compared to their American counterparts.

However, some studies have found no correlation between culture and tolerance of silence, challenging the notion of a "silent" East and a "talkative" West. For instance, King and Aono (2017) found no significant difference in tolerance for silence between Japanese and UK students. King and Harumi (2020) note that comparisons between Western and Eastern outlooks on silence are prone to overgeneralization. Silence is a multifaceted phenomenon that incorporates culture as one of its components, and cannot be reduced to culture alone. In less formal settings in Japan, speaking out can be not only permitted but expected. For instance, even though Japanese workers might choose not to voice their criticism during a formal meeting, at a company drinking party (*nomikai*), where banter is socially sanctioned, they can be more candid and outspoken with their bosses. Hence, it is worth considering not only the cultural dimension but also the functions and contexts in which silence occurs. (Anderson, 2018; Nakane, 2007).

2.2. Silence in Education

Silence is a frequent occurrence in education, and specifically in language teaching. Literature suggests that language learners tend to stay silent when they are anxious (Harumi, 2001; Smith & King, 2018), struggle with difficult tasks (Rahmi, 2024), need time for cognitive processing (Bao, 2019), or are not interested in the material (Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). Apart from unintended silent behavior, silence can also be used as a communicative tool. Students might stay silent to indicate confusion, express solidarity with each other, or demonstrate their defiance towards teachers (Bao, 2019, 2014; Harumi, 2011; Iwane-Salovaara, 2013; King, 2013; Nakane, 2006, 2012).

Bao (2019) also distinguishes between silence and reticence. Whereas silence is neutral and can be used to encourage learning (by providing time or conversational space), reticence is perceived as a lack of proficiency or unwillingness to communicate (Bao, 2019; Bao & Shachter, 2024).

Finally, silence can be used as a face-saving strategy. By choosing to remain silent, students avoid such face-threatening acts as making a mistake or confronting a teacher (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009; Nakane, 2006; Rahmi, 2024; Sasaki & Ortlieb, 2017). Nakane (2006) provides a detailed account of Japanese students in an Australian university who explain their silence as a reluctance to challenge the lecturer.

2.3. Silence in the Japanese EFL Context

In the Japanese EFL setting, students' silent behavior tends to be even more salient for several reasons. Multiple studies report that school classes in Japan tend to discourage speaking out while simultaneously allowing students to stay silent without being reproached (Crosby, 2024; Harumi, 2011; King, 2013; Sakai & Kikuchi, 2009). The reasons for the predominance of silence are both cultural and institutional. Japanese teachers tend to be anxious about their English proficiency, and as a result, they often avoid communicative activities (Dewaele, 2019; Sakui, 2004). On the institutional level, teachers are often expected to teach for exams using drills and focusing on test-taking strategies (Allen, 2016). In this setting, classes become teacher-centered, with students not expected to communicate in English actively.

When Japanese students transition from school to university, they are confronted with a completely different set of expectations. The norms instilled by Japanese teachers are rarely applied in university classes taught by anglophones, who tend to value communication over silence (Bao, 2023) culturally. As a result, students' silence is often viewed negatively as an inability or unwillingness to communicate (Crosby, 2024; Harumi, 2001, 2011; Smith & King, 2018). Simultaneously, students might view their teacher's requirements as unreasonable and expect to be nominated instead of speaking out (Ellwood & Nakane, 2009).

This tension was demonstrated by Nakane (2006), who analyzed the silent behavior of Japanese students in an Australian university. Nakane reported that during seminars, Japanese students tend to speak out less compared to their non-Japanese counterparts. This study's findings suggest that students who were unsure if their answer was correct tried to save face by remaining silent. However, their silence was perceived as negative and threatening to authority by teachers (Nakane, 2006).

Another example of this miscommunication was given by Harumi (2001), who showed the same video of a student being silent to British and Japanese participants. Japanese participants perceived silence as neutral and communicative, viewing it as a way to state "I don't know" without actually saying it. British participants, on the other hand, viewed silence as a sign of boredom and rudeness (Harumi, 2001). The tensions above, caused by different expectations, might ultimately result in misunderstandings and communication breakdowns.

2.4. Silence in Self-Access and Tutoring

Self-access is an approach in language education that has gained momentum in Japan since the early 2000s, with the proliferation of university-based self-access learning centers (SALCs) (Mynard, 2016). SALCs aim to encourage learning the target language and developing learner autonomy outside of a classroom by providing visitors with community support, learning resources, and one-on-one guidance. SALCs provide greater flexibility compared to formal classes, as visitors can choose their preferred modes of study and resources with SALC staff acting as facilitators rather than instructors.

Many self-access facilities offer language tutoring and advising sessions for their visitors, which take a one-on-one form (Koyalan, 2009; Mynard, 2016, 2019). For example, one-on-one support for academic writing is available at self-access facilities in institutions such as Kanda University, Soka University, and Ritsumeikan University.

During one-on-one guidance, differing expectations regarding silence and participation can lead to tension similar to that found in a classroom. However, in the case of individual tutoring, such tension might be even more salient since there are more turn-taking opportunities and, as a result, more pressure to speak out.

Such tension was demonstrated by Hiraga et al (2003) in their study on fine arts tutoring sessions with Japanese students in the UK. Tutors expected Japanese students to take an active stance by answering questions and elaborating. Conversely, students expected tutors to give direct feedback without asking many questions. As a result, both parties encountered practical difficulties and were unable to communicate effectively with each other.

Foreign language anxiety might be another factor that causes silence in self-access. Suzuki and Hooper (2024) investigated anxiety and communication apprehension displayed by Japanese university students who visited a self-access learning center. The results indicated that the main reasons for the foreign language anxiety were perceived lack of conversation skills and the fear of negative evaluation.

Finally, King and Aono (2017) investigated how students from different cultural backgrounds react to silence. They used a quasi-experimental approach to compare the tolerance to silence between Japanese and UK students during tutoring sessions. Students in both groups displayed low tolerance towards silence and reported anxiety during the silent periods.

The interplay between silence, culture, anxiety, and language learning has been extensively investigated in the classroom setting. However, there is still a lack of research on the role of silence in the self-access context. Considering the rising popularity of self-access in Japan, it is crucial to understand how silence emerges in this setting. This paper aims to shed light on the phenomenon of silence in self-access by investigating how tutors and tutees perceive silence and communication differently.

3. Data Collection and Methodology

3.1. Research Objectives

The literature review above highlights the need for further research on silence in the self-access context. This study, therefore, addresses explicitly one-on-one language tutoring as a part of self-access using the following research questions:

1. How do perceptions of silence differ among tutors and tutees?
2. In what forms does the tutees' silence manifest itself in the tutoring sessions?

3.2. Context and participants

There were two groups of participants: tutors and tutees. All participants were provided with information about the study and signed informed consent forms, agreeing to be video-recorded and interviewed. Participants' names were anonymized and assigned numerical identifiers.

1) Tutors

The research was conducted in a self-access tutoring program at a private university in Japan. This program focused on improving tutees' academic writing by checking their essays. The staff was comprised of international students working as part-time tutors. At the time of the research, all the tutors had undergone an initial pedagogical training on tutoring skills. The information about the tutors who agreed to participate in this study (N = 6) is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Participant information (tutors)

Participant	Gender	Country	Teaching and tutoring experience	Language used in the Session
T01	female	Colombia	Self-access conversational program – 2 years Tutoring – 1 semester	English
T02	female	Bulgaria	Tutoring – 2 semesters	English
T03	female	Brazil	Tutoring – 2 semesters	English
T04	male	Kenya	Tutoring – 1 semester High school teaching – 1 year University teaching – 1 year	English
T05	female	Japan/the US	Tutoring – 2.5 years	Japanese
T06*	female	India		English

[a] *The session with T06 was observed, but this tutor did not take part in the interview. As a result, only data from observation and the tutee interview were analyzed.

Tutor T05 had the most experience in the tutoring program, and she was also an outlier in terms of language usage. She was the only tutor who offered students an opportunity to conduct a session entirely in Japanese. All the other tutors had less tutoring experience, and they mostly used English during the sessions (T01 and T03 occasionally switched to Japanese, but only for short periods).

2) Tutees

The tutee participants (N 9) were Japanese first-year students enrolled in an advanced-level elective course. Tutees' English proficiency ranged from B1 to B2 according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), and in the interviews, they all reported high motivation for learning English and a strong willingness to communicate. All the participants in this group had been asked by their teacher to use a tutoring program to get help with their writing assignments earlier. As a result, they had prior experience of receiving tutoring. The number of previously attended sessions varied between 1 and 3 for all the tutees except S04, who had attended seven sessions. The information about the tutees is presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Participant information (tutees)

Participant	Gender	Had a session with (Tutor ID)	Previous tutoring experience (number of sessions attended)	Language used in the Session
S01	female	T01	3 sessions	English
S02	male	T01	2 sessions	English
S03	male	T02	2 sessions	English
S04	female	T03	7 sessions	English
S05	female	T03	3 sessions	English
S06	female	T04	1 session	English
S07	female	T06	2 sessions	English
S08	female	T05	2 sessions	Japanese
S09	female	T05	2 sessions	Japanese

3.3. Research instruments

The two main instruments utilized in this study were video-recorded tutoring session observations and semi-structured interviews with both tutors and tutees. Participants were given the choice of whether they wanted the investigator to stay in the room during the session or just record it without being physically present. This was done in order to reduce tutees' anxiety. If the investigator was permitted to be present during the session, he used a stopwatch and took notes to record salient periods of silence.

After the observation, the investigator conducted semi-structured interviews with tutors and tutees. The interviews were conducted separately, one-on-one. Interviews with tutors were conducted within three days of the session observed with them, while interviews with tutees were mostly conducted on the same day, with one tutee joining over Zoom within a week after the session. Tutors were interviewed in English, and eight tutees were primarily interviewed in English with some comprehension checks and elaborations done in Japanese. One tutee was interviewed in Japanese.

The interviews were divided into two parts, with the first part comprising questions about motivation, willingness to communicate, tolerance of silence, and perceptions of silence (see Appendices A and B for the lists of questions). The second part focused explicitly on the observed session and used the Stimulated Recall (O'Brien, 1993) method, in which participants were shown video excerpts from their session. This enabled participants to recall the reasons for staying silent and describe their feelings during the intervals of silence.

3.4. Data analysis

The video recordings from the observations were transcribed using a simplified version of Conversation Analysis (Liddicoat, 2021), a method that enables the measurement of small pauses and non-verbal responses. The investigator primarily focused on measuring silent pauses, noting speech overlaps, and identifying non-verbal signals.

The interviews were transcribed and then coded using the following steps. Initially, the themes and keywords frequently mentioned in the literature were highlighted in the transcripts using color codes. After that, the themes frequently mentioned by interviewees but not in the literature were coded. Then, the data from the interviews was cross-referenced with the key points from the observations. Finally, the coded data were organized into themes that were then analyzed.

4. Results

4.1. Perceptions of silence among tutors

Before we address the specific examples of tutees' silence in tutoring sessions, it is essential to investigate the perceptions that tutors and tutees have regarding silence and its role in communication. Four tutors (T01, T02, T03, T04) mentioned that the frequency and length of silence in Japan tend to be greater compared to their country of origin.

Tutors T01 and T02 exhibited a lower tolerance for silence and stated that in their cultures, there is a tendency to avoid silence. For instance, T01, who came from Colombia, mentioned that in her

home country, silence is mostly perceived negatively, while rapid turn-taking, interruptions, and small talk are viewed as normal:

> *In a normal conversation...Yeah, there's a lot of noise. Like people interrupt each other, we start talking a lot, so it [silence] is not really welcomed.* (T01)

She also mentioned that she considered being silent in class disrespectful:

> *for example, it will be… It was really shocking for me that a teacher would ask a question here [in Japan] and nobody answered. For me, that's also a disrespect to the teacher.* (T01)

T03, who was from Brazil, voiced similar views, saying that conversations in her country tend to be fast-paced and silence is mostly viewed negatively. She also admitted that when the silence happened during tutoring, she felt compelled to fill it. The session observation data confirmed the preference of both T01 and T03 for fast-paced conversations, as evidenced in their communication with tutees, where they featured more speech overlaps compared to other tutors. It is worth noting, however, that most of the overlaps displayed by T01 and T03 were cooperative rather than competitive in nature. T01's and T03's overlaps were not used to dominate a conversation by forcefully taking turns. Instead, these two tutors either used overlaps to support and develop the tutee's ideas.

T02 and T04, who are from Bulgaria and Kenya, respectively, stated that in their cultural context, silence does not necessarily have a negative connotation. However, compared to their cultures, the length of silence in Japan is longer:

> *I think Japanese people, their silence is more prolonged...* (T04)

T04 also mentioned that after he started working as a tutor, he realized that silence can be used as an "I don't know" answer.

A key point regarding tutees' silence was that it made tutors anxious. Four tutors (T01, T02, T03, T04) reported nervousness and anxiety when tutees remained silent for an extended period of time:

> *Oh yeah, sometimes I also feel really uncomfortable with those moments, because I'm like, I don't know what to do*. (T03)

Interestingly, in the interviews, these tutors displayed awareness that students' silence often happens due to cultural differences and language anxiety rather than low motivation. Yet the tutors still reported being nervous. T02, for example, stated:

> *I have, like, studied the culture and everything for a few years. So I wasn't absolutely unprepared, but still is, like, it's one thing to know, like "Oh, here silences may or… Maybe gonna be a bit longer, like maybe not five seconds. 10 seconds", but when it's just numbers in your head, it's very different. When you actually encounter... and when we've practiced it during [program's name] training sessions, it really became very obvious… The difference...* (T02)

Other tutors (T01, T03, T04) shared a similar sentiment during the interviews. Even though they had experienced silence in Japan before and were aware that tutees' silence is rather typical, the anxiety persisted. These responses indicate that cultural awareness alone might not be sufficient to increase tolerance of silence. Hence, tutoring programs might use session recordings and role-plays for training tutors to help them experience silence.

However, it is important to notice that one of the tutors was an outlier in terms of silence perception. T05, the most experienced tutor, grew up in a bilingual household and was exposed to both Japanese and American communication styles. T05 stated that she used to have a lower tolerance to silence but got accustomed to it while living in Japan. T05 also claimed that she had more tolerance for tutees staying silent and mentioned that she preferred to "*lean into the silence"*. Additionally, she mentioned her ability to recognize different functions of silence, such as unspoken "I don't know" answers and silence caused by deep thought.

The observation data corroborated T05's self-reported tolerance for silence. On average, the silent pauses in her sessions were longer compared to those of other tutors. On one occasion, she waited 57 seconds after asking a question while a tutee was generating ideas. Later, during the interview, T05 mentioned that she was not particularly anxious during this prolonged silence.

The higher silence tolerance of T05 might be attributed to her origin as a person who grew up in both the US and Japan and speaks both languages. During the interview, T05 mentioned that she can adjust her communication style depending on the cultural background of the person she is talking to.

However, T05 also noted that outside of the tutoring context, she tended to use more small talk to fill the silence when talking in English:

> *When I'm speaking to someone in English, like sometimes I just say things that I don't mean, just to fill the silence.* (T05)

This suggests that T05's tolerance of silence is highly contextual, as she reported displaying more tolerance of silence when communicating with tutees and less tolerance when speaking English in her daily life.

4.2. Usage and perceptions of silence among tutees

Out of nine tutees, seven did not have a negative perception of silence, while the other two mentioned that silence often makes them feel uncomfortable. Six tutees (S01, S02, S03, S04, S05, S07) mentioned that they had stayed silent during a tutoring session when they needed time to think. Five tutees (S02, S05, S06, S08, S09) cited language anxiety as a reason for silence, while four tutees (S02, S04, S06, S08) mentioned that they stayed silent out of fear of making a mistake. Language anxiety, especially in terms of speaking, and mistake aversion seemed to be tightly connected. A glimpse of this connection is demonstrated in S08's account of being silent in high school:

> *Some questions back then were based on common sense, so one would either give an answer based on common sense or not. My answers were a bit different from common sense... So… Because my answers were like that, everyone looked at me as if I were saying something strange. So sometimes I got strange looks from classmates. So this experience still has an effect on me even in the university English classes.* (S08)

S08 stated that due to the occurrences like the one described above, she became more cautious of speaking out and making mistakes. A similar sentiment was shared by S06, who said that in Japan, mistakes are considered shameful, and one would rather not speak if they are unsure of their answer.

Apart from the unintended silence discussed above, six tutees (S02, S04, S05, S06, S06, S07) also mentioned that silence has a range of communicative functions in the Japanese context. In other words, tutees reported that in some cases, they use silence intentionally as a communicative tool. S07 mentioned that silence can be used to express affirmation, while S02 stated that silence can also be used to express the "I don't know" answer. S04 and S05 noted that staying silent might be a sign of solidarity and emotional support between friends. Finally, S06 connected silence with politeness, saying that in Japan, it is widely believed that interruptions are considered rude. The S06's avoidance of interruption is supported by the observation data and her responses to the Stimulated Recall questions. During the observed session, S06 wanted to take a turn but was unable to interrupt the tutor, who controlled the conversational floor.

The data above demonstrate that the responses given by Japanese tutees provide more varied examples of communicative silence usage compared to tutors, who mostly viewed silence negatively.

However, it is worth noting that tutees' tolerance of silence was not homogeneous. Two tutees, S04 and S05, mentioned familiarity as an important factor that affects silence. According to S04 and S05, their tolerance towards silence is lower when communicating with unfamiliar people, while longer periods of silence can be tolerated when communicating with friends. The heightened tolerance towards silence can be understood from the perspective of a *safe territory* (Bao, 2014), where silence is welcomed and viewed positively.

Additionally, S01, who was an outlier among the tutees in terms of tolerance for silence, repeatedly stated that silence is uncomfortable. S01's case is also interesting because she connected her avoidance of silence with her identity as a person from the Kansai region in Western Japan:

> *students, especially those from Kansai, I mean… Kansai area.. So, they, they do effort to continue to talk and don't make silence. So… so, we can... can keep a good atmosphere of communication. So, it… Silence is not a good aspect of communication.* (S01)

This statement is reflected in the observation data, as S01 frequently used overlaps, and silent pauses initiated by her were not very long (with a maximum duration of 4.8 seconds). As the examples above demonstrate, regional and contextual factors influence how Japanese tutees perceive silence, challenging the notion of passive Japanese learners.

Finally, S04 and S07 noted the differences between Japanese students and anglophones in terms of cultural perceptions of silence. S04 gave the following example of how her English teacher reacted to silence during class:

> *When everyone is silent, the teacher speaks a lot. She gives us a lot of ideas like "Try saying this…". I think my image is… the majority of Japanese people do not do this, but I think foreigners tend to start talking and give a lot of ideas and examples as soon as there is a silent moment.* (S04)

To sum up, most tutors viewed silence during tutoring negatively and reported feeling nervous when tutees remained silent. Conversely, tutees tended to have a more nuanced approach to silence and its communicative functions. According to the interview and observation data, silence in tutoring is closely associated with communicative preferences, expectations regarding participation, and difficulties with turn-taking. Therefore, the next sections will address these themes.

4.3. Communicative preferences

In the interviews, both tutors and tutees frequently mentioned the tutees' preference for non-verbal communication. The communicative importance of non-verbal signals in the Japanese context was also cited by tutees (S02, S04, S07, S08). This is how S07 put it:

> *For example, people in Japan often communicate without speaking, instead using eye* contact. (S07)

Based on the interviews and observations, tutors preferred more straightforward and verbal communication, whereas tutees preferred to convey their message through more subtle and non-verbal means. During the sessions, tutees used facial expressions, tilting their head, looking up or down, and rocking. For tutees, one of the key functions of nonverbal signals was to express confusion. Four tutors (T01, T02, T03, T05) reported that tutees rarely said, "I don't know." T05 noted:

> *yeah, I think… I don't think I've ever heard that in Japanese. Like, I don't think I would ever hear like wakaranaidesu [I don't know]. It'd just be silence. Yeah, so I think, I think so.* (T05)

In one of the sessions with T05, S09 repeatedly stayed silent while tilting her head after being asked a question. Another tutee, S02, made a "mmm" sound after a period of silence, seemingly to indicate confusion. Later in the interview, he also mentioned:

> *if a student is silent, it is probably because they didn't understand something. So staff could…Well… explain it more simply. It would be great…* (S02)

This passage suggests that S02 expected tutors to be able to correctly identify silence as an "I don't know" signal.

Not all tutors, however, could tell apart different types of non-verbal signals. For instance, T01 reported that she struggled to differentiate non-verbal signals during her sessions. T01, T02 and T03 also indicated a preference for tutees using verbal messages as opposed to non-verbal ones:

> *there's no shame in saying I don't know. So I think in most of the time, this would just save so much time if they just say "I don't know"* (T03)

Hence, tutors tended to display a preference for verbal signals while tutees seemed to prefer the non-verbal ones, especially when indicating an "I don't know" answer. Perhaps the reason for tutees using non-verbal signals is similar to mistake avoidance. Admitting not knowing something is similar to making a mistake in the sense that it potentially leads to a loss of face and embarrassment, so it would make sense for tutees to avoid verbalizing an "I don't know" response as a face-saving strategy.

4.4. Expectations regarding participation

Apart from communication, there were also key differences in expectations regarding participation and the roles of tutors and tutees. Expectations regarding participation are one of the factors that shape the use of silence in an EFL classroom (Crosby, 2024). Similarly, different views on participation might affect communication between tutors and tutees. Three tutors (T01, T02, T03) stated that, although encouraging participation was one of the goals of the tutoring program, they did not expect Japanese tutees to be particularly active. T01 and T03 mentioned that they still tried to involve tutees by asking questions, while T02 stated that she was fine with tutees not being active:

> *No. No, most of them don't usually participate. And I think it's fine. I mean, they're... more like observe what we're saying."* (T02)

T04 and T05, on the other hand, expected active participation from tutees:

> *yeah, definitely […] I made it a point to ask questions that would encourage them to speak more.* (T05)

As for the tutees, S01, S04, and S07 seemed to participate actively in a manner that coincided with the tutors' views. For instance, S01 stated that she made an effort to ask questions both in class and during tutoring actively. During the observed session, S01 asked multiple questions and even corrected T01 when the tutor misunderstood her question. As for S04 and S07, both of them asked questions during their sessions, and seemed to be fine with tutors using overlaps. S04 also verbally indicated her confusion when she did not understand the tutors' feedback.

Participation of other tutees, however, differed from the tutors' expectations. S08 and S09, who joined the session with T05, did not ask questions, and despite T05's efforts to involve them in the tutoring process, S08 and S09 featured long pauses before they replied to questions posed by T05 (up to 57 seconds for S08 and 27 seconds for S09). Additionally, S09's answers were brief, and on two occasions, her silence after being asked a question prompted T05 to move to another topic. Interestingly, both of the sessions were conducted in Japanese, so S08 and S09's silence cannot be attributed to low language proficiency.

T05 reported during the interview that she felt S08 and S09 were not enthusiastic:

> *I felt that the students were quieter than usual. Like, I think the students I usually get are more, you know, a little bit more vocal, I think, or enthusiastic, I would say...* (T05)

She also made the following comment about the session with S08:

> *I don't think it was really like, you know, "I want help, I want to get help with this". And so I think she was more expecting me to just be like, yeah, "Just do this, and this, and this".* (T05)

The interviews with S08 and S09 provide another perspective regarding this exchange. Both S08 and S09 said that they are motivated to learn English and try to participate actively in class. However, both of them reported struggling with generating ideas and public speaking. Additionally, S08 remembered the pressure to say something while staying silent:

> *The staff waited quietly while looking at me. […] I thought, "I have to answer fast".* (S08)

The sessions with S08 and S09 demonstrated the tension between the tutor's expectations of active participation and tutees' struggle to generate ideas and speak out. This tension eventually led the tutor to believe that the tutees lacked motivation and agency.

The most salient example of different expectations was given by T02 when she described her first session with S03. According to T02, when this tutee first attended T02's session, they had the following exchange:

> *I suppose it was his first time coming to [program's name]. He wasn't exactly aware of what the idea of the [program's name] is. He thought that you would come in and just have your essay fixed, as if you didn't participate in the process, which is what he requested of me when I tried to involve him in the process. He would say, "But you are here… here to work, right? You're here to..." Oh, yeah. He was rather direct...* (T02)

While the tutor expected the tutee to answer questions and elaborate on his ideas, the tutee wanted to receive more direct feedback and get his paper corrected.

The examples provided in this section illustrate how the differing expectations regarding participation influence communication between tutors and tutees. Some tutors might have a strong preference for active verbal participation that does not correspond with tutees' abilities and communicative styles. Conversely, tutees might view tutors as teachers and thus expect them to give more direct feedback.

4.5. Turn-taking

The last factor that influenced silence in tutoring was difficulties in turn-taking. In the interviews, four tutees (S04, S06, S07, S08) mentioned the importance of reading the room (*ku:ki wo yomu)* in the Japanese context. Silence, then, might be a result of reading the room and not wanting to impose on other people. This is how S08 describes a group of students answering a question posed by a teacher in class:

> *In the case of Japan, silence is the time when we read the room. So, I think... For example, if a teacher asks students a question, everyone might become silent. At this time, students might look at each other's faces, trying to decide who will speak. Students would exchange glances, read the room, and then someone might go like, "I will answer". In this case, the person will answer. So, probably silent time is a time for reading the room.* (S08)

The S08's statement suggests that reading the room can be interpreted as a social expectation of giving a turn to other speakers.

Next, the example of S06 will be given to illustrate how different views on turn-taking might lead to silence. It is worth noting that S06 did not stay silent after being asked questions, and, according to her, she had no problem understanding the tutor's points. Instead, her silence was mostly a result of her struggling to take a turn. In the session with T04, S06 asked a question about how to cite sources at the beginning of the session (7:43). However, the tutor digressed. He answered S06's question 10 minutes after it was asked (18:07). During the interview, S06 said that she wanted to discuss her question earlier, but she was unable to take a turn.

The reason for this turn-taking tension seems to be twofold. On one hand, T04's turns were long (up to 4 minutes), and he did not do any comprehension checks. On the other hand, S06 mentioned reading the room and aversion to interruption as the reasons for staying silent. This is how S06 described her experience:

> *eeh… In Japan, most people think it is important ku:ki wo yomu [read the room]. Uhm… so… I thought it was time to teach him. Teaching time, and maybe he wants to talk at the end.* (S06)

As a result, the tutee was reluctant to interrupt while the tutor controlled the conversation floor. This prevented S06 from taking a turn. Other tutees also reported being unable to take a turn during tutoring sessions. In an interview, S04 recounted a past session when a tutor misunderstood S04's writing, but the tutee could not correct the tutor:

> *When the staff revised my paper, she thought my topic was something else; I wanted to convey a different message. So, I want to say… it isn't… it's different… I want to talk about these topics, but she thinks I want to talk about another topic, so she tells me, "You should erase this point and add another sentence". But she [talked a lot], so I could not interrupt her talking.* (S04)

Finally, S07 also experienced not being given a floor in one of her past sessions. According to S07, the tutor's explanation was lengthy, so the tutee hesitated to ask questions and decided not to speak up.

The instances described above appear to coincide with what Nakane (2012) refers to as *silencing*. Unlike conspicuous silence that happens after being asked a question, silencing might be harder to detect. In other words, a tutor who does not give conversational floor to a tutee might not even realize that silencing took place. In the case of T04, he did not seem to realize that he prevented a tutee from speaking by controlling the floor. Instead, in the interview, he primarily focused on S06's low language proficiency:

> *I realized that I misinterpreted the student's level of language. […] But yeah, so maybe it could be about language and not about silence...* (T04)

This section has demonstrated how silencing happens in tutoring sessions due to the different communicative preferences and views on turn-taking.

To summarize, the findings of this study reveal several key aspects of silence in tutoring. One such aspect was a difference in perceptions of silence between tutors and tutees. Most of the tutors noted the length of silent pauses in the Japanese tutoring context and the feeling of anxiety when being exposed to tutees' silence. Most of the tutees, on the other hand, showed greater tolerance for silence. They also displayed a more multifaceted view of silence, highlighting it not as a handicap but also as a communicative tool.

Another important aspect of silence was related to the difference in views on participation and the tension created by this difference. In three sessions, tutors expected tutees to be more verbally active by asking questions and giving ideas. In contrast, tutees remained silent due to anxiety and a preference for more direct feedback. This tension led tutors to view tutees as passive and unmotivated.

A similar tension was present in communicative preferences. In the interviews, tutors displayed a preference for verbal signals, whereas tutees emphasized the importance of non-verbal signaling and the ability to "read the room." The signalling of "I don't know" answer was especially salient, as tutors wanted tutees to verbalize it, while tutees preferred to communicate the "I don't know" message non-verbally. This difference can lead to a situation where a tutee intentionally uses silence as a communicative tool, but a tutor, being unable to detect the non-verbal message, perceives silence as unwillingness or inability to participate.

The final important aspect of silence in tutoring was related to a difference in turn-taking and *silencing* that emerged as a result of such a difference. Three tutees reported not being given a floor during their sessions because a tutor kept talking and controlled the conversation, effectively silencing them. Interestingly, in one case, the tutor did not recognize *silencing*. Instead, he cited a tutee's low proficiency as the main reason for her silence. The phenomenon of silencing seems to be particularly relevant in the one-on-one tutoring context and warrants further investigation.

5. Implication

The data obtained through observations and interviews reveal that silence in tutoring is a complex and multifaceted process that arises due to the numerous gaps and differences.

Gaps in cultural perceptions of silence, communicative preferences, expectations about participation, and turn-taking. Although these gaps may not be fully bridged, raising awareness about them and demonstrating how they interact with each other is crucial for improving communication between tutors and tutees.

There are several recommendations that self-access center managers and tutors can use to make the phenomenon of silence less intimidating for both tutors and tutees. The first recommendation is to address silence in the tutor training. It may be beneficial for tutors to learn about tutees' preferences for non-verbal communication and turn-taking patterns. Tutors might also learn not only how to give time, but also to maintain a conversational floor by doing frequent comprehension checks and shortening their turns.

Another recommendation is to prepare a set of documents for tutees that outline expectations regarding participation and communication. It would be unrealistic to expect tutees to change their communicative styles overnight; therefore, these documents may focus on raising awareness about how tutors and tutees might have different ideas of participation and communication.

The third recommendation would be to systematically foster an environment in which mistakes and questions are not only tolerated but actively encouraged. For instance, tutors might spend some time at the beginning of a session engaging in small talk to build rapport with their tutees. Finally, self-access center managers or tutors can prepare simple paddles for tutees with phrases such as "I have a question" or "I don't understand". This might give tutees more opportunities to take turns without forcing them to interrupt.

6. Conclusion

This research aims to shed light on the phenomenon of student silence in the context of self-access tutoring sessions, which has been previously underexplored. The findings suggest that different cultural perceptions of silence, as well as views on participation, communicative styles, and turn-taking, contribute to tutees' silent behaviors during tutoring sessions.

Hopefully, this study also demonstrated that the common notion of silent and passive Japanese learners is insufficient for explaining the vast array of factors that contribute to silent behaviors. To better understand how silence emerges and evolves, it is crucial to ground silence research in specific contexts.

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