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Beyond 'safe-talk': Institutionalization and agency in China's English language education

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Beyond 'safe-talk': institutionalization and agency in China's English language education

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This paper will discuss some of the pitfalls of the notion of "safe-talk" (Chick 1996), a fruitful analytical concept that has been widely used in classroom discourse studies to link chorus-like repetition sequences with certain institutional and social processes related to either post-colonialism or migration. The discussion will draw on a sociolinguistic ethnography carried out in three urban schools that were involved in the implementation of the reforms aimed at modernizing education in contemporary China. By going beyond dichotomized approaches between those who are interested in capturing institutional processes of social reproduction and those who prefer to focus on individual actions and choices in classroom practices, this article reflects on the pertinence of the representation of such chorus-like repetition sequences as a discursive space in which certain social identities are produced, attributed value, circulated and contested according to institutional logic and in view of the different interests at stake. This representation provides a more integrative perspective for the study of relations between agency and ideology in the Chinese institutional context.
Keywords: safe-talk, classroom interaction, modernization, institutionalization, social agency, sociolinguistic ethnography, Chinese education, English language education.

1. Introduction

Since the notion of 'safe-talk' was first used by Chick (1996) to describe the rhythmically coordinated chorusing prompts and responses in which students and teachers collude to preserve their dignity by hiding the fact that no learning is taking place, this analytical label has been particularly fruitful in sociolinguistic studies of classroom interaction. Thus, a multitude of researchers across language disciplines have applied the notion to a wide range of national contexts, investigating the links between this activity arrangement in classrooms and issues of power, social inequality and domination in the framework of specific socio-political and economic conditions (see Arthur 1996, Bunyi 2001, Hornberger & Chick 2001, Ndayipfukamiye 2001, Annamalai 2005, Rubdy 2005, Martin 2005, Weber 2008, Ngwaru & Opoku-Amankwa 2010; for Botswana, Kenya, Peru, Burundi, India, Singapore, Malaysia, Ghana/Zimbabwe and Luxembourg, respectively).

However, this paper focuses on the extent to which the above analytical label may contribute to obscuring relevant issues. On the one hand, the use of such a category can lead to the imposition of pre-given models of communication that, while undermining individual actions, give prominence to ideal participation frameworks in which all participants (teachers and students) share common goals. On the other hand, the careless

application of the notion of 'safe-talk' to classroom discourse may also conceal processes of institutionalization of choral practices, in connection with wider official discourses.

Therefore, the appropriateness of the notion of 'safe-talk' is examined in this paper by drawing on an ethnographic and sociolinguistic study carried out in 2006 in three "experimental schools" (实验学校) in China, in which such chorus-like forms of participation were found to constitute a discursive space where inter-personal, institutional and socio-political interests were all at stake (Pérez-Milans 2009). In particular, this study is underpinned by the framework of sociolinguistic ethnography developed by Martín-Rojo (2010) and Heller (2002, 2011). This perspective enables a close analysis to be made of the links between local on-going interactional practices and the wider social processes which they (re)produce, naturalize, resist and/or transform.

Regarding the study of local practices, this research framework follows the methodological tradition of Interactional Sociolinguistics, which focuses on fine-grained discourse analysis with the aim of exploring how certain language patterns that are traditionally linked to a particular sociolinguistic class structure in the field of macro/quantitative sociolinguistics studies can be displayed in rather unexpected, creative and heterodox ways by certain participants in particular situations (see Gumperz 1982; Roberts et al. 1992; Rampton 1995). This methodological commitment is intended to avoid some of the risks of other approaches to discourse, which have underestimated local complexities in the on-going interactional activity by emphasizing a priori stable macro-societal processes which are taken for granted and projected onto the discourse as "background facts" (see Blommaert & Bulcaen 2000; Rampton 2001).

As for the links between such local practices and wider social processes of change, this study takes into account the work of social scientists who have sought to overcome the representations of social structures as entities distinct from everyday practices (see Cicourel 1978, Collins 1981, Giddens 1982, Mehan 1987). In this sense, special attention is paid to the way everyday activity is organized (and disorganized) in institutional settings where local interactions and social positioning are constrained by activity arrangements that are ritualized according to particular "logics of practice" (Bourdieu and Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1982), in connection with national and international socio-political/economic processes of change.

These are the issues addressed and analysed in this paper. I shall begin by introducing a more detailed contextualization of the emergence and use of the notion of 'safe-talk', highlighting its contributions but also pointing out the potential dangers of its careless transportation to different contexts and research traditions (Section 2). After that, I present data analysis arising from the research carried out in the three Chinese experimental schools. Thus, chorus-like practices are examined in order to reflect upon the suitability of the analytical category of 'safe-talk' in the context of this study (Section 3). Finally, the implications of the analysis will be discussed, also considering other socio-linguistic notions, such as "language ritualization" (Section 4).

2. 'Safe-talk' revisited

In recent years, attempts have been made to revisit the notion of 'safe-talk' in a broader way, so that it can be adjusted to incorporate new meanings and connotations to the study of classroom discourse in different contexts (see Weber 2008). In this section, I provide a more detailed revision of the term, contextualizing it within its own historical and disciplinary tradition in order to highlight some of its contributions and limitations. In this respect, 'safe-talk' should be resituated, in the context of the linguistic, social and discursive turns that took place during the second half of the 20th century in the fields of anthropology, linguistics and sociology. In particular, the category of 'safe-talk' is framed within the shift introduced by these turns in studies of classroom discourse, from traditional pedagogical concerns about designing efficient teaching strategies to the sociolinguistic analysis of the links between everyday activity in classrooms and wider socio-cultural processes beyond the classroom walls.

The introduction to the book in which Chick's study first appeared (1996) frames the book's whole contribution within Street's (1984) de-construction of the hegemonic institutional representation of literacy as an autonomous model detached from cultural and social embedding. In other words, its contribution is framed within the differentiation between 'autonomous' and 'ideological' attitudes to the role of literacy in society, the latter being those attitudes that view the social interests underlying the educational institutionalization of literacy as a set of technical/cognitive abilities disconnected from the

situated context and socio-economic conditions of production. The Introduction to Chick's book puts it this way:

> "there is little justification for adopting an autonomous approach when we look at (…) education (…) the central argument of this book is that an alternative –ideological- approach is required when we look at what is going on in language classrooms at any level, in any type of educational institution. The purpose of this book is, then, to explore the proposition that behaviour in the classroom can be explained or interpreted with reference to the society outside the classroom" (Coleman 1996: 9).

In this context, the label of 'safe-talk' was used by Chick to categorize rhythmically coordinated choral practices found in South African KwaZulu schools; these were linked with specific institutional and ideological processes previously described by Collins (1987) and MacDermott & Tylbor (1987). These previous studies had shown that some institutional procedures implemented in the United States during the 1980s to group students according to their ability (low-ability / high-ability) were resulting in socialization practices of collusion between students and teachers within the low-ability groups. According to the authors, these students and teachers were engaging in interactional face-saving, in which the primary goal was more to make the students' illiteracy not noticeable than to achieve any other academic purpose. While enabling teachers to resolve immediate tensions in local practices and to preserve students' social faces, these practices contributed in the long term to a systematic exclusion of minority students from opportunities to learn and practice the forms of legitimated literacy discourse.

In the light of these previous insights, the analytical category of 'safe-talk' in Chick's sociolinguistic study was thus oriented toward pointing out that the arrangement of classroom activity around such choral participation structures, rather than being just a KwaZulu cultural style of participation transported into the classroom, was an interactional activity performed by students and teachers as a consequence of the segregationist (apartheid) system under which all schools had to teach using English as a medium of instruction even though this (colonial) language was not spoken by the local black communities in their everyday life. This interactional work, which helped those involved to construct the fiction that classroom activities were maintained, despite the lack of understanding of the medium of instruction, therefore reinforced the social inequalities of the apartheid system:

> "Following McDermott and Tylbor (1987) I see the teacher and [the] students as colluding in preserving their dignity by hiding the fact that little or no learning is taking place. While serving the short-term interests of teachers and students, such strategies, I suggest, contributed to the widely documented high failure rate in black education in apartheid South Africa, and made teachers and students resistant to educational innovation. The strategies thus served to reinforce and reproduce the inequalities between the various population groups which characterised apartheid society" (Chick 1996: 24).

This observation was supported by a fine-grained analysis of classroom recordings and transcriptions. Chick based his interpretations with reference both to the analytical method of interactional sociolinguistics (Gumperz 1982), which accesses the interpretative or inferential processes of participants by closely examining video/audio recordings and by eliciting interpretations from the participants about progressively finer details of the discourse, and to the researcher's interest in understanding the nature of social order in education through the discovery of patterns of interaction in classroom daily life (Sinclair & Coulthard 1975, Mehan 1979). In particular, Chick focused on the management of certain verbal and non verbal patterns of participation as contextualization cues; that is, as discourse conventions that signal choral participation frameworks by allowing participants to know the required interactional rules and frames of interpretation in the course of the action. On the basis of such analysis, he then concluded that such choral repetitions served a mainly social function at the expense of an academic one.

This analysis paid particular attention to two main cues, the use of a rising tone and the use of a set of yes/no questions, provided by the teachers in order to prompt choral responses in classroom activity (as well as individual responses in a sequence). While these two cues could have served the academic function of either reinforcing certain key information items (by helping the students to memorize technical terms) or allowing the teacher to access the level of the students' understanding (by helping the teacher to know whether or not to recycle explanations at a lower level of abstraction), respectively, Chick's analysis revealed that this was not the case. In fact, they were used either to ask students to chorus information available to them before the lesson (rather than the name of the items that they had learnt about in the lesson) or to signal display questions whose choral responses were without exception 'yes' (therefore having as their only function that of signalling participation, rather than open questions which signal level of understanding):

> "The social function of chorusing became even more clearly evident when I examined the lesson as a whole. I discovered that the students are required, in response to both kinds of cues, to provide mainly confirmative one- or two-word responses, or responses which repeat information on the board or information which has been recycled again and again by [the teacher]. This suggests that chorusing gives the students opportunities to participate in ways that reduce the possibility of the loss of face associated with providing incorrect responses to teacher elicitations, or not being able to provide responses at all" (Chick 1996: 29).

In this regard, Chick's contribution to sociolinguistic studies is clear. Although with some difficulties, given the lack of triangulation between interactional data and other discursive data obtained from interviews and policy documents in the field, he provided an account of how to conduct a detailed analysis of classroom discourse in a way that allows the researcher to frame it in the context of institutional constraints that make sense in situated historical, socio-political and economic conditions. His study has been widely applied in classroom discourse studies around the world to link choral participation with institutional processes of the reproduction and naturalization of social inequalities in the context of multilingual societies transformed by either post-colonialism or migration (see references in Introduction).

Nonetheless, it should be noted that these other studies do not always base their interpretations on the same detailed level of interactional analysis as does Chick, and on many occasions this results in careless transportation of the category of 'safe-talk' without considering the fact that certain choral participation arrangements might not fulfil all the interactional conditions that characterize 'safe-talk' practices. As Chick showed in an attempt to characterize his data in a different way to that of previous classroom discourse studies that had already described such choral repetition practices in Europe and the USA (as in Sinclair & Coulthard 1975, and Mehan 1979, respectively), what makes these choral repetitions function as 'safe-talk' practices is the fact that they are based on social function and not academic function. This view needs to be verified by a systematic analysis of the interactional conventions on which participants draw in the course of on-going actions. In this sense, a careless transportation of the category often leads to interpretations where 'safe-talk' is assigned to the form rather than to the situated function of the interactional structures of choral participation.

Apart from these methodological problems, there are other ontological concerns that warn us about some of the risks of using the notion of 'safe-talk'. In particular, a misunderstanding of the situated function of these interactional structures of choral participation can impede the study of local agency and institutional processes. In fact, I will show that on the basis of the data compiled in the three Chinese experimental schools studied, the categorization of choral repetition practices as 'safe-talk' may conceal interesting discursive phenomena concerned with social agency and institutional legitimization. These phenomena are illustrated in the following section.

3. Modernization and English language education in Chinese experimental schools

3.1. The site, the data, and the social categories

The three schools studied in China (Pérez-Milans 2009) cover different educational levels (one primary school, one secondary education school, and one school that included all pre-university educational levels) and were located within distinct socio-economic local contexts across two different cities (two of the schools are in Hangzhou city centre and one is in the suburbs of Wenzhou city) in Zhejiang province. Their material resources vary greatly, depending on local conditions, even though all of them are part of the public educational system of the People's Republic of China. However, these three schools were found to share an institutional category that places them in a key social position within the system; they are institutionally categorized as "experimental schools" (实验学校), which means that, before all other state schools in China, they must implement the educational reforms of modernization arising from the national policies, in the contemporary context of the Chinese Communist Party's call for a "Chinese modernization" (中国现代化).

The following extract is taken from the policy document of one of these three schools and illustrates the social responsibility assigned to them as a consequence of their institutional categorization as "experimental" within the Chinese educational system:

Extract 1. "The mission that we shoulder"

我们原有办学基础不尽如人意，师资队伍整体水平还有得进一步提高，我们的办学设施离现代化标志性实验学校的要求还相差甚远，未来三年更是教育不断创新的发展时期。

所有这一些，我们深感任务艰巨。物竞天择，适者生存，教育作为一种市场，无可厚非地进入到这一无私的空间之中。我们在制订这个三年计划的时候，在看到成绩的同时，更应该清醒地认识到我们面临的形势，我们肩负的使命，我们承担的责任。

Our school baseline is not satisfactory; the general level of the teaching staff has still to improve, and school facilities are still far from the requirements of the experimental schools that are the reference for modernization. The next three years are a developmental period aimed at achieving greater innovation. In this respect, our task is a very demanding one. Natural selection, the survival of the strongest and the adjustment of education to the marketplace must form part of this selfless space. Now is the time to formulate the three-year plan, to consider the results, to acknowledge more clearly the situation that we face, the mission we must shoulder, and the duty that we assume.

{Institutional document, page 2}

The research questions that guided the process of data collection were thus oriented toward exploring the meaning of modernization in the everyday life of these schools and, in particular, in English language classrooms (as a space represented in official discourse as a key factor in China's modernization[2]). Processes of social categorization were analyzed by attempting to answer the following questions: what counts as a "good experimental school" in everyday discursive practices? Who is considered as a "good", "normal" or "legitimate" participant in everyday activities? What forms of participation are constructed as legitimate/non-legitimate by participants in everyday activity in off-classroom spaces as well as in English language classrooms? How do students position themselves in this space?

The fieldwork in the three experimental schools lasted about 6 months, and involved observation of their everyday activities both in and out of the classroom spaces, from Monday to Saturday every week (from 7.00 am to 4.30 pm). This resulted in a data-corpus that includes field-notes [960 pages]; video/audio recordings of the practices out of the classrooms [19 hours] and in $6^{th}/8^{th}$ grade English language classrooms [52 classes of 45 minutes each]; interviews with all school members (heads of the schools, teachers and students) [9 hours]; questionnaires to teachers [6] and students [30]; email-communications [12]; institutional documents [3]; the English language curriculum for experimental schools [1]; pictures and samples of institutional spaces, objects, panels and posters to which everyday activity was oriented [185]; schools' web-pages [3]; and English language textbooks [3], workbooks [4] and complementary pedagogical resources used in the English language classrooms studied [98].

From all these data there emerged a broad picture which reflected considerable complexity in the construction of social categories. Regarding the "good school", the ethnographic exploration of how schools organized their everyday activities showed that the social construction of what counted as such is mainly concerned with the educational values of academic excellence (i.e. good results obtained by students in the national examinations organized for each curricular subject at the end of every educational level), competitiveness (i.e. a good position in the official rankings of the experimental schools at municipal, provincial and national level, which depends on the kind of external activities reported by them), and collectivist performance (i.e. the institutionalization of a set of standardized exercises with respect to physical and patriotic activities, involving synchronized postures and body movements, performed by all students in each school; these exercises are graded and the results incorporated into the students' educational records under the category of "moral education" [德育]).

However, tensions and dilemmas regarding the implementation of the above principles were found to vary among the schools studied, depending on specific local conditions. This is the consequence of an institutional system that pushes schools to adjust to curricular centralization while also obliging them to address progressive local economic liberalization. Thus, each school stressed the above values in different degrees, according to the resources available to them and to their local communities; that is, they ended up by emphasizing these values in different ways depending on their potential for acquiring students (clients) and, therefore, obtaining higher educational fees and school budget. All these differences impacted on the material and symbolic organization of everyday activity, on the teachers' and students' concerns and complaints, and even on the participation that was required of the researcher (see Pérez-Milans, 2012, for a detailed ethnographic description of different dilemmas regarding the fulfilling of the national demands, as deduced from interviews, practices, and policy documents in the three schools).

As regards the social category of the "good student", the analysis of the practices concerning the above mentioned "moral education", in which the school members gather to coordinate their participation according to pre-established norms and with respect to physical and patriotic activities, showed there to be an interactional legitimization of collectivist synchrony and responsibility. Apart from everyday activity in each curricular

subject, there were specific outside-classroom symbolic spaces in the schools which played an important institutional role. All community members of each school (heads of the schools, teachers and students) gathered in these spaces, once a day, to engage in these activities displaying different statuses of participation (animators of collectively synchronized body movements and supervisors in charge of evaluating the animators' performances). These different statuses were distributed in shifts throughout the academic year so that everyone had the opportunity to be both evaluator and evaluated.

The complementing of academic achievements and collectivist participation, related to moral education as a core part of the students' evaluation, was discursively represented by the schools' principals as a specific Chinese educational response to the need for modernization that is grounded both in Communist laws for modernization and in Chinese cultural traditions, seeking to counterbalance the individualistic moral influences experienced as a result of openness to the West. Extract 2 corresponds to an interview with one of the school principals, and it is very representative of this kind of discourse:

Extract 2. "You are now facing in the West some problems"

Miguel: what is your opinion about the current situation of Chinese education?

Li: we have now too much pressure on teachers / students and school principals in China, and the one-child policy is one of the reasons // parents want the best for their children // the new context of internationalization and the new technologies such as Internet are making children receive many inputs even though they are still immature // the west is open but the east was closed before // Spain is a developed country and this is why the birthrate there is already low / but here in China not yet because China is still a developing country // and this is why we are facing now many challenges in education (…) you are now facing in the west some problems concerning student behaviour / right? / this is why we are trying here to put the emphasis on character education / that is / not just good psychical education but also moral and physical in order to fulfil Chinese parents' expectations about education

{Interview with the head of one of the schools. Field notes. Notebook No. 4, page 18}

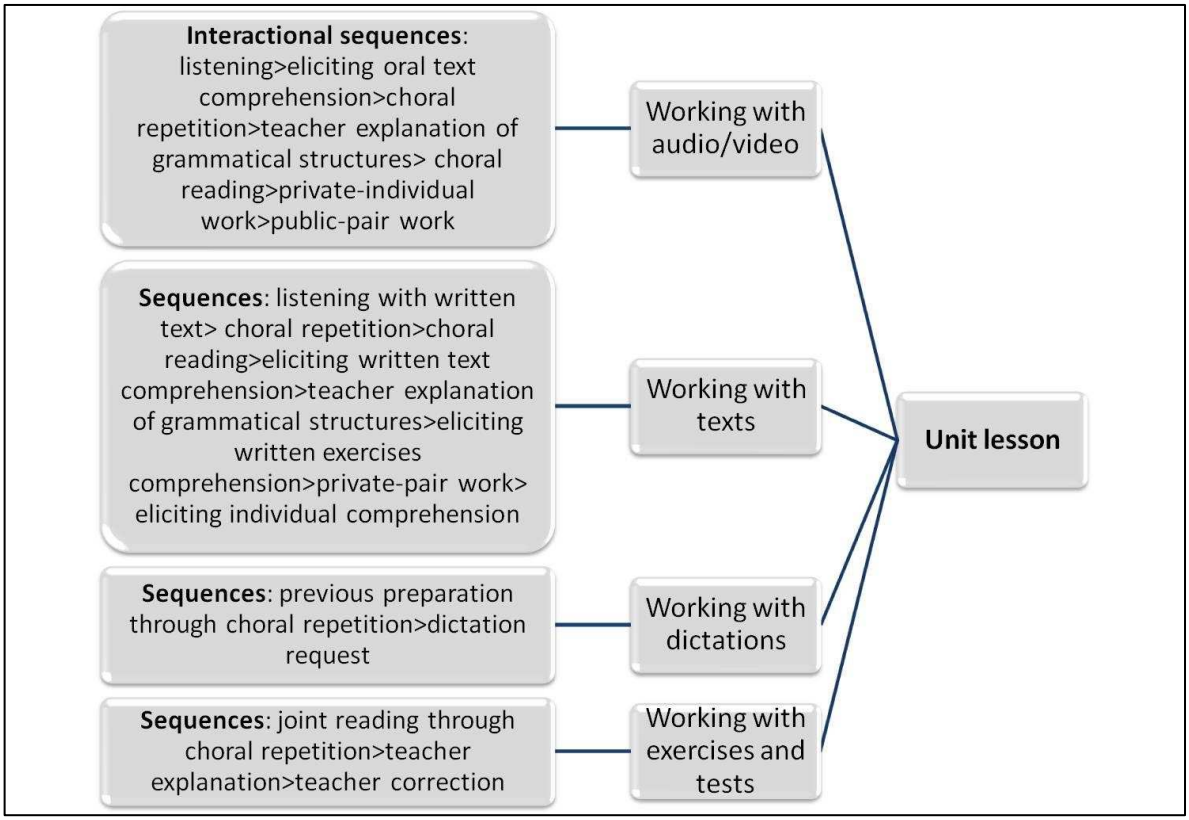
Nevertheless, the social identities revealed by the participants in the course of these collectivist practices were more varied and contradictory than at first sight. Thus, the students tended to position themselves adopting attitudes and identities that are not necessarily aligned with the institutionally legitimated ones. These aspects have been analyzed in previous publications (see Pérez-Milans 2011, for a detailed interactional

analysis of students' positioning in collectivist practices out of the classroom). In the next section, I examine these processes, with specific reference to the English language classrooms, in which choral practices were constituted as a key discursive space that is framed within this ethnographic context.

3.2. Institutionalization and agency in English language classrooms

This study of the innovation reforms being experimentally implemented in English language education was conducted by analyzing the interactional organization of the classroom activity (in the 6th and 8th grades) as well as the official discourse regarding the curriculum. The systematization of the recurrent sequential forms of participation by means of which the participants coordinated their social actions in the different educational activities, for each lesson unit, constitutes a general picture that is illustrated in Figure 1. Among these recurrent interactional sequences, choral repetition occupied an important part of everyday activity. In fact, this form of participation takes up almost all the classroom time, particularly during the sessions at the beginning and in the middle of each lesson unit (with each lesson unit being comprised of 6 sessions, approximately). Extract 3 is taken from one of these sessions in the 6th grade class in which the participants were working on the unit of "hobbies" (see transcript conventions in Appendix1):

Figure 1. Recurrent sequential forms of participation in each unit lesson



Extract 3. "What is Alice's hobby?"

[Video]: (…) *I like sport / but she likes art // we look the same / but we don't like the same things // tell me something about you / what's your hobby? your new pen* pal / Alice

{some participants talk while the video is playing}

Linda: ok / so first / first question is where &

& {the video keeps playing. Linda stops it}

Linda: WHEERE- where in- where does Alice live? / 她住在哪里？/ where does Alice live? / does- is Alice live in China?
{Translation of Chinese: where does she live?}

Students: NOO

Linda: Alice lives in ↑

Students: AUSTRALIAA

Linda: very good / so- ah / Alice is from Australia / so she lives iin / Australia / 澳大利亚 / ready / āustrāliā
{Translation of Chinese: Australia}

Students: ĀUSTRĀLIĀ

Linda: āustrālia

Students: ĀUSTRĀLIĀ

Linda: and what is Alice's hobby? / what is Alice's hobby? {she plays the video} // let's listen again // (now listen)º

[Video]: to Luiyun at penpal dot com / from Alice at penpal dot com

Linda: so/ this is e-mail ee address / 它是一个 e-mail 地址 // to 表示是你要发送给谁的 / ready? / tō Liūyūn

{Translation of Chinese: this is an email address // to means the person you want to send to}

Students: TŌ LIŪYŪN

Linda: āt pēnpāl dōt cōm

Students: ĀT PĒNPĀL DŌT CŌM

Linda: 这个点读作 dot / 连起来/ tō Liūyūn āt pēnpāl dōt cōm

{Translation of Chinese: this symbol is read as dot / all together}

Students: TŌ LIŪYŪN ĀT PĒNPĀL DŌT CŌM

Linda: frōm Ālīcē at pēnpāl dōt cōm

Students: FRŌM ĀLĪCĒ AT PĒNPĀL DŌT CŌM

Linda: yes / Alice 写给 Liuyun 的// 好我们来看第一句

{Translation of Chinese: Alice writes to Liuyun // ok let's have a look at the first sentence}

[Video]: dear Liuyun

Some students: DEAR LIUYUN

[Video]: (( )) a new penpal

Some Students: A NEW PENPAL

[Video]: (()) Australia

Linda: ok / ready/ dēār liūyūn

Students: DĒĀR LIŪYŪN

Linda: ī'm hāppy tō hāve ā nēw pēn pāl

Students: Ī'M HĀPPY TŌ HĀVE Ā NĒW PĒN PĀL

Linda: Alice is very happy / because she has a new pen pal/ her new pen pal is / Liuyun/ so she is very happy / ready? / ī'm hāppy tō hāve ā nēw pēn pāl

Students: Ī'M HĀPPY TŌ HĀVE Ā NĒW PĒN PĀL

Linda: ok / 来/ {points to Xianlin} Xianlin / (()) / ī'm hāppy tō hāve ā nēw pēn pāl

{Translation of Chinese: go}

Xianlin: {stands up} ī'm hāppy tō hāve ā nēw pēn pāl

Linda: good↓ / next ↓

{Xianlin sits down}

Yihua: {stands up} ī'm hāppy tō hāve ā nēw pēn pāl

Linda: good ↓

{Yihua sits down}

Daqiang: {stands up} ī'm hāppy tō hāve ā nēw pēn pāl

Linda: good ↓

{Daqiang sits down}

Weiwei: {stands up} ī'm hāppy tō hāve ā nēw pēn pāl

Linda: good ↓

{Weiwei sits down}

Hongling: {stands up} ī'm hāppy tō hāve ā nēw pēn pāl

Linda: good ↓

{Hongling sits down}

Weihan: {stands up} ī'm hāppy tō hāve ā nēw pēn pāl

Linda: very good/ {Weihan sits down} the second (()) / ī līve īn Āustrāliā

Students: Ī LĪVE ĪN ĀUSTRĀLIĀ

Linda: {pointing to herself} ī līve īn Āustrāliā

70 **Students**: Ī LĪVE ĪN ĀUSTRĀLIĀ
71 **Linda**: so Alice she lives inn Australia/ next //{plays the video}
72 [Video]: I like swimming/ diving and riding my bike
73 **Linda**: {stops the video} I liike [{making gestures} swīmmīng/ dīvīng/ and rīdīng my
74 bīke]
75 **Students**: [SWĪMMĪNG/ DĪVĪNG/ AND RĪDĪNG MY BĪKE]
76 **Linda**: yes/ so Alice's hobby iss / Alice's hobby ISS↑ [swīmmīng/ dīvīng/ and rīdīng]
77 **Students**: [SWĪMMĪNG/ DĪVĪNG/ AND RĪDĪNG MY]
78 **Linda**: HEER [bike]
79 **Students**: [BĪKE]
80 **Linda**: rīdīng↑hēr bike]
81 **Students**: [HĒR BĪKE]
82 **Linda**: yes / not riding my bike// not your bike/ her bike// riding her bike/ now/ 那我
83 们读的(())这个句(()) // ready? / ī līke swīmmīng/ dīving and rīdīng my bīke
84 {Translation of Chinese: then let's read (()) this sentence (())}
85 **Students**: Ī LĪKE SWĪMMĪNG / DĪVING AND RĪDĪNG MY BĪKE

{Recording code: 7v_Zh_P24112006I}

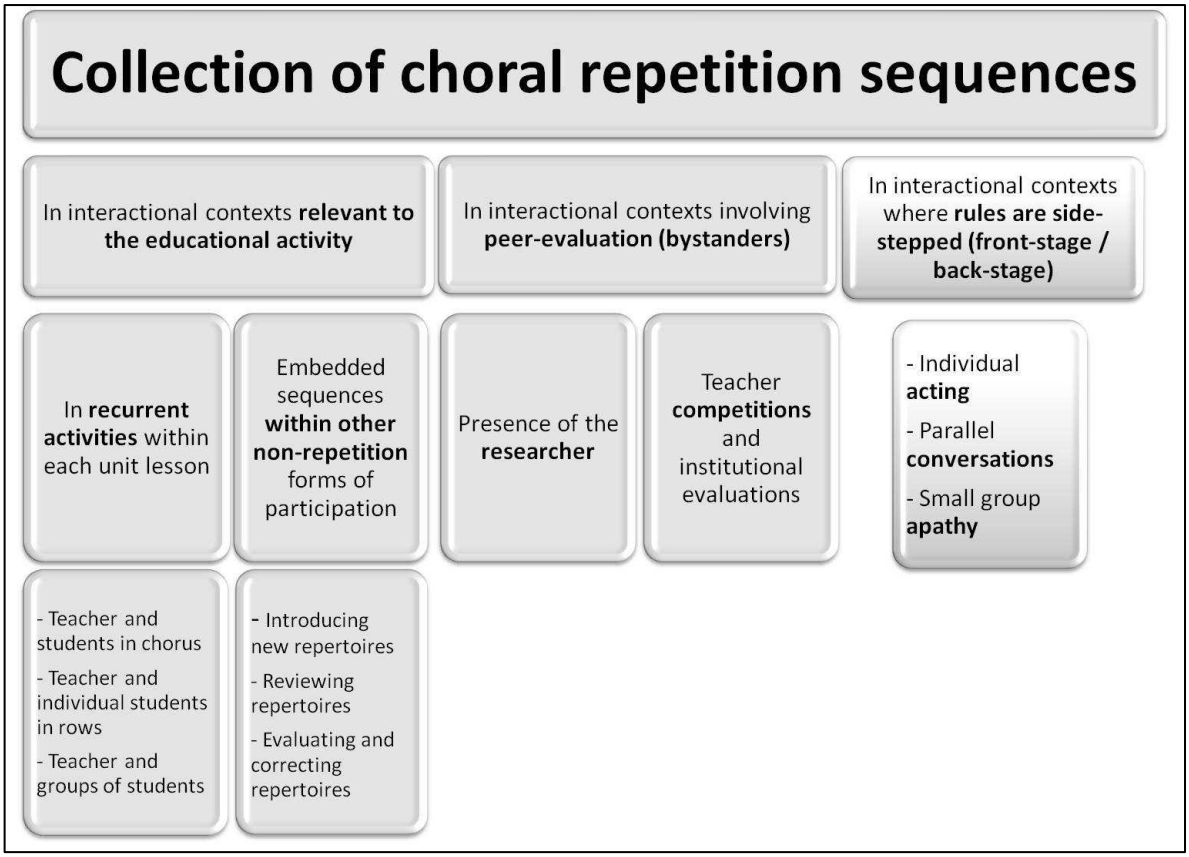
As shown by the example of classroom interaction above, activity is built up according to a participation framework in which the legitimate participant status of the students is oriented to the choral animation of repertoires of words, grammatical structures and speech acts around hypothetical interactions (email communication) illustrated by the authorized teaching materials (video player). In fact, the teacher arranges the activity by managing certain verbal resources that function in the interaction as contextualization cues of this kind of framework, as it is the case for code-switching (Chinese language is used for the activity management [lines 7, 13, 22, 29, 34, 49, 82] while English is used as the target language for the repetitions [lines 14-18, 23-34, 42-48, 49-67, 67-70, 73-75, 76-82, 83-85]), intonation marks (high intonation), and requests ("go" or "ready?" [lines 14, 23, 42, 47, 49, 83]). It is also important to note that these repetitions involve different formats that evoke different interactional rules. Thus, we have participation frameworks of repetition that involve turn-taking between the teacher and the whole class in chorus (lines 14-18, 23-34, 42-48, 67-70, 73-75, 76-82, 83-85) or between the teacher and all the students in one row (lines 49-67) (in addition, other forms are often used, such as those involving repetitions between the teacher and different groups according to gender or to their physical location in the classroom).

Extract 3 is therefore similar to the kind of participation framework described by Chick in referring to 'safe-talk'. However, this category might not be accurate for this

particular example, as these repetitions seem to play, not just a social function, but also (and most importantly) an educational one. Interactional repetition structures are thus constructed by working on questions that are crucial to an understanding of the oral text on which the participants are focusing their attention; that is, these forms for participation are coordinated around the 'where' (lines 13-18, 67-71) and the 'what' (lines 19-67, 71-85) of the actions carried out by the text's main character (Alice). Although semantic understanding cannot be demonstrated, these repetitions seem to perform an educational purpose, as they are concerned with the educational items and contents that are relevant to the lesson unit in question. In this extract, such forms of participation are also elicited by the teacher as a scaffolding strategy to correct the students' performance when syntactic or grammatical errors are detected, as in the case of the misuse of 'my' and 'her' possessive adjectives in lines 76-82.

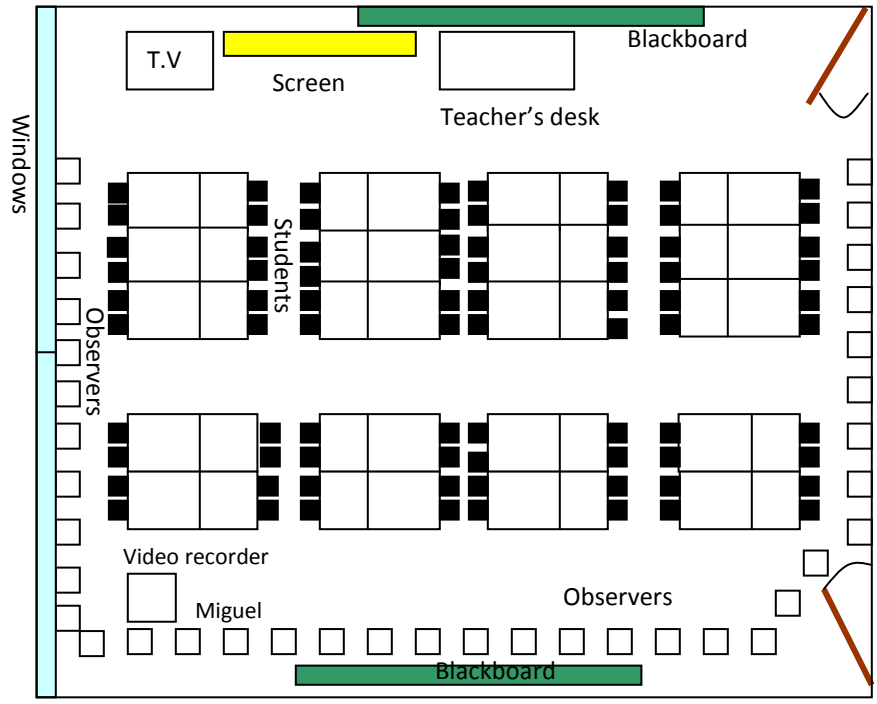
The exploration of all sequences of choral repetition within the corpus of classroom interactions confirms the educational function of this form of participation (see Figure 2 for an overview of the collection of sequences of choral repetition and their interactional contexts of occurrence). In fact, the collection of these sequences shows that they tended to emerge in interactional contexts that were relevant to the on-going educational activity. Apart from the fact that they occupied long periods of time in all the recurrent educational activities, these sequences were usually constructed by the teachers as embedded sequences within the course of other non-repetition forms of participation to introduce, review and correct target repertories of words, grammatical structures and speech acts that were relevant to each of the lesson units. However, the systematization of all sequences of choral repetition also raises some doubts about the way these sequences are often represented when described as 'safe-talk'. On the one hand, it raises doubts about their nature as interactional strategies that teachers just come up with in other to solve the immediate tension of having to teach the subject through the medium of a language that neither they nor their students know well. On the other hand, it makes difficult to understand these sequences of repetition as interactional spaces in which teachers and students collaborate unambiguously.

Figure 2. Collection of sequences of repetitions in the data corpus



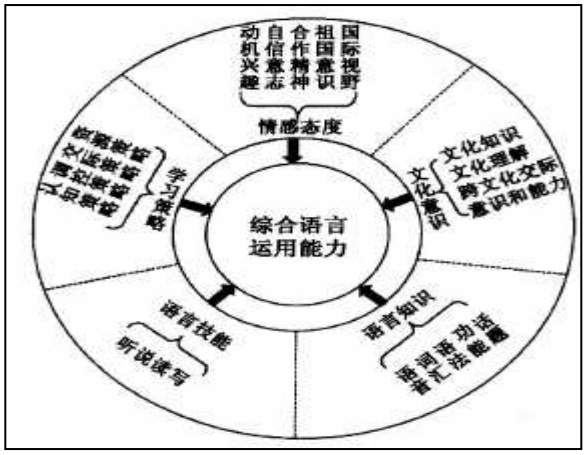
Concerning the nature of the chorus repetition sequences as interactional strategies that teachers just come up with, it is worth noting that such forms of participation were particularly and markedly displayed before non-ratified participants or bystanders (Goffman 1984), who, although fictionally constructed by the teacher and students as non-present in the event, were part of the scene as observers or potential evaluators of the teacher's performance. This is the case of the researcher as well as of the school's principal and of other English teachers from the same school or from others, in the context of teacher peer-evaluation activities or in the course of institutional competitions among English teachers in different schools at a municipal/provincial level (see Figure 3 for a sketch of the physical arrangement of classes involving bystanders).

Figure 3. Classroom in English language teacher competitions



Therefore, the organization of classroom activity around practices of choral repetition seemed to play an important institutional role in defining what counts as a legitimate teaching-learning practice within the context of the innovation reforms. Indeed, these practices were an important part of what in interviews and institutional documents was considered to be a specifically Chinese way of teaching English language. Figure 4 is extracted from the official English language curriculum designed for experimental schools, in which a later explanation on the need to complement English language teaching with Chinese traditional culture and correct values "in order to filter moral and ideological education and to balance foreign cultural influences on the students' values and life perspectives" (Experimental English Language Curriculum, page 49) is preceded by a representation that embodied those values within the abstract educational category of "comprehensive language use abilities":

Figure 4. "Comprehensive language use abilities"



Comprehensive language use abilities:
Language skills: listening, speaking, reading and writing.
Language knowledge: phonetics, vocabulary, grammar, pragmatics, themes.
Attitudes: motivation, confidence, cooperation, patriotism, international perspectives
Learning strategies: cognitive, organizational, communicative, resource management.
Cultural awareness: cultural knowledge, cultural understanding and cross-cultural communication.

{Experimental English Language Curriculum, page 6}

In particular, the educational category of "comprehensive language use abilities" is represented as being based on the combination of a set of linguistic abilities/contents ("listening, speaking, reading and writing"), attitudes of "motivation" or "confidence", learning strategies ("cognitive", "organizational"), and values concerning "patriotism", "cooperation" and "cross-cultural awareness". All of these aspects are thus constructed as necessary attributes of English language teaching, therefore contributing to the blending of English language skills, on the one hand, and cultural dimensions promoting cross-cultural awareness from the standpoint of the attachment to a supposedly Chinese cultural background, on the other hand. In fact, this category was institutionally linked to the wider one of "comprehensive development" (全面发展) used by the school heads to reconcile the combination of moral, physical and psychical educational dimensions in relation to general everyday activities, both in and out of the school classroom.

With regard to the supposed nature of the choral repetition sequences as interactional spaces in which teachers and students collaborate unambiguously, as it is often taken for granted by those who describe those sequences under the label of 'safe-talk', a closer look

at the data shows that these institutional practices and values are not uniformly reproduced by all participants in the schools' everyday discursive practices. Although choral repetitions played an important educational function and were institutionally legitimized in the three schools studied, within the discourses of experimental reform and innovation, there were also spaces for practices by which students position themselves (in the course of the activity) as not necessarily aligned with the official interactional norms. In fact, these on-going local disorders to orderly choral practices constitute another problematic issue encountered with the analytical category of 'safe-talk', as they would be masked by the homogeneous representation of the community that emerges from such a category. To put it another way, the use of the label of 'safe-talk' would contribute in this case to obscuring the conceptualization of these practices as a discursive space in which the institutional interests are not the only ones present.

In particular, the analysis of sequences in which choral repetitions were not uniformly reproduced shows three main forms of interactional positioning that signalled boredom in the course of the activity. These three forms of positioning involved individual acting, parallel conversations and lack of group engagement. Firstly, an example of individual acting is shown in Extract 4, corresponding to an activity in which the participants were supposed to engage in the collective reading of the dialogue they had previously heard in Extract 3:

Extract 4. "She keeps moving her mouth"

Linda: ok / (( )) {going from her desk towards one of the aisles between the students' desks} 我们来看第一段啊 / look at- read your books read after me- read after me // dēar Liūyūn {she walks up to where Meiyi is sitting. Meiyi immediately changes her corporal position, from one in which she is leaning back in her seat and is holding a paper under her table while reading it, to one in which she puts both arms over the table while looking at her textbook}
{Translation of Chinese: let's have a look at the first paragraph}
Students: DĒAR LIŪYŪN
Linda: {turning around and going back towards the blackboard, away from Meiyi} ī ām hāppy tō hāve ā nēw pēn pāl
Students: Ī ĀM HĀPPY TŌ HĀVE Ā NĒW PĒN PĀL {Meiyi goes back to her initial corporal position, by leaning back in her seat and hiding her left arm under the table while paying attention to what she is holding. She keeps moving her mouth during the chorusing practice but without any perceptible voice}

17 **Linda**: ī līve īn Āustrāliā
18 **Students**: Ī LĪVE ĪN ĀUSTRĀLIĀ

{Recording code: 7v_Zh_P24112006I}

After reading the text twice, with sequences of repetition, the teacher establishes the participation framework of collective reading by using a framing turn ("ok") followed by an instruction with language shift to Chinese ("我们来看第一段啊 / look at- read your books read after me") as well as by the reading of the first sentence of the paragraph with high intonation ("dēar Liūyūn"), all of it functioning as contextualization cue of the new sequence. The most significant aspect of this sequence is that it shows that the participants do much more than merely engage in choral repetition, although this may be obscured by the temptation to use transcription conventions that tend to focus on collectivist actions rather than on individual ones (and which therefore are reinforced by and contribute to analytical categories such as 'safe-talk'). In this particular case, it is interesting to examine the local tensions or frictions between, on the one hand, the institutional efforts made by the teacher (Linda) to maintain the participation framework of choral repetition at the front-stage (Goffman 1984) of the activity and, on the other, the local actions of the students who position themselves as participants who act as if they were following the rules (as if they were playing the "official game") while doing other un-official/non legitimate activities at the back-stage (see Figures 5, 6, 7).

Figures 5, 6, 7. Individual acting

In Figure 5, which corresponds to the photogram extracted from the time 29'18.20" of the recording, the student Meiyi is not aligned with the required interactional rules (i.e. sitting down with both arms over the table and looking at the textbook while reading chorally) (line 3, in the transcript). As can be seen in Figure 6, corresponding to the

photogram for 29’19.28”, this is followed by a body displacement across the physical space of the classroom performed by the teacher, who approaches Meiyi while maintaining her verbal engagement with the rest of the students. This body displacement is then understood by the student as a warning cue to re-establish the required verbal/non-verbal pattern of participation, as she immediately changes her body position and engages in the choral repetitions when approached physically by the teacher (lines 3-9, in the transcript). Nevertheless, she returns to the previous pattern of participation as soon as the teacher turns round and moves away from her (see Figure 7, corresponding to the photogram for 29’20.14”), while simulating cooperation by moving her mouth in coordination with the rest of the students but without vocalizing (lines 10-16, in the transcript).

Secondly, an example of parallel conversations is shown in Extract 5, which is taken from the same class analyzed above:

Extract 5. “Jinling and Meiyi interrupt their conversation and look back to the screen”

Linda: ok / so {she walks towards the computer and shows a new slide on the tv screen, which is placed at the front-corner of the class, behind the teacher’s desk} / so

{parallel conversations}

Linda: soo (( )) hōbby

Students: {parallel conversations suddenly stop} HŌBBY

Linda: hōbby

Students: HŌBBY

Linda: hōbby

Students: HŌBBY

Linda: whāt’s yōur hōbby?

Students: WHĀT’S YŌUR HŌBBY?

Linda: {looking at and pointing to the screen} ī līke māking kītes

Students: [Ī LĪKE MĀKĪNG KĪTES]

[{Jinling turns her head and talks to Meiyi, who is sitting in a different row, behind her}]

Linda: {looking at and pointing to the screen} ī līke cōllēcting stāmps {she looks back from the screen to the class, which is followed by change of body position of Jinling and Meiyi who interrupt their conversation and look back to the screen}

Students: [Ī LĪKE CŌLLĒCTING STĀMPS]

[{Linda looks back to the screen. Jinling turns her head again to say something to Meiyi, very quickly, and then looks back to the screen}]

Linda: ī līke plāyīng ā vīolīn

Students: Ī LĪKE PLĀYĪNG Ā VĪOLĪN

{Recording code: 7v_Zh_P24112006I}

In this case, the teacher tries to orient the students' attention to a new section in the textbook ("Let's talk"), within the same lesson unit of "hobbies". This section shows a dialogue between two characters talking about their hobbies. Before initiating a sequence of listening in which the teacher plays the dialogue on an audio player while the students are supposed to listen to it (which was a recurrent activity in the corpus data, when working with this section), Linda embeds a sequence of choral repetition around the repertoire of actions that are uttered in the dialogue. These actions are graphically illustrated on a screen, so that pointing to this screen is a resource used by the teacher during the turn-taking between her and the students in chorus (lines 13-14, 16-20, 23-24). Nevertheless, these repetitions are not reproduced without discontinuity, as can be seen by observing the way in which Jinglin and Meiyi participate in the activity, managing their body positions and eye-gaze to act as if they were engaging in the repetitions while having a parallel conversation. Thus, they orient their body and eye-gaze to talk to each other when the teacher is looking at the screen (lines 13-15, 21-24; Figure 8, corresponding to the photogram for 7'53.06") while looking at the screen and repeating in coordination with their peers when the teacher looks at the class (lines 16-20; Figure 9 corresponding to the photogram for 7'55.13").

Figures 8, 9. Parallel conversations

Thirdly, extract 6 offers an example of lack of small group engagement, in the course of an activity in which students were supposed to engage in choral repetitions in groups, according to the gender of the students:

Extract 6. "Read louder"

1 **Zhao**: now open your books turn to page // 87 / 87
2 {noise of pages being turned}

Zhao: 好了吗？ / now I am the interviewer / 采访者哦 / who is Holly? / girls Holly / boys / Maria / (( )) 吗？

{Translation of Chinese: finished? / now I am the interviewer / interviewer}

Some students: 听到了 &

{Translation of Chinese: understood}

Zhao: & 听到了吗？/ who is your best friend Holly?

{Translation of Chinese: understood?}

Girls: PETE

Zhao: why is he a good friend?

Girls: BECAUSE HE LIKES TO DO THE SAME THINGS AS I DO / HE IS POPULAR TOO / AND GOOD AT SPORTS

Zhao: are you good at sport too?

Girls: WELL I LIKE SPORTS / BUT HE IS MORE ATHLETIC THAN ME / I'D SAY WE'RE BOTH PRETTY OUTGOING THOUGH

Zhao: what else do you like about Pete?

Girls: HE IS FUNNIER THAN I AM / AND HE IS WILDER / I'M A LITTLE QUIETER

Zhao: how about you Maria? who is your best friend?

Boys: MY BEST FRIEND IS VERA

Zhao: Vera

Boys: VERA

Zhao: what- what do you like about her?

Boys: (( )) {they do not read in unison. It is difficult to hear clearly what they are reading as they are reading in a low voice}

Zhao: that's important to me / (读好来)º / is she a lot like you?- a lot like you?

{Translation of Chinese: read better}

Boys: (( )) {they do not read in unison. It is difficult to hear clearly what they are reading as they are reading in a low voice} &

Zhao: & (( )) 站起来

{Translation of Chinese: stand up}

{boys stop reading}

Zhao: 站起来 // 男生 / 站起来

{Translation of Chinese: stand up // boys / stand up}

[{boys stand up. Noise of chairs. Parallel conversations}]

Zhao: [ONE TWO / 我数三下] // who is your best friend? / ready? / go

Boys: MY BEST FRIEND IS VERA / WHAT DO YOU LIKE ABOUT HER? / WELL SHE IS A GOOD LISTENER / AND SHE CAN KEEP A SECRET / THAT'S IMPORTANT TO ME / IS SHE A LOT LIKE YOU? / SOME PEOPLE SAY THAT WE LOOK ALIKE / WE'RE BOTH TALL AND WE BOTH HAVE LONG CURLY HAIR / BUT VERA IS MUCH QUIETER THAN ME / AND SHE IS ALSO SMARTER / I'M MORE OUTGOING

{Translation of Chinese: I'm going to count down from three}

Zhao: 大部分同学都是比较好的哦 / 又不是没吃早饭 / 读大点声音

{Translation of Chinese: many of you were better / not as if you had missed lunch / read louder}

{Recording code: 10dp_Zh_S31102006I}

By using a framing turn with instruction, the teacher (Zhao) initiates a sequence that directs the students' attention to the transcript of a dialogue which they have been working on previously (lines 1-2). Once the students find the corresponding page in their textbooks where the dialogue is shown, Zhao establishes the choral participation framework by groups according to the students' gender, which is done by shifting to Chinese language and by attributing the different roles of the dialogue to each of the two groups (lines 3-6). In this case, she plays the role of the interviewer by reading the questions and each group is in charge of reading the replies of each one of the two interviewees of the dialogue. Thus, the first half of the sequences is constructed by turn-taking between the teacher and the girls (lines 8-19) while the second half involves turn-taking between the teacher and the boys (20-30).

The second half is particularly interesting in terms of how the participants position themselves with respect to the interactional rules of the required participation framework. During the turn-taking between the teacher and the boys, the students engage in the reading without synchronized participation and reading loud, which is followed by negative evaluations on the part of the teacher, who exhorts the students to read "properly" (lines 24-30). As the boys continue this pattern of participation during two exchanges, the teacher finally stops the sequence without letting the students finish the reading of their text and initiates a new one that requires the boys to read again from the beginning of their text while standing up (lines 31-45). This is followed by the required pattern of participation on the part of the students, who read their texts vigorously and in a synchronized way, which is positively evaluated by Zhao (lines 46-48).

Samples of on-going local disorders in orderly choral practices are therefore common in the English language classes studied in the three Chinese experimental schools. The students explained these forms of interactional positioning by referring to boredom or to individual interests that were not necessarily aligned with the official ones. Extract 7, for instance, is taken from a questionnaire filled in by one of the students who was considered as a 'good student' by her teacher but who displayed these 'non-official' forms of participation in classroom activity:

Extract 7. "I do not like collective readings"

Miguel: 学习英语什么地方喜欢什么地方不喜欢？为什么？

{Translation: What do you like and what you do not about studying English?}

Tingting: 学英语,喜欢听 (英文歌 有趣的对话 等) 不喜欢拖拖拉拉的集体朗读.也喜欢写.不喜欢抄

{Translation: I like listening (English songs, interesting dialogues, etc.), I do not like collective readings. I also like writing, but I do not like copying}

Miguel: 对你来说，为什么中国教育需要英语课？

{Translation: Why do you think Chinese education needs English classes?}

Tingting: 中国教育需要英语是为了接上世界的轨道.也为中国人铺好一条可发展的道路.而对我,则是为了将来的出国等做准备.

{Translation: Chinese education needs English to connect with the world track, so that the Chinese can pave a road to development. For me, the future is to prepare myself to go abroad}

{Part of a questionnaire conducted to students in 8th grade}

As a reaction to the researcher's inquiries presented in the questionnaire, focusing on very general topics and national categories, the student constructs a discursive representation of herself as a language learner who is non-univocally aligned with the institutionalized legitimate activities (i.e. collective readings). However, she actually represents herself as a student who wants to learn English for personal goals concerned with travelling or living abroad, goals that are not necessarily framed within the Chinese national interest in preparing citizens to live in China and to contribute to the national economic demands resulting from China's openness to the international market.

4. From 'safe-talk' to ritualization: language, institutions and social change

The set of examples analyzed above shows the extent to which the analytical category of 'safe-talk', which has been widely used to describe choral practices in classrooms in different social contexts, could lead to a misrepresentation of some local and institutional situated processes. In the case of the research carried out in three experimental schools in urban China, the commitment to the study of local uncertainties, institutional logic and wider processes of social change is reflected in a theoretical-methodological approach that pays close attention to the on-going local activity in the situated context as well as to the

traces between different local practices across space/time within the schools (i.e. in different English language classrooms but also in institutional competitions or in other spaces beyond the classrooms) and between these practices and other forms of situated discourse toward which such local practices are oriented (i.e. national policy documents, school documents and interviews).

The ethnographic, discursive and interactional analysis of these traces in the context of this study allows us to make a representation of choral practices as interesting spaces for the production, circulation and evaluation of certain symbolic resources (certain forms of knowledge, forms of participation or social categories) that are allocated, legitimated, naturalized or side-stepped in different ways by school participants. In the context of the institutionalization of certain collectivist practices, which are coming to play a key role in the construction and legitimization of the social categories of 'good school' and 'good student' in the three experimental schools, analysis of the choral practices adopted in the English language classes under the above-mentioned approach shows there are two main dimensions, which have been described previously in other sociolinguistic studies focusing on language ritualization in a classroom context (see Rampton 2002, 2006: chapter 5).

On the one hand, these choral practices seemed to be constructed as "institutional rituals" (Bourdieu & Passeron 1977; Bourdieu 1991; Bernstein 1971, 1975) in the sense that the students were expected to engage in "a mode of delivery that entails a high degree of fluency, without hesitations, in a stylised intonation contour, accompanied by prescribed postures, proxemics, behaviours, attitudes and trappings" (Du Bois 1986: 317, quoted in Rampton 2006: 181). Indeed, these practices were constructed as educationally oriented institutional shows, which were discursively justified on the basis of their representation as a specifically Chinese way of teaching English, grounded on Chinese traditions and cultural values as opposed to foreign ones. Furthermore, this discourse of curricular reform was framed in the schools within a wider one of educational modernization in which collectivism (linked to other institutional rituals performed out of the classrooms, analyzed elsewhere) was constructed as a necessary Chinese response to the influence of Western individualism in the contemporary context of economic internationalization.

All educational reforms experimentally implemented today in China are part of the guidelines aimed at the construction of a quality education (教育教学质量), which are

directly derived from the wider institutional campaign of the so-called "Patriotic Education" (爱国主义教育)[3]. This campaign, which is not only directed at the school space but to all institutional domains, was outlined by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) as a reaction to its loss of political legitimacy in the context of the Tiananmen pro-democratic protests (Zhao 1998: 291; Guo 2004: 25). Therefore, the analyzed practices are circumscribed within the contemporary nationalist strategies implemented by the CCP for political legitimization.

After Mao Zedong's death in 1976, Deng Xiaoping's move away from a "national communism" (Fitzgerald 1995) towards a more pragmatic nationalist strategy based on "open doors" economic reforms (see Hughes 2006) did not face the socio-economic difficulties which had resulted from Mao's previous policies (i.e., the Cultural Revolution). Although Deng's conversion of the Chinese planned economy into a market economy produced good results from the start, they however ended up throwing China into a new economic crisis during the second half of the 80's. Therefore, this lack of socio-economic achievement caused civil mobilisations claiming for an extension of the economic liberalization reforms to the political domain. As a consequence of these mobilisations, the CCP shifted towards new modernization discourses where loyalty to the State-Party and economic internationalism, and a rejection of western neo-liberal democratic values are combined with the sponsoring of the 'excellent national traditions' which emphasize cultural values of social harmony, hierarchy and collectivism, in order to legitimate an authoritative state championed by the CCP in the context of the globalized economy (Wang & Karl 1998; Gries 2004; Zhao 2004; Hughes 2006; Esteban 2007; Guo 2007).

On the other hand, a close look at the on-going local activity within the course of the choral repetitions shows there to be an interactional space in which the students do much more than engage unambiguously with official practices. And this is an important dimension to bear in mind when dealing with ritualization: "there is room for manoevre in even the most rigid of rituals (…) and in plural stratified societies, people respond to rituals in different ways, some of them quite at odds with the original design" (Rampton 2006: 189). Concerning the data analyzed in this paper, analysis of these practices reveals interesting spaces in which the students engage in inter-personal and agent practices not necessarily aligned with the institutionally legitimated ones. In particular, they engage in

forms of participation that allow them to construct the fiction of collaboration in the "institutional ritual" while displaying attitudes of boredom with respect to the interactional rules being reproduced.

These forms of participation are accomplished by different ways of managing the front-stage and backstage of the activity, which involve instances of individual acting, parallel conversations and lack of group engagement. Such management is therefore not free of tensions and dilemmas for the on-going classroom activity, and interactional consequences of these forms of keying may vary from fictitious smoothness to disruption. In the case of the fictitious smoothness, the educational activity continues in the front-stage while students engage in other, simultaneous, individual or peer-group activities in the backstage, as shown in Extracts 4 and 5. In the case of disruption, the lack of engagement in the required participation framework is so explicit that the backstage becomes a front-stage in the classroom activity, obliging the teacher to stop and re-initiate the activity in order to re-establish what is institutionally desirable, as shown in Extract 6.

These institutional and local dimensions that are linked to the (re)production of ritualized choral practices in English language classrooms, in the context of the three Chinese experimental schools studied, uncover a more complex picture than the one offered by the analytical category of 'safe-talk'. In particular, the understanding of such choral practices as rituals that involve institutional legitimization and individual agency, under the contemporary conditions of the People's Republic of China, allows us to conceptualize a discursive space in which different interests may be at stake in connection with local, national and even global cultural politics. Students and teachers are therefore not represented as participants who unconsciously reproduce language and social ideologies; that is, they are not represented as people who reproduce institutional forms of knowledge and social/linguistic identities by unwittingly contributing to naturalizing social relations linked to social structures and social inequality. Rather, they are represented as social agents who position themselves in ambiguous ways which produce short-term uncertainties and which may unfold as unexpected long-term consequences.

Appendix 1: Symbols used in the transcripts.
AA (Capital letters) loud talking
AA (italics letters) reading

/ short pause (0.5 seconds)
// long pause (0.5 – 1.5 seconds)
[ ] turn overlapping with similarly marked turn
(( )) non-understandable fragment
( )º low talking
{ } researcher's comments
↑ rising intonation
↓ falling intonation
Ā high intonation

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[2] The crucial role of English language education in Chinese national modernization was first stated by former Chinese president Deng Xiaoping (Deng 1978), in the context of the beginning of the "open doors" economic reforms. In fact, the first English language curriculum in Chinese compulsory education was published after this statement (Ministry of Education 1978). From that moment on, the English language curriculum has experienced an on-going process of reform, to adapt English language teaching to the officially termed "Chinese national conditions" (Li 2004: 346-353).

[3] Some of the most important educational policies implemented after the national guideline of the "Patriotic Education Campaign" are the following ones: "Guidelines for the Reform and Development of Education in China" (中国教育发展和改革纲要), in 1993; "Action plan for patriotic education" (爱国主义是实纲要), in 1994; "Education Law of the People's Republic of China" (中华人民共和国教育法), 1995; "Action Plan for Educational Vitalization Facing the 21st Century" (面向 21 世纪教育振兴行动计划), in 1999.