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Voices and Spaces: Rethinking Silence, Speech, and Resources in Language Education. Introduction

The present issue draws together diverse perspectives on *silence*, *speech*, and *resources* in language education from many international contexts, including Australian, British, Japanese, German, and Polish educational settings. These three themes intertwine in language education (Figure 1). Silence represents the strategic space for listening and reflection, aiding conceptualization and thought processing (Alerby, Alerby, 2003; Creely, 2024; Gruber, Henriksen, 2024); speech signifies the overt practice and self-expression essential for language learning and fluency attainment (Choi, 2024; Nava, Pedrazzini, 2018), whereas resources encompass various teaching tools, including digital and multimodal platforms that support and enhance language acquisition (Eng, 2005; Mumtaz, 2000).



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Figure 1. The silence-speech-resources relationship diagram

The synergy between *silence and speech* fosters reflective and sharing practice; as Harumi (2024: 110) explains, silence contains ‘preludes to speech’. The link between *silence and resources* underscores thought processing and output; and the connection between *speech and resources* showcases verbal discussion and output, which according to Greenwalt, Ha-deer, and Kothari (2024: 93), should be meaningful and should stretch beyond ‘idle talk’. At the centre, where all three intersect, lies the essence of effective language education—integrating listening, speaking, and varied resources to cultivate a comprehensive learning experience.

The first five articles in this special issue explore silence and communication regarding language learning and pedagogy. They commonly address the significance and multifaceted nature of silence, whether as a tool for fostering reflection and emotional intelligence, an interactional resource in language practice, or a phenomenon shaped by cultural dynamics. They also collectively emphasize silence not merely as an absence of speech but as a dynamic and constructive element of communication that can significantly influence language education and learner engagement.

Anna Bąk-Średnicka examines the multifaceted roles of silence within educational contexts, particularly concerning health and well-being in Poland and Japan. Her main argument posits that silence holds significant communicative value and implications for mental and emotional health. The author argues that silence can benefit student behaviour and teacher pedagogy when being perceived differently across cultures and educational settings. Her article explores the dual nature of silence, depicting it as both a healthy, productive state that fosters reflection and as a potentially harmful silence linked to discomfort, anxiety, or bullying in educational environments. The author advocates for teachers to recognize the varied reasons

behind student silence, whether they are cognitive challenges, emotional states, or the result of health issues. She suggests that educators should receive “silence pedagogy” training to enable them to better navigate and utilize silence as a constructive educational practice.

The article by **Seiko Harumi** presents a narrative case study that investigates how a Japanese learner of English utilized various forms of silence as interactional resources during her study abroad experience in the UK. The concept of “multi-contextual silences” refers to diverse and purposeful uses of silence that foster collaborative second language (L2) interactions, particularly in unfamiliar socio-cultural environments. The study emphasizes the importance of understanding silence comprehensively, although it is traditionally perceived as a negative aspect of interaction for Japanese EFL learners. It shows that silence can be a productive interactional tool, manifesting in different contexts such as solitude, creative expression, and active listening. The paper calls for a shift in pedagogical approaches to recognize the value of silence in cross-cultural communication and promote a more inclusive understanding of interaction styles. By raising awareness about the multifaceted roles of silence, learners and educators can enhance their interactions in multicultural settings, ultimately fostering deeper connections and understanding in language learning contexts. Harumi contributes to the field by presenting silence as a valuable interactional resource rather than a negative aspect of communication. The Individual Network of Practice (INoP) framework highlights the importance of social networks and learner agency in shaping language experiences.

Luis Javier Pentón Herrera re-evaluates the role of silence in foreign language education through the lens of social-emotional learning (SEL). Traditionally, silence has been seen as a barrier to communication; however, this paper argues for a transformation of that perspective, promoting silence as a valuable tool for deep learning, introspection, and emotional intelligence. The author discusses how silence is deeply embedded in various cultural and social contexts and highlights its significance in internal dialogues during communication. From a socio-emotional perspective, the paper emphasizes silence as a form of affective communicative competence—highlighting its potential to enrich language learning and emotional literacy. The author proposes six practical strategies for incorporating silence into classroom practices that help to foster empathy, self-awareness, and autonomy among students. Pentón Herrera contributes a new idea to the field by positioning silence as an active and valuable tool for fostering introspection, emotional awareness, and effective communication. He introduces the concept of affective communicative competence, integrating social-emotional learning (SEL) principles to enhance language instruction.

Marzanna Pogorzelska presents the findings of the analysis of over 80 English language textbooks published to explore how these texts address (or fail to address) the themes of colonialism and the identities of colonized peoples. Utilizing content analysis and critical discourse analysis, the study identifies three main categories reflecting dominant trends regarding colonialism: the absence of the colonized, the portrayal of the colonized in folkloric terms, and the invisibility of colonization itself. The findings reveal that many textbooks background or exclude references to colonized groups, often portraying colonization as a neutral event, thus reinforcing a narrative that privileges colonizers over the colonized. This silencing contributes to a significant gap in the representation of colonial histories and the experiences of indigenous peoples. The author emphasizes the need to critically examine language textbooks and suggests that incorporating a decolonial perspective could foster greater intercultural sensitivity in language education. The discussion contributes to the field of language education by highlighting the colonial narratives present (or absent) in English language textbooks. It uncovers practices of silencing and marginalization of indigenous identities, demonstrating how textbooks often reinforce colonial attitudes.

Agata Klimczak-Pawlak examines the role of silence, specifically silent pauses, in the fluency of L2 English academic presentations. Highlighting the dual nature of pauses, the paper discusses how these can facilitate effective communication or indicate dysfluency, especially among non-native speakers. The study involved three advanced Polish EFL students with varying levels of proficiency who participated in an academic presentation course. They delivered impromptu speeches and prepared presentations, which were analyzed for pause duration, frequency, and placement. The study emphasizes the importance of teaching students about the strategic use of pauses to enhance fluency and presentation skills. The analysis suggests that academic instruction positively impacts mid- and lower-proficiency students more than their high-proficiency peers, who benefit more at the level of presentation finesse. Klimczak-Pawlak's work contributes to the field of L2 acquisition and public speaking by analyzing silent pauses in academic presentations among L2 English speakers. It highlights the positive impact of targeted instruction on fluency, particularly for mid- and lower-proficiency students. It also offers a nuanced understanding of pause types that can enhance assessment metrics for spoken proficiency.

The second overarching theme of the present issue rethinks speech in language education in connection to silence. The two articles in this section explore communication dynamics in the classroom, specifically focusing on the role of teacher verbal communication and its impact

on student engagement and learning outcomes. The article by **Dat Bao** examines how Japanese students perceive their lecturers' verbal communication in an Australian higher education setting. The findings highlight positive lecturer talk, which enhances student engagement through effective pedagogical strategies, and negative lecturer talk, which impedes learning through being unclear and unengaging. The findings also stress the importance of recognizing the impact of teacher talk on student well-being and the awareness of the long-term effect of teacher talk on students' desire for and commitment to learning. The practical recommendations offered by the author emphasize the significance of student-centred, engaging, and inclusive teaching practices in promoting compelling lecturer talk.

Dat Bao and **Jonathan Shachter** explore the experiences and desires of three Japanese university students who identify as 'pro-verbalisation learners'—students who grapple with classroom silence yet yearn for more verbal engagement in their English language learning. Despite their quiet demeanour in class, the student participants expressed a strong desire to participate verbally, highlighting a disconnect between their internal aspirations and the external classroom dynamics that contribute to their reticence, regardless of the challenges, including feelings of inadequacy, fear of negative evaluation, and pressure from peers, which hinder their ability to speak up. The study emphasizes the importance of acknowledging student voices and modifying teaching strategies to foster a more verbally proactive learning environment for silent students who wish to engage more fully in their education. It contributes to English language teaching by amplifying the voices of quiet learners who wish to engage more verbally in the classroom. The introduction of 'pro-verbalisation pedagogy' offers a new framework for educators to enhance student engagement, especially in the context of Japanese language learners, while encouraging further research on silent learners' needs and dynamics in various educational settings.

The third theme concerns resource adaptation in language education. The articles in this section emphasize the role of feedback and technology in enhancing learning experiences. Both articles advocate for strategies that foster engagement, motivation, and comfort in learning languages, underscoring the intertwining of technology and psychological factors in effective education.

Katarzyna Sierak explores the evolution of language learning amid rapid technological advancement. She emphasizes that technology significantly influences contemporary education, drawing parallels to past industrial revolutions that reshaped learning. Highlighting the concept of multimodality, the study underscores the importance of integrating diverse

communication forms—such as language, images, and sound—into educational practices. Her study findings indicate that students favour internet-based and multimedia resources over traditional textbooks, seeking visually engaging and interactive content. Sierak makes a significant contribution to the field of language learning by examining the intersection of technology and education through the lens of multimodality, that is, integrating diverse communication forms in education.

The article by **Czesław Kiński** and **Bartosz Kiński** investigated the relationship between positive orientation (POS) and feedback perception among foreign language learners, alongside factors such as gender differences and feedback frequency. The study results, derived from large data obtained from 429 university students, indicated that POS correlated positively with comfort in receiving feedback from both teachers and peers, suggesting that students with a positive attitude viewed feedback as an opportunity for growth rather than criticism; however, gender differences were salient. Moreover, higher frequency of feedback improved students' comfort levels and perception of various feedback elements, underscoring the need for regular feedback to normalize educational processes. This study's findings contribute to the field of L2 acquisition by integrating positive psychology to examine how positive orientation influences perception of feedback.

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