Tracking foreign language teacher emotional reactions to student silence: An autoethnographic case study in Japan
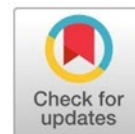
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ABSTRACT

While much has been researched regarding English language learner (ELL) perspectives on silence and pedagogical implications, the longitudinal adverse effects of ELL silence on expatriate foreign language (FL) teachers is an under-researched area of study. When considering that (a) Japanese FL classrooms are known to have high levels of silence as compared to the West, (b) expatriate FL teachers generally have a negative bias toward student silence, and (c) the fact that FL teacher attrition rates worldwide are reported to be increasing; this is a surprising gap in the field. Using dynamic systems theory, Bronfenbrenner's (1979) ecological systems theory, Barnlund's (1970) transactional model of communication, and Spilt et al.'s (2011) student-behavior mental representation model as a framework to investigate FL teacher emotional reactions to silence, the researcher conducted an autoethnographic event-based sampling study over a university term in Japan (98 days). In accordance with event-based sampling methodology, the researcher documented in-the-moment or near-the-moment incidences when emotional reactions to silence occurred. The main findings of this study are as follows: (1) Japanese ELLs are uncomfortable receiving direct expatriate FL teacher assistance around their peers, (2) negative reactions to Japanese ELL silence are linked to the establishment or disruption of classroom patterns, and (3) stress pertaining to teacher-teacher silence emerged after teacher-student stress stabilized mid-term. Regarding the third theme, suppressive surface acting and the need for social support were found to contribute to expatriate FL teacher stress. Negativity bias was also an influential factor when interpreting silence.

1. Introduction

Teaching is largely considered one of the most stressful occupations (Chen et al., 2022; Johnson et al., 2005), and language teaching specifically may be one of the most emotionally challenging environments for teachers (Gkonou et al., 2020). This is primarily attributed to the fact that cultural and identity issues are inexorably connected with the subject matter (Dumitrašković & A., 2015; Talbot & Mercer, 2018). Notwithstanding the disruption of COVID-19, in recent years, a large number of foreign language (FL) teachers have left the profession due to stress and burnout (MacIntyre et al., 2019). As a result, investigations focused on language teacher wellbeing have increased considerably

(Jin et al., 2021a). While numerous factors have been found to influence language teacher wellbeing (e.g., personality, professional development, workplace culture, emotional challenges, community support, motivational issues, effort-reward imbalance, and so on) (Ren et al., 2019) (Babic et al., 2022; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020), the extents to which teacher-student interpersonal relationships affect wellbeing have largely been ignored (Spilt et al., 2011a; Virtanen et al., 2019). Considering that teacher-student interactions are essential to language learning (Hall & Walsh, 2002), this is a surprising gap in the field.

Informed by my over 15 years of language teaching experience, it is clear that expatriate FL teachers prefer classes where there is a positive dynamic. Often this occurs when there is a good balance of student personalities - individuals who are keen to learn, outspoken, fun, and encouraging to their fellow students. These students can add momentum to learning (Shachter & Haswell, 2022) and be a source of joy to teachers (Talbot & Mercer, 2018). In addition, talkative language learners contribute to their own development; this is because the act of speaking provides FL teachers with essential cues to monitor comprehension (Filipi, 2018), accuracy (Gibson, 2008), and student engagement (Bao, 2014). Depending on a particular utterance, a teacher could provide helpful feedback. When faced with student silence, on the other hand, an expatriate FL teacher can be confused about how to proceed (Harumi, 2011a), thus feeling the necessity to motivate and/or expend more quantities of energy to elicit a response (Acheson et al., 2016; Gkonou et al., 2020; S. A. Morris, 2022; Stone, 2012a).

Beyond the physical drain of pushing/ motivating certain LLs (e.g., reticent, shy, uncomfortable, low-aptitude, low-motivated, low-confidence) to speak, there is a need to understand the psychology of teachers. Teachers generally have a psychological need for relatedness with their students (Spilt et al., 2011b) and look for student responses as indicators of how well a lesson is going (Shachter & Haswell, 2022) Moreover, to varying degrees, FL teachers view their language as a reflection of culture, and when silence is perceived as resistance (Al-Ahmadi & King, 2023), this rejection of culture can cause frustration and loneliness (Tilburg et al., 2005). It is clear that expatriate FL teachers generally view silent incidences as an opposing force in the classroom (Al-Ahmadi & King, 2023; Harumi, 2011a; King, 2016). Therefore, from the perspective of an expatriate FL teacher in Japan, this investigation aims to shed more light on silent incidences by tracking emotional affect over the course of a university term.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Defining silence

In the field of language learning, (King, 2013a) considers silence, or "absence of talk," a dynamic construct that can shift or change depending on a wide range of competing forces (p. 328). (Bao, 2013, 2014, 2023; Bao & Ye, 2020) highlights how causes of silence in a second language acquisition contexts are pretty varied but can be grouped mainly as either positive (e.g., processing information), neutral (i.e., accepted in a given scenario) or negative (e.g., defiance). Regarding willingness to communicate, the terms volitional or non-volitiona silence could be used (Peter D. Macintyre, 2007) or intentional/ non-intentional silence (Kurzon, 2007). Interestingly, FL teachers (regardless of truly volitional or non-volitional) may perceive silence as an indirect behavior (e.g., apathy) (Acheson et al., 2016). Therefore, it is essential to note that depending on subjective interpretations and context, FL teachers may group a variety of silent incidences as undesirable (Bao, 2023). To clarify these concepts, though, it is necessary to have a brief discussion on student talk.

While there is not necessarily a consensus on how to rate the efficacy of a language-learning classroom (David Hayes et al., 2011; Faez et al., 2019), from my experiences, whether teaching at a private or public language school, student and teacher performance is often rated based on how much students are talking. Therefore, from a teacher-trainer perspective, if students are talking a lot, the FL teacher has fostered an 'ideal' classroom atmosphere whereby students display skill development through continuous verbal utterances (Bao, 2013). On the other hand, if the language classroom is silent, observers may feel something is wrong with the learner or teacher. While there *may* be something wrong, Bao has argued that the processing of information, for example, is essential to the language learning process. Therefore, this category of silence should be viewed as "positive silence" (Thanh-My & Bao, 2020). Neutral silence pertains more to a mutual understanding (e.g., everyone in class remains silent during a written exam). Negative silence, on the other hand, would be any silence

that debilitates learner progress. Negative silence can be caused by many factors, including lack of motivation, outright defiance, extreme shyness, or uncomfortable reactions to pressure (King, 2013a; Nakane, 2007; Shachter & Haswell, 2022; Smith & King, 2018). classify negative silence into three affective groups: embarrassment, fear, and anxiety; annoyance, anger, and resistance; and disengagement.

For this study, negative silent incidences experienced by a FL teacher will be defined as the following: (a) unwanted/inappropriate/uncomfortable wait times, (b) unreciprocated communication, and/or (c) a desire for another party to instigate paths toward mutual understanding. Positive incidences, on the other hand, will relate to instances where student speech triggered a positive effect. Through this lens, it is essential to distinguish that positive reactions will not necessarily relate to positive silence. These definitions are posed with the base understanding that interpretations of silence among expatriate FL teachers may be highly subjective and vary on a case-by-case basis. Indeed, this is a central component of this study, as students may employ silence in different ways for different reasons.

2.2. Factors that influence Japanese ELL silence

While this investigation centers on an expatriate FL teacher's emotional reactions to Japanese ELL silence in a university classroom, attention must be given to the pervasive role of silence in Japanese culture. Communication styles and the use of silence throughout Japanese culture are far different from the West (Banks, 2016), where silence can sometimes be viewed as uncomfortable and/or socially awkward. In Japan, for example, non-verbal communication is much more prevalent to maintain politeness. The listener is expected to deduce meaning based on context, and in Japanese communicative interactions, direct language is seldom used (Bao, 2014). These points are made to reinforce that even though this investigation centers on an educational context, in a macro sense, Japanese cultural communicative practices pervade almost all institutions (Banks, 2016; Lebra, 1987; Takahashi, 2021; Yoshikawa, 1987). Silence is especially noticeable in shared spaces like public transportation and group waiting areas (e.g., medical facilities, licensing offices). One reason why silence is maintained in these settings is to allow individuals to comfortably rest (Asai & Barnlund, 1998).

Turning toward language learning contexts specifically, Japanese ELLs may be silent (a) as a representation of their true self, (b) because of embarrassment, (c) to maintain harmony and balance in the social situation, or (d) as a function of defiance (Lebra, 1987). Moreover, certain Japanese ELLs will remain silent to avoid potential embarrassment related to fears of alienation (Harumi, 2011a) And in rare cases, Japanese students (ELL and otherwise) may choose to be silent to avoid embarrassing others. This behavior is categorized as a form of social anxiety called *taijin kyofusho* and is region-specific to Japan.

While silence is revered in Japan and often used to show reticence, politeness, and respect (Kubota & Takeda, 2021; Stone, 2012a; Takahashi, 2021; Yoshikawa, 1987), it is important to highlight again that "the absence of talk" (King, 2013a) can be influenced by a myriad of factors. Depending on the individual, these factors could include trait shyness (Zimbardo, 1977), public-self versus private-self display rules (Asai & Barnlund, 1998), communicative language teaching pedagogy (Cutrone, 2009), compulsory language classes (Fryer et al., 2014), verbal communication styles (Stone, 2012b; Takahashi, 2021; Watzlawick et al., n.d.; Yoshikawa, 1987), conditioning toward a transmission model of communication (Glasgow, 2015; Nishino & Watanabe, 2008; Richardson & Smith, 2007; Takahashi, 2021), hierarchal structures in the classroom (Banks, 2016), East Asian attitudes towards perfectionism (Takahashi, 2021), among others.

It is important to note that biased interpretations of silence in a specific learning context may depend on personal or cultural experience. One can simply look at the word "reticent", which is considered a positive trait in Japan. Under this category, Japanese students may remain silent as a show of respect (Bao, 2014; Lebra, 1987), to establish hierarchies (Banks, 2016), or simply because they are more accustomed to classroom silence (King, 2013a; King & Harumi, 2020). Conversely, some students may hide behind the auspices of reticence - using silence as a vehicle to mask defiant attitudes toward language learning (King & Smith, 2017). When it comes to behavioral interpretations, a Japanese language teacher may view a reticent student as being polite and contributing to the *wa* (harmony) of the classroom (Harumi, 2011a). However, an expatriate FL teacher may classify the

same "silent" student as having a low willingness to participate with other classmates and/or a low willingness to communicate (Harumi, 1999) (King, 2016). It is understandable that expatriate FL teachers may feel substantial cultural differences in the use of silence in their daily lives in Japan. For this investigation, it is essential to focus the review on a more narrow scope, specifically on how Japanese ELL silence can contribute toward expatriate FL teacher stress in learning contexts.

2.3. Expatriate FL teacher stress caused by Japanese ELL silence

In a seminal study by (King, 2013b), teacher-instigated talk in Japanese university ELL classes was found to exceed 90% of all verbal instances. This data was drawn from upwards of 90 hours of classroom observations. Even before this alarming finding was provided to the field, it was generally viewed that expatriate FL teachers often encounter prolonged silence in the classroom and view this silence as a wall (Harumi, 2011a). British FL teachers, for example, negatively interpreted student silence as boredom, disinterest, or laziness (Harumi, 1999). As highlighted, these negative interpretations of silence can be caused by vast differences between an expatriate FL teacher's social, cultural, and educational experiences and expectations (Shachter & Haswell, 2022; Wiltshier & Helgesen, 2018).

When reviewing the literature, it is clear that silence can be perceived as avoidance or resistance (Cutrone, 2009; Glasgow, 2015), so when faced with these negative reactions, expatriate FL teachers may feel a certain burden to motivate students and counter negative energy with positive energy (Gkonou et al., 2020; S. A. Morris, 2022). This could take the form of actively switching the mood of the room (e.g., through a personality or task shift) or even the placement of desks in the classroom. Going into an environment where the expectation is to give energy without the possibility of receiving anything in return (beyond monetary compensation) falls within the category of emotional labor (Hochschild, n.d.).

2.4. FL teacher emotional labor

In the healthcare industry, emotional labor is defined as "the act or skill involved in the caring role, in recognizing the emotions of others and in managing our own" (Riley & Weiss, 2016) While the foundations of this research began with a focus on healthcare workers and service industry professionals (e.g., nurses, doctors, customer service representatives, shop clerks, and flight attendants), there has been more interest in teachers in recent years (Acheson et al., 2016; King et al., 2020). Certain concepts like deep acting (altering one's genuine emotions to fit the desired scenario), surface acting (projecting a mask or façade to fit the desired scenario), and emotional consonance (genuinely aligning a desired emotion to a particular situation) have been established as critical terms to understand the processes in which professionals deal with interactions with customers (or students) (Hochschild, n.d.). One argument by (S. A. Morris, 2022) as to why expatriate FL teachers employ false personas in the classroom is directly related to cultural expectations. "Non-Japanese EFL teachers at all educational levels are tacitly, and sometimes explicitly, expected to be fun and positive with students" (S. A. Morris, 2022).

In a study investigating expatriate FL teacher emotional labor, (King, 2016) interviewed a teacher with nine years of experience teaching in Japan who *still* cited silence (i.e., had not grown accustomed to it) as stalling and rude behavior. The fact that certain Japanese ELLs (a) left their speaking partner in the lurch for long periods of time and (b) they did not use previously taught prompts (e.g., *could you repeat that*, *could you say that again*) was a primary cause of this frustration. The expatriate FL teacher in the (King, 2016) study viewed Japanese ELL speaking as a volitional process (see (Peter D. Macintyre, 2007), and as such, the choice *not to speak* was interpreted as intentional and with purpose. One such purpose could be as simple as apathy toward language learning - another major cause of expatriate FL teacher frustration (S. Morris & King, 2018). When faced with silence or resistance, FL teachers may employ suppressive surfaces acting as a tool to hide their negative reactions to undesirable behavior (Acheson et al., 2016). When individuals act in this way as a means to navigate uncomfortable situations, their true feelings must temporarily be put aside, causing cognitive dissonance.

To define the term, cognitive dissonance relates to specific stress levels, which can occur when individuals purposefully engage in behavior that directly conflicts with one's true belief (Festinger, 1957). Cognitive dissonance is a significant factor leading to burnout and consequent employment drop-off rates in various industries (Acheson et al., 2016; Mercer & Gregersen, 2020; Zapf & Holz,

2007). In the context of this study, expatriate FL teachers in Japan may feel varying degrees of burden to constantly instigate conversations and motivate students to engage in cultural behaviors that are perhaps uncomfortable to Japanese students (e.g., speaking English confidently, being more outgoing, shifts in interpersonal relationships). When an expatriate FL teacher in Japan does not have the energy to overcome resistance to silence, they may perhaps concede to the silence and become silent themselves. This phenomenon can be categorized as emotional contagion (Hatfield et al., 1993) whereby a teacher's behavior can directly correlate to a student's behavior (Moskowitz & Dewaele, 2019). In summary, it is clear that silent incidences can cause various levels of stress to expatriate FL teachers for various internal and external reasons (King, 2016; King & Smith, 2017). To date, however, the extent to which an expatriate FL teacher is affected by specific negative incidences of Japanese ELL silence over the course of a term is unclear.

3. Research Questions

While there have been studies which utilized semi-structured interviews for exploratory studies into the emotional labor involved with language teaching (Benesch, 2018; Miller & Gkonou, 2018), emotion regulation (S. Morris & King, 2018), emotional wellbeing (Talbot & Mercer, 2018), and discussions about the relationship between student silence and negative affect (DJEDID, 2021; King, 2016; King & Smith, 2017), researchers, until recently, have hardly investigated the longitudinal relationship between ELL silence and the emotional impact of these silent incidences on expatriate FL teachers. This is surprising considering that expatriate FL teachers generally have a negative bias towards learner silence (King, 2016; Smith & King, 2018), and incidences of student silence in Japan are considered much higher than in the West (Harumi, 2011b; King, 2013a, 2014; Simon Humphires, n.d.; Wiltshier & Helgesen, 2018) Moreover, FL teacher wellbeing has a direct impact on FL teacher development (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020), so if silence is negatively affecting expatriate FL teachers in Japan, standards of teaching may suffer to certain degrees (e.g., withdrawing from students, modifying trained teaching practices to conserve energy). In the existing literature, however, the effect of learner silence on expatriate FL teachers is underexplored. As a pioneering attempt to respond to the multiple gaps in the field, the current study proposes an autoethnographic case-study design to investigate the following research questions:

Q1. In what patterns or frequency does an expatriate FL teacher experience emotional

reactions to Japanese ELL silence over the course of a term?

Q2. What factors in these incidences of silence govern the nature of FL teacher

stress, and how do these factors emerge over time?

Before outlining the study's methodology, it is important to situate this investigation in a theoretical framework, which includes ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), dynamic systems theory (see Larsen-Freeman & Cameron, 2008), the transactional model of communication (Asai & Barnlund, 1998), and (Spilt et al., 2011b) model of teacher mental representations. Each component will be discussed briefly below.

4. Theoretical Framework

4.1. Ecological Systems Theory

Recent investigations focused on language teacher wellbeing have used Bronfenbrenner's (1979) Ecological Systems Theory as a theoretical framework (e.g., (Hofstadler et al., 2020; Mercer, 2020; Pentón Herrera et al., 2022). According to this theory, certain factors that affect wellbeing can be organized in the following interactive layers: individual, microsystem (e.g., direct relationships), mesosystem (auxiliary relationships), ecosystem (e.g., institutional factors), macrosystem (e.g., societal factors), and chronosystem (i.e., changes over time) (Jin et al., 2021b). FL teachers move through these layers, and the layers, themselves, can interact in complex and dynamic ways. For this investigation, this study will use an adapted and simplified socio-ecological model adapted from (Jin et al., 2021b) and (Michaels, n.d.), whereby the investigation will focus on the individual, microsystem and chronosystem (Fig. 1).
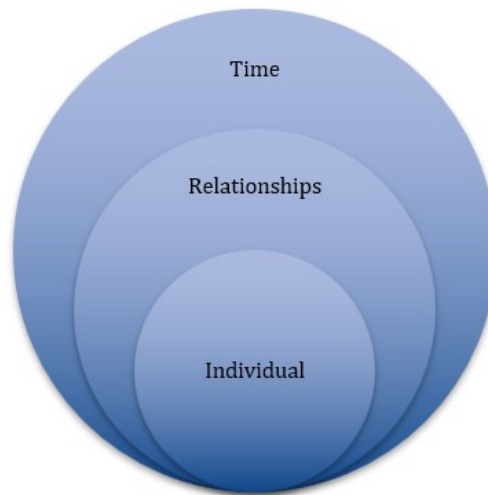
Fig. 1. Simplified Socio-Ecological Model (Shachter)

4.2. Dynamic Systems Theory

Throughout this study, and like other scholars in the field, silence will be investigated through the lens of dynamic systems theory (DST) (Al-Ahmadi & King, 2023; Smith & King, 2018). DST has been established in language learning as a "useful lens" to investigate the emotional effects of silence on teachers (Smith & King, 2018). The core of this theory is that focal events (e.g., silence, emotional reactions to silence) within a complex dynamic system do not occur in a linear order. Instead, attractors influence events - these are factors within an environment that can push or pull individuals toward specific behaviors (e.g., positive engagement, volitional silence). These attractors exist within a wide range of individual, group, institutional, and societal factors. DST conceptualizes how attractors can have a direct influence on attractor states, which (Smith & King, 2018) label "a period of relative stability" (p. 324).

4.3. Transactional Model of Communication

The Transactional Model of Communication (Asai & Barnlund, 1998) is a conceptual framework used to understand the multiple dynamics and factors to consider when analyzing face-to-face interactions in Japanese university language classrooms. Fig. 2 (below) describes the components of the model. When compared to previous models of communication (e.g., transmission, interactional), the main distinguishing feature is the concept of co-creation of meaning. This meaning is influenced by four main contexts: social, physical/psychological, relational, and cultural. It is also influenced by past and future events.
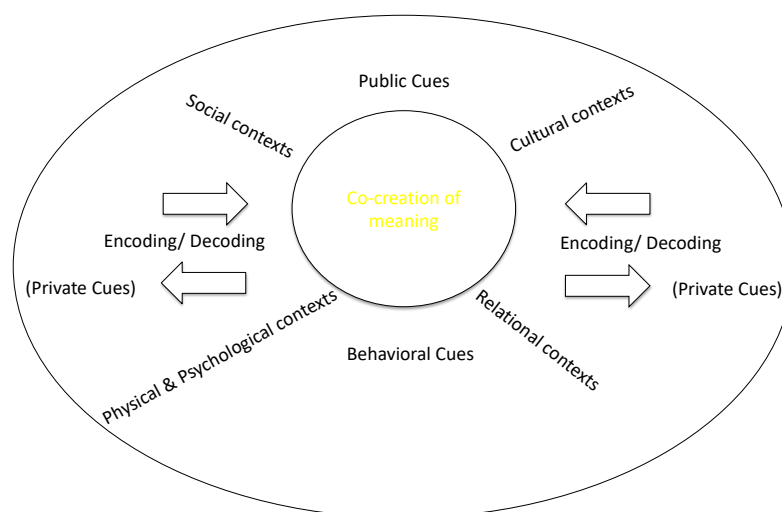

Fig. 2. The Transactional Model of Communication (Asai & Barnlund, 1998) (visuals by Shachter)

4.4. Spilt et al. (2011) - Mental representations of student relationships

Fig. 3 shows a hypothetical model of how teachers, during interactions, make appraisals of student behavior, which impact mental representations of teacher-student relationships, and consequently affect emotions, well-being, and future appraisals (Spilt et al., 2011b). For this study, the researcher will investigate perceptions of student behavior pertaining specifically to interpretations of silence. Because interpretations of silent behavior can vary widely between individuals depending on the context, the (Spilt et al., 2011b) model accommodates this study well in showing how specific interpretations of silence are processed and how these appraisals impact emotional affect.
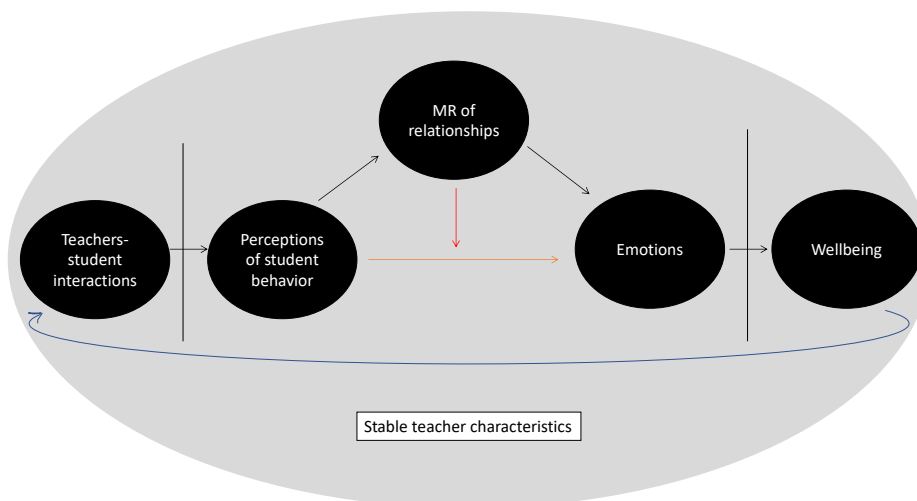

Fig. 3. Mental representations of student relationships (Spilt et al., 2011b)

5. Method

5.1. Autoethnographic Case Study

The approach of this project falls within a social-constructivist worldview, where researchers deeply explore the meaning in people's lives (i.e., where they live and work). In particular, social-constructivist researchers focus on individual interactions, where "the basic generation of meaning is always social" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), p. 8). Open questions are often used as a means to understand participant viewpoints. Within this worldview, researchers visit the context or setting to collect information in order to better understand it personally. Additionally, a social-constructivist researcher will interpret what is discovered; this interpretation is influenced by the researcher's own life and experiences (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

Autoethnography is an approach that has roots in anthropology and sociology, where the researcher examines their own experience in the context of a group's shared patterns of behavior, language, and activities over an extended period of time (e.g., FL teachers over the course of a term) (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Observation notes are frequently used during data collection (Boufoy-Bastick, 2004). This autoethnographic case study will utilize event-based sampling to track and investigate the emotional impact of silence on a FL teacher. To demonstrate trustworthiness, this study employs thick description (Geertz, 1973) and strives to acknowledge bias.

5.2. Data Collection Procedure: Event-based sampling

Used frequently in health and psychological research, experience-sampling methods (ESM) help researchers know more about how people's *real* experiences over time. Unlike laboratory research or longitudinal reports restricted to a specific location or time (e.g., same class every week), experience-sampling methods offer researchers the flexibility of following participants throughout their daily lives. Moreover, unlike an observation where the researcher can impact the participant or environment, experience-sampling methods can provide accurate, nuanced, and unbiased data over time (Silvia & Cotter, 2021).

Event-based sampling is a data collection procedure within the broader category of ESM. With event-based sampling, participants receive a signal from themselves on when to report. Consequently, the event-based sampling approach is practical when researchers are looking to know more about concrete, salient, discrete events. These events have no grey area; they either happened or did not (e.g., smoking a cigarette, or getting angry at your spouse) (Silvia & Cotter, 2021). Event-based sampling can also serve as short auto-interview prompts over time, yielding nuanced and rich qualitative data.

As such, this project will use event-based sampling to learn more about focal events involving emotional reactions to silence over a university term in Japan. While it may be impossible to get at the moment observational data, this method often reveals near the moment observational data. It is essential for the participant to write exactly where they are, what they are doing, what happened, how they are feeling, and if any factors influenced the event. As opposed to retrospective reports, which may be unreliable due to recall bias (Coughlin, 1990), in-the-moment or near-moment observational data is essential when revealing authentic human experience.

In this project, anytime the researcher experiences an emotional reaction to silence, they will make a journal entry. The center of this investigation revolves around focal events in the classroom. However, because this project takes place within a complex dynamic ecological system, the researcher will also report on focal events that occur outside the classroom. Moreover, the researcher will be free to expand upon established/emerging themes, characters, and/or situations as they develop over time.

5.3. Research participant & setting

The researcher is a full-time lecturer of English with over eight years of university-level language teaching experience in Japan. He is an American male in his early 40s with a low-intermediate level of limited-working proficiency in Japanese. The data collection (98 days) took place over the second term at a private school in Japan. The institution is ranked between 151-200 in Japan (exact rankings are not provided after 150). In the language department, there are about 20 full-time expatriate FL teachers from a variety of nationalities. Since first and second-year students in all 20 departments (approximately 3,000 per year) are required to take compulsory English classes, the language department is one of the most active in the school. The majority of students I teach are considered to be at the A2 level according to the European Common Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR). These facts are given to establish that the levels of encountered silence may be more than comparative expatriate foreign FL teachers who teach at higher-level universities and/or teach non-compulsory students.

5.4. Quantitative analysis

At first, as a means to capture a snapshot of patterns and frequency, quantitative data from the event-based sampling data will be identified. This will include (but not be limited to):

- total number of days reported
- on what days reports were made
- total number of incidences reported,
- negative incidences reported,
- positive incidences reported,
- interactional variant (e.g., Teacher-Student, Teacher-Teacher)
- domains (e.g., classroom, hallway)

5.5. Qualitative analysis

Thematic analysis is a powerful qualitative approach to interpreting narrative data, identifying and analyzing meaning by interpreting patterns. (Egerton 1995) recommends categorical aggregation in which data are clustered into several categories or classes and interpreted based on existing theory and researchers' knowledge to uncover the meanings of data obtained from fieldwork. Qualitative data was analyzed by utilizing Cresswell & Cresswell's recommended procedures outlined in Table 1 (below).

Table 1. Data Analysis in Qualitative Research (Creswell & Creswell, 2018)

Raw Data	
1. Organizing and preparing data for analysis	
2. Reading through all the data	
3. Coding the data	
Themes	Descriptions
4. Interrelating themes/ descriptions	
5. Interpreting the meaning of themes/ descriptions	

This analysis will aid in investigating reoccurring themes/characters/situations and perceptions of silence over time. As it is impossible to include all entries in the event-based sampling data, re-occurring themes will be highlighted. From here on, the writing style will change to 1st-person.

6. Findings & Discussion

6.1. Student discomfort with direct teacher assistance around their peers

Data from event-based sampling clearly shows that negative emotional reactions to silence repeatedly occurred when I attempted to provide 1-1 assistance to students who displayed confusion during autonomous tasks. It is also important to highlight that this assistance occurred in front of their peers. Assistance in front of peers is particularly relevant when numerous studies have found that social anxiety occurs in the Japanese language classroom as a direct result of student efforts to not stand out from the class for fears of alienation and/or embarrassment (King & Harumi, 2020). On the first day of term, I wrote the following:

I explained the instructions for the day, which didn't include much. The recorded speaking task was to 'talk about your summer vacation.' Prior to this, I provided the class with an example/ parameter, taught them how to map it out, and then when they were finished writing/planning, gave them the opportunity to record in the empty classroom down the hall. When finished with the recording, they could start their e-learning, which mainly involved gap-fill listening. If they had headphones, they could stay in the main classroom; if not, they could return to the 'recording room.' Most students progressed well enough as I could monitor their progress from my computer (i.e., watching recording submissions via the Moodle interface). Also, I could watch students leave and return to the classroom and see students putting on headphones. At this point, I could also monitor listening e-learning progress from my dashboard. One student looked confused, so I gave him my attention. He interrupted the student (his friend?) behind him, who already had his headphones in. At this point, I left my desk and walked up to him to assist him.

Me: "Do you have a question?" ((in English))

Japanese ELL: Does not respond, looking at the phone

Me: "Do you have headphones?" ((in Japanese))

Japanese ELL: Looks up from phone but does not respond.

Me: "Do you have any questions?" ((in English))

Japanese ELL: Again, looks down at the phone, does not respond.

Me: "Do you have any questions?" ((in Japanese))

Japanese ELL: Waves hand in front of face and says "No."

At that point, I *retreated* to my desk and observed him asking (interrupting) his peer for guidance.

Observations: Students would much rather solve problems by asking their peers. I thought it was my job to assist him, so I gave him some time/energy/attention. The interaction seemed pointless. I

was a little annoyed he continued looking at his phone in the first instance of silence. But I can understand that he was processing (a) what he should do, (b) how he should respond to me, and (c) how he should act in front of his peers. Also, this was the first silent interaction of the term (1st day), so it didn't drag me down too much.

Instead of engaging with me to receive offered assistance, the Japanese ELL used volitional silence as a vehicle to disengage from the interaction or even used silence to create a boundary. Boundary creation is not necessarily new to the literature; in Japanese educational contexts, specifically, one may argue that students are conditioned toward the transmission model of communication where one party transmits and one party receives information (Takanashi, 2010). The above scenario directly contrasted to this (i.e., I directly asked the Japanese for a response). Interestingly, the very nature of the transmission model will provide distance between teachers and students. Possibly because of this conditioning through junior and senior high schools (Glasgow, 2015), students are more comfortable with the distance between themselves and teachers. Moreover, there is also evidence that this boundary is actively protected when Japanese ELLs enter university (Banks, 2016).

(Banks, 2016) found that within the university classroom ecological system, certain Japanese ELLs take the role of gatekeeper between the class (as a whole) and the teacher. This gatekeeper helps not only protect boundaries between teacher/ students (e.g., hierarchal, social) but also provides a safety net to their fellow classmates who want to (a) avoid the potential embarrassment that may occur by answering a question incorrectly and/or (b) inadvertently standing out from one's peers. I experienced this specific behavior described by (Banks, 2016). Often, for example, when asking a Japanese ELL a question during a lesson in front of the class, that individual would first turn to their peers to confirm the correct answer. In this way, the answering student served as the class representative and took time and effort to confirm the appropriate/accurate answer. In this way, the dynamic was automatically shifted from a 1-1 interaction into a 1-class interaction.

In the specific example reported previously, I viewed the gatekeeper as a superfluous actor in the dynamic because I was attempting to *help* a specific person move past confusion (i.e., not surveying the class for knowledge). Regardless of the impetus, though, for the purposes of this study, a negative reaction by me ensued when the gatekeeper (via an undesired diversion in communication) instigated a time lag. Moreover, a negative reaction occurred when I surmised that a confused student prioritized student-student assistance. Indeed, I expressed frustration when this occurred because I felt it was more efficient to ask the teacher directly for clarity. In summary, the Japanese ELL in the reported incident most likely looked to his peer as a utility to avoid direct communication with an expatriate FL teacher to avoid embarrassment related to his confusion. The findings of this study build on Banks (2016) in that the role of the student gatekeeper may be more complex than previously known.

6.2. Undesirable silence associated with establishing or disrupting classroom patterns

Unlike other studies, which found teacher stress to gradually build to an exhaustive level (e.g., (Acheson et al., 2016; Simon Humphries, n.d.), focal events of negative emotional reactions to silence were found to cluster at the beginning and end of the term. The fact that these events were not clustered in the middle of the term suggests that tolerance for silence may have reached a stable level as the students and I gradually came to a mutual understanding regarding accepted behaviors and practices. From a communicative perspective, these findings may suggest that a gradual co-creation of meaning (Barnlund, 1970) was established over time, leading to fewer opportunities for unpleasant reactions to silence as the term progressed. Moreover, when comparing the beginning and end-of-term events, there were stark contextual differences. Considering these differences, it is fair to argue that both the establishment and disruptions in classroom patterns correlate with increased incidences of negative reactions to silence. From a dynamic systems theory perspective, as the term and weeks within the term progressed, and as this co-creation of meaning was solidified, an attractor state of relative stability occurred where both the students and myself made adjustments to adapt to cultural, social, educational, and/or linguistic challenges related to silence.

As highlighted, negative reported reactions to silence did not cluster in the middle of term. However, there were numerous reports the day after I returned from an academic conference. Interestingly, the conference was reported as a highly positive experience, returning to the classroom rejuvenated. Unfortunately, though, my enthusiasm was not met in kind. It is clear that a disruption in established practices occurred where the Japanese ELLs had become accustomed to my personality pre-conference. In one report, I wrote the following:

I attended a conference over the weekend - possibly a context shift - western environment - had to shift to a Western mindset - western communication - academic/casual English. This may have been a factor in a more difficult transition back to class. I was motivated by the conference, which caused me to raise my expectations/ return to what I thought a teacher should do (i.e., hold students accountable - encourage them to speak).

When looking at the infrequency of journal entries in the middle of the term (beyond this report), one can argue that the co-creation of meaning evolved through a series of behavior negotiations - occasions where myself and the Japanese ELLs in my class came to an agreement on how to personally and interpersonally manage uncomfortable dynamics. From the Japanese ELL's perspective, uncomfortable dynamics could include answering directions individually and/or actively communicating more in class. From my perspective, uncomfortable dynamics could include unintended wait times and a perceived resistance to talk (King, 2013b).

6.3. The emergence of stress pertaining to teacher-teacher silence

Even though this investigation was framed in ecological systems theory (i.e., allowing for insights outside the classroom), I indicated that it was surprising that teacher-teacher silence incidents emerged as a source of stress. Before discussing this theme, however, it is essential to reinforce three key concepts relative to social interactive interpretations of silence. Firstly, mental representations of behavior (see (Mercer & Gregersen, 2020) are highly subjective and may differ widely between individuals. Secondly, silence can be unintentional, with no overt meaning (Nakane, 2007). And a final concept that must be highlighted is the established psychological principle of human negativity bias (Baumeister et al., 2001), a term which summarizes how people generally remember negative events with more emotional force than positive ones.

As a consequence, future events (e.g., silence) may be skewed toward past biases and unfairly applied to irrelevant scenarios. Coupled with the fact that silent incidences are also generally viewed with bias (Smith & King, 2018), it is logical to see how certain behaviors can be subjectively misconstrued. Moreover, the event-based sampling data shows two separate incidences of sudden resolution, where silent teacher-teacher reactions were no longer viewed from a negative lens, and past incidences were reframed. However, the stress felt before these resolutions still requires a thorough examination. After reviewing the data, two factors contributed to teacher-teacher stress: emotional labor associated with suppressive surface acting and a desire for teacher-teacher social support.

6.3.1. Suppressive surface acting

The first factor contributing to teacher-teacher stress associated with silence was associated with emotional labor: the practice of suppressive surface acting - a behavior that has been argued to be the most draining of the three emotional labor behaviors (Acheson et al., 2016). With suppressive surface acting, an individual faces a negative situation and uses energy to conceal one's true reactions or feelings (e.g., anger, disgust, sadness). In a study focusing on five FL teachers in a rural US high school, suppressive surface acting was directly associated with direct behaviors (e.g., rude student comments) (Acheson et al., 2016). However, the silence experienced/interpreted in the current study may be better labeled as indirect behavior or unintentional silence. This assertion is made based on the kind of interactions found in the data, which mainly occurred by happenstance (e.g., passing in a hallway) or informally (e.g., encountering someone in a shared workplace). As negative reactions to Japanese ELL silence reached levels of relative stability (detailed previously), the theme of teacher-teacher stress emerged in the data mid-term:

> *It is funny because this journal evolved into social interactions with teachers more than anything. Regarding students, possibly my tolerance is higher/ expectations are lower.*

Whether unintentional or not, though, in the reported interactions (which will not be detailed to protect anonymity), I internalized these repeated silent incidences as negative. Without the confidence that the behaviors were intentional, a state of limbo continued where I felt uncomfortable broaching the issue directly with specific teachers. Furthermore, I conceded that the emotional impact experienced may very well have been one-sided. During these incidences, suppressive surface acting was used to project outwardly that silence was not perceived as a negative effect. Moreover,

throughout the term, a degree of energy was used to process the potential meaning of teacher-teacher silent interactions.

When looking at the weekly patterns drawn for the event-based sampling quantitative data, negative emotional reactions mainly occurred at the beginning or near the beginning of the workweek. This suggests that tolerance for stress associated with silence builds throughout the week. From an emotional labor perspective, it could also be argued that weekend breaks interrupt deep or surface acting practices (i.e., the teacher returns to their true self on the weekends). Considering that the vast majority of positive events around teachers were reported on Saturdays, it is reasonable to argue that when the teacher returned to the work environment (where tolerance for silence was expected), there was an adjustment period to adjust to the role. Compared to other teaching positions, where a 5:2 workday/weekend ratio is typical, I had a 4:3 ratio. This would support that the true self may have solidified over three days, and an abrupt personality adjustment may have been needed at the beginning of the week to match institutional, pedagogical, and/or cultural expectations.

6.3.2. The need for social support

The second main factor that contributed to teacher-teacher stress associated with silence in this study directly relates to my desire for social support in the workplace. In a wide range of studies, social support in the workplace has been found to not only help language teachers manage stress but also correlate with improved student achievement (Sadoughi & Hejazi, 2022). Regarding emotional labor, (Kinman et al., 2011) cited in (Acheson et al., 2016) found that teachers "who reported higher levels of workplace social support tended to report less emotional labor, emotional exhaustion and depersonalization, and more personal accomplishment and job satisfaction" (p. 848). Reported event-based sampling data from this study shows that when teachers did not reciprocate casual greetings, energy was spent on suppressive surface acting. Instead of gaining energy boosts throughout the day, these incidents put a strain on my limited resources needed to manage Japanese ELL silence over a term. Conversely, it is fair to theorize that some expatriate FL teachers may have been looking for social support in the form of casual silence in the form of a respite from talking outside of the classroom.

Before this data collection, I did not consider that (expatriate) FL teachers potentially had different customs in regards to silence; this will need to be explored further... While we all deal with silence in the classroom, I thought we had common ground on casual greetings. Some teachers may remain silent outside the classroom to protect their limited resources. That is, where I am looking for casual talk; they are looking for causal silence.

When reviewing the data, it is clear that the teacher-teacher silent interactions occurred during breaks between classes or when I encountered other teachers in shared workspaces. Perhaps knowing that tolerance for both (a) student silence and (b) cultural differences regarding communication styles between the East and the West was required in this teaching context, I naturally looked for western-style casual greetings when encountering fellow expatriate FL teachers. Looking deeper, it is possible that I was looking for *cultural-specific* casual greetings (e.g., American) and assumed all expatriate FL teachers shared similar views on these practices. Looking back over the data, it is clear that expatriate FL teachers who were reported to produce unwanted silence were from a different country than myself. When casual (possibly region-specific) greetings were not reciprocated, I reported feelings of uncertainty related to the strength of teacher-teacher relationships. This uncertainty is indeed an issue worth exploring, given the drastic reduction of social activities due to COVID-19 (MacIntyre et al., 2019).

When I started working at the institution where data was collected, there was an official off-campus welcome party for new teachers, which provided an opportunity for cohesiveness outside the work environment. The department also organized additional opportunities for expatriate FL teachers to socialize throughout the year. Even though the institution has returned to face-to-face classes and the majority of on-campus student activities have returned, organized off-campus teacher-centered social activities have returned to a different frequency than pre-COVID. Without the opportunities to form relationships and gain background knowledge on each other, expatriate FL teacher-teacher interactions involving silence may be susceptible to strain due to uncertainty.

As highlighted in the data, I acknowledged that even though the interactions were interpreted as negative, it was unclear whether the other expatriate FL teacher involved in a particular interaction did anything wrong. Institutions should consider resuming all pre-COVID social activities that were

established to build group cohesion with expatriate FL teachers. For this study, knowing more about fellow teachers in a specific context may help overcome the negative bias that surrounds silence. Beyond silence, though, strong teacher social networks and support systems have been found to increase self-esteem, job satisfaction, motivation to teach (I S Schonfeld, 2001), correlate with the adoption of positive coping strategies (Shen, 2009) and reduce burnout (Russell et al., 1987), stress (Griffith et al., 1999), depressive symptoms (I S Schonfeld, 2001), and feelings of depersonalization (Greenglass et al., 2007).

6.4. Negativity Bias

Highlighted when discussing the emergence of teacher-teacher stress, negativity bias is also relevant to how expatriate FL teachers interpret student silence or perhaps even how student talk is processed. As previously defined, negativity bias essentially describes how humans are more likely to remember negative events with more clarity - as a result, future events may be negatively influenced (Baumeister et al., 2001). In relation to this study, infrequent positive incidences of student talk did not have nearly the impact as negative incidences of student silence. Over the course of the term, there were entries detailing positive interactions with students. However, these were very short entries, and these did not strongly affect the researcher. Here are a few examples:

- *more students seem to be saying c-u after class / fewer greetings in the beginning*
- *a student said "hi" in the beginning of class - good!*
- *recently, students have said "see you" when leaving class. I've come to view greetings before class as rare, unexpected and nice.*

Considering that undesirable silence proved to have a more pronounced impact on my emotions in this study, expatriate FL teachers in similar contexts should make an effort to balance their perspectives by giving equal attention to positive events in the classroom.

7. Implications and Conclusions

As detailed in the discussion, negative reactions to silence occurred when direct 1-1 assistance was offered in front of a Japanese ELLs' peers. These occurrences aligned with the disruption and establishment of classroom practices. However, As the term progressed, fewer incidences were reported, indicating that a period of relative stability was established through a co-creation of meaning. This meaning most likely was reinforced by established pedagogical principles such as routine creation and repetition (Krashen & Scarcella, 1978; Lynch & Maclean, 2000). Routine creation and repetition help to curb the potential negative influence of linguistic insecurity (by both FL teachers and ELLs) and the discrepancy in communicative model preferences (i.e., Japanese ELLs have been conditioned to transmission). It also could be argued that the Japanese ELLs in this study may have become more accustomed to the tenets of communicative language teaching pedagogy.

Regarding communicative language teaching (CLT) pedagogy, pair checks are often used to provide ELLs with more opportunities to speak and give FL teachers a chance to survey the class casually. While changes in interpersonal dynamics may be a cause for hesitation in the beginning of term due to uneasiness related to social anxiety (King, 2014; King & Smith, 2017; Maher, 2021; Shachter, 2018), utilizing pair checks can also be an effective tool to boost group cohesion and avoid embarrassment related to uncertainty. From a FL teacher's perspective, pair checks serve as a precursor to group checks in CLT. This is especially useful because when it is time to do a class check, FL teachers will have ascertained which students know and do not know the answer. Choosing students who definitely know the answer is a practical way to avoid uncomfortable silence due to a lack of confidence or misunderstanding.

Interestingly, though, after reviewing the event-based sampling data, it is evident that pair checks were not utilized when detailed task instructions were given. To avoid undesirable silence after giving detailed instructions, FL teachers should consider using pair checks. This could start with, Explain/repeat to your partner what the teacher just said (in L1 and/or L2). After surveying the pairs, the FL teacher could nominate a student who clearly understood the instructions to repeat the directions to the class again. Moreover, if individual students still need assistance, the FL teacher could nominate a gatekeeper or a few gatekeepers to assist these students. Observing the pair check would have identified these gatekeepers. From this study's findings, it is clear that Japanese ELLs

prefer 1-1 assistance from their peers, so it is recommended to support this predisposition actively. FL teachers in other teaching contexts may also find this strategy advantageous.

With a successful pair check and nominated gatekeepers, FL teachers may feel a sense of accomplishment that (a) undesirable silence is avoided and (b) ELLs are able to eventually navigate task completion. "Eventually" may be the keyword, as students may need more time during this process. Considering that undesirable silence and consequent negative emotional affect occurred in this study when I attempted to assist individual students expeditiously, the patience required in tolerating this dynamic may be worth it. Evidence was also given, however, that a boost in my motivation to teach outside the classroom (e.g., conference) did not translate to success in the classroom mid-term. This suggests that perhaps I made compromises/ sacrifices in regards to pedagogy (i.e., how often Japanese ELLs were instructed/required to speak) or interpersonal relations (e.g., use of distance or apathy as a coping method).

In one of the reported incidents, for example, I remarked that I "retreated" from the situation. This highlights how FL teachers can spiral into guilt associated with perceived inefficacy (Simon Humphires, n.d.). My negative reactions to silence at the beginning of the term may have contributed to an attractor state whereby my expectations regarding student talk time were adjusted - leading to feelings of inadequacy (i.e., a FL teacher's job is to encourage talk). From the perspective of this study's findings, the coping methods used to deal with undesirable classroom silence (e.g., compromising pedagogical expectations) may have affected my teacher identity. I should not have accepted the attractive state of relative stability and pushed the students to speak more. Teachers should use pattern interrupts occasionally as a device to improve motivation (Horvath, 2019). As previously highlighted, though, assertive behavior in a Japanese context can backfire and produce more silence. While the aims of this investigation did not relate to the potential links between coping and teacher identity, future studies may consider these findings as a launching point for research.

Before concluding this study, it is essential to state that while an autoethnographic investigation can produce rich, detailed, and nuanced data, findings from this study may or not apply to other contexts. Future researchers may find value in expanding ethnographic research by recruiting FL teachers from a variety of different backgrounds and experiences. Data from each case study may provide a different perspective, and using these perspectives as a group, a cross-case analysis may prove helpful in identifying similar and contrasting themes. Moreover, future case studies and cross-case analyses could be compared to the findings of this study as a means to support or argue against these findings. Future studies may also investigate the degree to which silence affects FL teachers outside of the teaching context (e.g., in society, personal life).

In conclusion, evidence drawn from this autoethnographic event-based sampling study suggests that while tolerance towards student silence stabilizes to a degree, the daily in-class stress caused by differences in social, educational, and cultural factors may have a direct impact on how expatriate FL teachers appraise silent incidences outside the classroom. Additionally, the coping methods used to deal with undesirable silence (in and outside of the classroom) may negatively impact teacher identity and well-being. To curb negative appraisals of teacher-teacher incidences of silence, it is suggested that departments reinstate teacher welcome parties and other social activities that existed pre-COVID. To avoid undesirable silence during the establishment and disruption of classroom patterns, it is recommended to use pair checks and nominate student gatekeepers as a means to confirm class comprehension. Finally, it is also important to remember that negativity bias may skew the perception and interpretation of silent incidents.

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Declarations

Conflict of interest	:	The author declares no conflict of interest.
Ethics Declaration	:	I as author acknowledge that this work has been written based on ethical research that conforms with the regulations of my university and that I have obtained the permission from the relevant institute when collecting data. I support *Journal of Silence Studies in Education (JSSE)* in maintaining high standards of personal conduct, practicing honesty in all professional practices and endeavors.
Additional information	:	No additional information is available for this paper.

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