



# Silence in the Foreign Language Classroom: The Emotional Challenges for L2 Teachers



Lesley Smith and Jim King

**Abstract** While learner silence in the classroom has recently become a topic of interest for teachers and researchers alike, the emotional effect of silence on classroom participants themselves remains largely understudied. Moreover, most studies of student silence in the classroom have primarily focused on its interplay in second language acquisition and L2 development (King in *Silence in the second language classroom*. Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstroke, 2013; Nakane in *Silence in Intercultural Communication*. John Benjamins, Amsterdam, 2007). Of equal importance, however, is silence's effect on the emotions and development of teachers themselves. An individual learner's silence can have numerous emotional charges, and, because emotions are contextually and socially constructed, they can shift the emotional mood within the classroom more generally and affect the emotions of the teacher. When learner silence is not appropriately managed, the subsequent classroom environment can add to the emotional labour of teaching (King in *New Directions in Language Learning Psychology*. Springer, Dordrecht, pp 97–112, 2016), and, in turn, affect teacher performance by disrupting teacher identity. This chapter will discuss three forms of this affective silence and examine how each form's role enters into an ecological relationship between student and teacher emotions. After a brief review of recent literature on learner silence and the problems it poses for teacher identity, we apply the concept of emotional regulation to the negative effects of learner silence and offer productive emotional regulation strategies for educators.

**Keywords** Silence • Classroom interaction • Emotional labour  
Dynamic systems theory • Emotional regulation • Identity

---

L. Smith (✉)  
Linguistics Program, University of South Carolina, Columbia, SC, USA  
e-mail: Smithle9@email.sc.edu

J. King (✉)  
Applied Linguistics Section, Department of English, University of Leicester,  
Leicester, UK  
e-mail: jk249@le.ac.uk



## 1 Literature Review of L2 Silence

Educators and researchers who acknowledge the role of dialogic talk in learning tend to regard student silence as a largely negative phenomenon. This is particularly the case in language learning contexts, where a large body of research demonstrates that both verbal interaction and oral production of the target language are key to language acquisition and L2 development (Long 1996; Swain 2005). While understudied in comparison to verbal communication, the literature on L2 learner silence has grown in recent years, encompassing numerous theoretical perspectives and research designs. Some ethnographic research examining silence, although not focused exclusively on language education, has provided useful data regarding the inextricable connection between silence and culture (e.g. Agyekum 2002; Basso 1990; Philips 1976). Educational research has also examined differences in cultural perceptions of silence and their impact on silent classroom behaviour, finding a proclivity of certain cultures toward nonverbal and indirect communication (King 2013; Nakane 2007). While cultural differences certainly impact classroom interaction, it is important to recognize that they are just one of many variables cooperating to produce certain behaviours, such as silence. Empirical research on learner silence has illustrated this complexity (King 2013; Nakane 2007; Yashima et al. 2015), showing variation in silence across individuals, classrooms, and cultures. Chief among these theoretical perspectives is Dynamic Systems Theory (DST), which has proved a useful lens for examining how silence interacts in the classroom to affect individual students and teacher/student interactions. DST-informed approaches maintain that the behaviour of organic systems is not a result of causal relationships between static components, but rather an evolving interaction between agents in the system, i.e. students and teachers (Larsen-Freeman 1997). This approach accounts for the constant flux found in classroom environments and lends itself well to analyses of silence due to the number of cognitive, social, and emotional factors associated with silent behaviour. These factors, called attractors in DST terminology, can guide classroom discourse toward an attractor state, i.e. a period of relative stability, in which silence is the norm, thereby discouraging student speech (Larsen-Freeman 2007; King 2013; Smith and King 2017). Negative feelings regarding a learner's silence are particularly powerful attractors, which can manifest externally to maintain a non-participatory state.

## 2 Silence and Emotion

The affective dimension of teaching has long garnered serious scholarly attention. Teaching is, after all, “irretrievably emotional,” (Hargreaves 2000: 812) especially for novice teachers and those who cope with the social and emotional challenges of living in a foreign country. Similarly, interest in the emotional aspects of language learning has recently exploded as researchers acknowledge the crucial role of

68 emotion in classroom behaviours and attempt to understand their roles in second  
69 language acquisition. An important goal of classroom emotions research has been  
70 understanding the relationship between student and teacher emotions. As emotions  
71 are both culturally and socially constructed (Denzin 1984), it seems obvious that  
72 students' emotions would strongly affect teacher emotions, and vice versa.  
73 Students' emotions can thus impact not only pedagogical methods, but teacher  
74 satisfaction, motivation, and identity construction (Sutton 2004; Zembylas 2007).  
75 Correctly interpreting the emotions of individuals can be difficult, and teachers are  
76 faced with the nearly impossible task of perceiving, interpreting, and tending to the  
77 emotions of many students. While there are various preemptive and reactive means  
78 of tending to student emotions, in real time teachers must rely on communicative  
79 acts to do so. One aspect of classroom interaction carrying heavy emotional charge  
80 and which is notoriously difficult to interpret is learner silence.

81 Across theoretical perspectives, silence is inexorably tied with emotion, as  
82 nonverbal communication tends to be more innate than verbal interaction, which is  
83 cognitive and content-heavy (Gregersen 2007). While certain functions of silence  
84 are consciously performed, for example, the use of wait time after teacher elicitations  
85 (Rowe 1974; Smith and King 2017), most silence is performed unconsciously.  
86 Additionally, nonverbal communication is thought to more accurately reflect the  
87 interlocutors' emotions than explicit verbal communication (Denzin 1984;  
88 Gregersen 2007). There exists an ecological and, importantly, reciprocal relationship  
89 between the causes, effects, and maintenance of classroom silence, particularly  
90 regarding emotions. While some studies purport constructive uses for silence in the  
91 classroom, such as giving time for cognitive processing and using silence as a  
92 politeness strategy (e.g. Jaworski and Sachdev 1998; Reda 2009), classroom silence  
93 in the form of non-participation tends to be viewed negatively, often resulting in  
94 adverse emotions among classroom participants. The silence and resultant negative  
95 classroom environment often impact the emotional and pedagogical behaviours of  
96 the students and teacher. In order to examine this link between teacher and student  
97 emotions through silence, we first discuss three types of affective silence stemming  
98 from negative learner emotions. While this list is not exhaustive, it highlights three  
99 important forms of affective silence and how each distinctly adds to the complex  
100 network of emotional relationships within classrooms.

### 101 3 Silence of Embarrassment, Fear, and Anxiety

102 Feelings of embarrassment, fear, and anxiety afflict many language learners and  
103 may significantly contribute to silent behaviour. In the language classroom, where  
104 miscommunications abound, it is common to see students who would rather be  
105 silent than misunderstood. These three emotional factors have a particularly strong  
106 effect on student behaviour, creating situations in which students are overly sensitive  
107 to the judgment and perceptions of others. In situations with more self-focused  
108 attention, such as the language classroom, learners often use silence as

109 a defensive strategy to save face and to limit negative judgment from their peers or  
110 the instructor (King 2013, 2014; King and Smith 2017; Nakane 2007). King's  
111 (2013, 2014) empirical study of L2 Japanese classrooms shows several cases in  
112 which students choose silence when faced their peers' negative perceptions. These  
113 students described in rich detail the excruciating feelings of embarrassment they  
114 endured when asked to speak the target language in the very public realms of their  
115 language classrooms. King further notes embarrassment's cultural significance and  
116 its wholly negative effect on L2 oral production (2013). The frequently embarrassed  
117 students in the study had concerns on a wide range of issues, from lack of profi-  
118 ciency to misrepresentations of their thoughts, or ideas of being perceived as too  
119 proficient or overly confident by their peers. Two students, Satoshi and Shizuko,  
120 describe feeling embarrassed in class when they perceive other students to under-  
121 stand when they do not. Satoshi says "I don't have confidence in my answer, then I  
122 really don't like what people around me might be thinking of me (...) and that's  
123 really embarrassing" (King 2013: 114).

124 Nakane (2007) notes that L2 students' perceptions of disadvantage can lead  
125 students to choose pragmatic actions which native speakers perceive as inappro-  
126 priate, causing miscommunications and negative opinions of non-native speakers.  
127 These negative views, whether justified or simply perceived, can threaten learner  
128 identity and adversely impact classroom performance. However, due to the inter-  
129 relatedness of embarrassment with personal factors, (being introverted and shy) and  
130 various situational factors (task familiarity and interest, peer dynamics) it is difficult  
131 to find remediation that accounts for this complexity.

132 Some scholars have looked at how cultural notions about silence contribute to  
133 the proclivity to use avoidance of talk to save face, particularly for students from  
134 East-Asian or Confucian-heritage countries. These students would seem to have a  
135 culturally ingrained notion of hypersensitivity to the other, leading to excessive  
136 self-monitoring (Lebra 1976; McVeigh 2002; Tsui 2001). While the way a culture  
137 treats and uses silence remains an important aspect of how learners from that culture  
138 perceive silence, L2 embarrassment and anxiety is a phenomenon which spans  
139 cultures, developing in ecological relationships between other internal and social  
140 factors.

141 Additionally, sociopolitical climate can have a strong effect on learners' silent  
142 choices, particularly if the learners are a part of a negatively perceived minority  
143 group. Immigrant students often have difficulty overcoming the overwhelmingly  
144 negative views of those in the majority ethnic group, and this often impacts their  
145 silent behaviour. Losey's (1997) study of Mexican-American adult college students  
146 showed how minority students in a multicultural classroom participated less fre-  
147 quently than their Anglo-American counterparts, with Mexican-American females  
148 communicating the least. Among many other factors, Losey (1997) cites cultural  
149 differences and negative self-perceptions about being powerless as reinforcing the  
150 fear of Mexican-Americans students to speak out. Nakane (2007) notes similar  
151 sentiments felt by a Japanese learner of English in Australia who faced racism  
152 during secondary school, which ultimately resulted in a friendship group made  
153 exclusively of Asian students. Outside of the obvious emotional and psychological

154 struggles faced by students who experience prejudice, the problems they face in  
155 acquiring a language with little authentic output is troubling (Swain 2005).  
156 Moreover, when feelings of anxiety and embarrassment facilitate silent behavior in  
157 students, it can affect a teacher's emotional state and subsequent pedagogical  
158 decisions. In studies on pauses and wait time, i.e. the silence between a teacher  
159 elicitation and a subsequent teacher or student response, teachers admitted to  
160 feeling anxious when students did not immediately respond to a question (Rowe  
161 1974; Shrum 1985). The teachers reasoned that students were bored or frustrated  
162 with the lesson. Consequently, these feelings of anxiety led them to talk more to fill  
163 the silence, which not only gave students less time to process information, but  
164 helped create a more teacher-centered environment, with fewer opportunities for  
165 meaningful student output.

166 Another negative consequence of classroom silence is that it can often encourage  
167 silence in other students. In Brown and Levinson's (1987) seminal work on  
168 politeness, they note that silence can be a means of avoiding what they call  
169 face-threatening acts, i.e. events that could potentially cause conflict or embar-  
170 rassment, especially in situations with social distance between interlocutors.  
171 Anxious students frequently use this as an individual strategy, or can engage in the  
172 "solidarity of silence" with peers to avoid embarrassment, which can sometimes  
173 cause learners to form cliques (King 2013). The formation of cliques often has  
174 negative effects on classroom speech because they discourage in-group/out-group  
175 communication. Because dominant cliques often set the tone of the classroom, they  
176 can spur a non-responsive environment, even among those who are outside of the  
177 clique, but fear embarrassment if they speak out. Sifianou (1997) and Nakane  
178 (2007) rightly point out that even when solidarity silence is positively viewed by  
179 students, it can also put more communicative demands on the dominant speaker.  
180 What students deem as face-saving for themselves may have the opposite effect on  
181 the teacher, who may either feel apprehension from the collective silence or mis-  
182 interpret it as defiant or angry.

### 183 ***3.1 Silence of Annoyance, Anger, and Resistance***

184 The complexity of silence can similarly be seen in the silence of annoyance, anger,  
185 and resistance. Just as silence can be a means of avoiding conflict, it can likewise  
186 create and maintain it. The silence of anger and annoyance has been less studied in  
187 the field of learner silence than other areas, but is of equal importance to the  
188 discussion of negative affective silence. Sifianou (1997) notes that silence can be  
189 used to draw distinctions between groups of speakers, creating solidarity between  
190 in-group members, while distancing them from another speaker or group. This  
191 phenomenon typically occurs where an explicit difference in power exists between  
192 interlocutors, often in the form of social, socioeconomic, and/or racial status. While  
193 teachers have a higher institutional status, i.e. they are related to an institution of  
194 which all interlocutors are members (Watts 1997), students can gain higher



discourse status by means of certain verbal and non-verbal acts. Silence of frustration and anger, for example, can manifest as a form of passive resistance in order to negotiate power structure. If the non-dominant group feels like something can be gained from a shift in power, they may become inclined to confront the dominant person and attempt to gain power status (Li 2001). One such example comes from Gilmore's (1985) study of African American inner-city students' use of silence as a means of passive resistance by "turning the loss of face back to the teacher" (55). The loss of face there came from intentionally shifting the communicative onus from the students back to the teacher. The students asserted their resistance using "stylized sulking," characterized by silence paired with other nonverbal communication, such as eye-rolling, slouching down, or casting sideways glances (55). In this way, students were able to simultaneously express their negative emotions, create a sense of solidarity with their peers, and isolate the teacher. As in L1 classrooms, teachers in the second language classroom traditionally have a higher power status, which places students in a relatively submissive role. This idea is supported and maintained by several factors, including the preference of many instructors for teacher-centered discourse patterns, such as Initiation-Response-Feedback (see Sinclair and Coulthard 1975), sociocultural ideas about traditional teacher roles, and the power disparity that can exist between native and non-native speakers. While silence is often interpreted in the language classroom as lack of understanding, confusion, or embarrassment, it is important to note that, like their native-speaker counterparts, L2 students can intentionally use silence to express noncompliance. Intentional silence is "a genuine choice made by the addressee and may be verbalized through a speech act... e.g. 'I will not talk'" (Kurzon 1998: 36). It may be the case that high proficiency students are more comfortable using silence in this form because they feel that the discrepancy between themselves and the teacher is smaller, allowing them to justify their immediate negative feelings. King (2013) provides an example in which students in an advanced English class refuse to orally participate following the arrival of a new instructor. The students noticed a drop in the level of the class and interpreted this as an insult to their abilities, even going so far as to talk to the instructor after class about their concerns. One student named Etsuko noted that "...other students were just angry and didn't say anything about it although they had the ability to talk ((in English))... all they did was to keep silent and say we don't understand this teacher's class" (2013: 110). The students' passive resistance in this context echoes the silence expressed by Gilmore's students who used silence as a means of managing their emotions in a more socially acceptable way.

### 3.2 *Silence of Disengagement*

Learner silence manifesting from boredom or disengagement has traditionally been found in classrooms which employ teacher-centered and lecture-style pedagogical methods. Teachers' beliefs about language learning play an important role in their



236 pedagogical methods and are often intertwined with cultural ideas about learning  
237 and teacher roles. In some East-Asian contexts, teachers rely heavily on  
238 grammar-translation methods, such as *yakudoku*, a teacher-centered approach  
239 entrenched in the Japanese education system (Gorsuch 1998; Hino 1988). These  
240 approaches are characterized by a heavy emphasis on lexical and grammatical  
241 accuracy, which does little to encourage authentic student speech and is often  
242 informed by the nations' educational systems. A number of Confucian-heritage  
243 countries, for example, have curricula based on high-stakes testing, which dis-  
244 courage communicative learning strategies and encourage result-oriented learning  
245 (King 2013; McVeigh 2002). These external variables can greatly influence  
246 classroom discourse toward a non-participatory state as they tend to rely heavily on  
247 IRF discourse structure (Sinclair and Coulthard 1975), which requires minimal  
248 student responses to teacher prompts (King 2015a; Yashima et al. 2015). In King's  
249 (2015b) stimulated recall study of silence in a Japanese tertiary English classroom,  
250 most of the students' self-reported silence was due to boredom or disengagement  
251 with the class. Even in less student-focused situations, such as whole-class choral  
252 drills, many of the students remained silent, suggesting that anxiety was not the  
253 most pertinent reason for their reticence. He recalls a particular student, Nao, who  
254 admits that during the choral drills, not only was she not listening, she was thinking  
255 'now is the chance to sleep', kind of thing... while the teacher was talking, well...  
256 it'll probably be alright" (King 2015b: 136). While physically present, cognitively  
257 the student was elsewhere and her speech was "without communicative meaning"  
258 (King 2015b: 135). External factors linked to student disengagement, like  
259 teacher-centric methods, can also interact with learner-internal traits, further  
260 encouraging silent states. Nao relied on silence not only in English, but also in her  
261 native language of Japanese. King makes the argument that "inarticulateness in her  
262 L1 transfers to her L2 performance," as she is accepting of silent behaviour and  
263 does not see it as deviating from her normal interaction (2015b: 139).

264 While teacher-centered methods are unavoidably linked to disengagement,  
265 silences of disengagement can also occur in student-centered environments. In  
266 Yashima et al.'s (2015) complexity-informed study of silence in whole group  
267 discussions, topic was the primary reason for non-participation, with students  
268 commenting that their lack of interest in the topic explicitly helped enable their  
269 silence. Correspondingly, students said that when they were more interested in the  
270 speech topic they felt more confident responding to peer questions. Yashima and  
271 her colleagues note that "the naturally occurring social phenomenon of passing the  
272 questions around" was related to topic relevance and interest, which worked  
273 together to increase student communication (2015: 120).

274 Another example of social and internal factors working to promote silence is  
275 again found in King (2013) in a student named Jiro. On the surface, Jiro's silence  
276 derived mainly from boredom, as he notes that the lesson is always the same, so he  
277 prioritizes work in other classes over participating in the English class. However,  
278 his silence also manifested from other peer-related external factors, like wanting to  
279 show solidarity between his sports club classmates. There, he used a positive  
280 politeness strategy to stay silent with other silent members, wishing to maintain

281 membership in this classroom subgroup. This politeness strategy is so called  
282 because, in Jiro's case, he does not know why the other members are silent, but to  
283 not cause anxiety or to help them maintain face, he too remains silent. Thus, two  
284 seemingly unrelated classroom variables, Jiro's internal identity as an in-group  
285 member and the external teacher-centered pedagogical methods, work to maintain  
286 his silent behaviour in the attractor state of silent classroom discourse.

287 Regardless of emotional charge, silent student behaviour emerges due to many  
288 interrelated, contextually-bound classroom variables enabling and maintaining  
289 silence from moment to moment. Factors in the studies outlined here include  
290 learner-internal proclivities for silence, L2 proficiency, processing, and affect, as  
291 well as multivariate external factors such as pedagogical methods, socio-political  
292 environment, culture, and peer influence. When student silence emerges, it recip-  
293 rocally affects the factors which led to its emergence in the classroom. In other  
294 words, emotions and silence have complex functions within the broader relational  
295 network of shared classroom emotions.

#### 296 4 Student and Teacher Emotions

297 Emotions that play out in the classroom necessarily impact students' behavior. As  
298 shown above where students use silence as a means of resistance and protest, the  
299 emotional behaviour of a few students can affect the whole class. But, how does the  
300 emotional behavior of students affect that of the teacher and vice versa? The idea  
301 that emotions are socially constructed is key to our understanding of the complex  
302 relational networks that exist between teachers and learners. Simply put, emotions  
303 are "temporally and relationally rooted in the social situation," (Denzin 1984: 52)  
304 meaning that emotions are learned, felt, and interpreted through social situations.  
305 Prior (2015) further exemplifies this conception of emotion when noting that  
306 emotions are a "constitutive part of our communicative repertoire and socially  
307 shared experiences," meaning that relationships are largely built on the commu-  
308 nication and negotiation of emotional behaviour through these shared experiences  
309 (2015: 31). Emotions are certainly not solely social constructions, as a broad body  
310 of educational emotion research suggests deeply complex interactions between  
311 cognitive, cultural, neurological, and connotative forces at work (Op't Eynde and  
312 Turner 2006; Pavlenko 2005). These emotional forces, however, do not occur  
313 within a vacuum and affect observable social interactions from which we can gather  
314 empirical data. Social conceptions of emotions are also helpful in illuminating the  
315 relational aspects of emotion, particularly in the classroom, where relationships are  
316 often distinctly hierarchical and unwavering.

317 Rather than static states, emotions may be viewed as processes (Denzin 1984),  
318 which have internal dimensions (i.e. how individuals process emotions) and  
319 external dimensions (i.e. how these emotions travel between individuals). If we  
320 apply these dimensions to the classroom, we can conceive of the internal dimension  
321 as the range of learner or teacher-internal emotions and how these emotions





322 manifest within the individual. The external dimension, on the other hand, is how  
323 these emotions affect the emotional climate and behavior of the classroom (King  
324 and Ng 2017). A classroom's emotional environment is unavoidably tied to the way  
325 teacher and student emotions are perceived. Teachers frequently misinterpret stu-  
326 dents' emotional behavior (Hargreaves 2000; Chang and Davis 2009), especially  
327 nonverbal communication, as there are no acoustic cues to interpret and teachers  
328 rely on accurately recognizing non-verbal emotional cues. Because teachers must  
329 depend on interpretative acts to read students' emotions, it is precisely the teacher's  
330 perceptions of these acts which affect their emotions, whether in line with the actual  
331 emotions of the students or not. This idea is related to emotional models which  
332 incorporate appraisal and attribution theories of emotions, defining appraisals as  
333 broad judgments about the positive/negative nature of situations and attributions as  
334 specific judgments about the causes for such events (Frenzel et al. 2009). Frenzel  
335 et al.'s (2009) reciprocal model of teacher emotions outlines these ideas as they  
336 pertain to the classroom, highlighting the mutual relationships between external  
337 behaviours and emotions. Socio-emotional components of student behaviour, such  
338 as affective silence, can spur teachers into agitated, anxious, and even angry states,  
339 especially because teachers' appraisals of non-responsive silence tend to be nega-  
340 tive, even if there is truly no negative emotion behind the silence. Different cultural  
341 backgrounds can at times predicate variations in interpretation, such as in Harumi's  
342 (2011) study of Japanese and English teachers' perceptions while watching a video  
343 of a socially anxious Japanese student who was often silent during class. Whereas  
344 Japanese participants perceived the subject as not wanting to stand out, saving face,  
345 or waiting for help, the English respondents deemed her bored, rude, and even lazy  
346 (Harumi 2011). Here, student silence, or rather the teacher's interpretation of  
347 silence, causes the teacher to have negative emotional responses, which adversely  
348 affects the classroom's emotional environment. Gregersen (2007) studied teachers'  
349 accuracy at recognizing nonverbal behavior resulting from Foreign Language  
350 Anxiety and found that, while most of the teachers could identify anxious behavior  
351 for high and low anxiety students, recognizing those behaviors for students in the  
352 middle of the spectrum was exceedingly more difficult and often overlooked. In  
353 short, if a teacher interprets a student's behaviour as a negative phenomenon it will  
354 colour the ways in which they view that student and their future interactions with  
355 them. With numerous possible inter-related causes of learner silence, correct  
356 interpretation and mitigation of silence by the teacher can become extremely dif-  
357 ficult and add greatly to the high emotional burden of teaching.

## 358 5 The Emotional Labour of Teaching

359 Teaching is indeed an emotional profession (Hargreaves 2000; Sutton and  
360 Wheatley 2003; Zembylas 2007), and good teaching is often associated with  
361 "caring," i.e. the idea that the more a teacher emotionally invests in students, the  
362 more successful their teaching and the more fulfilled the teacher will feel

363 (Isenbarger and Zembylas 2006). The constant personal engagement of teachers  
364 with students entails high emotional demands in the classroom, as teachers expe-  
365 rience a gamut of positive and negative emotions. Emotional labour, or the forced  
366 management of emotions to comply with the social norms associated with a pro-  
367 fession, has traditionally been studied in service professions, such as airline  
368 attendants, cashiers, and restaurant servers, where the display rules (emotional  
369 norms) are strict and highly regulated (Hochschild 1983; Zammuner and Galli  
370 2005). Recently, however, the emotional labour of teaching has come into research  
371 focus as teachers must similarly manage and present their emotions in appropriate  
372 ways in front of students, parents, and administrators (see e.g. King 2016; King and  
373 Ng, in press; Acheson et al. 2016). Appropriate is a somewhat ambiguous term, but  
374 for many teachers, “getting it just right” (Sutton 2004) or having a temperate  
375 classroom environment that is neither too emotional nor too stripped of emotion,  
376 can be a professional and personal goal. As previously discussed, however, the  
377 shifting emotional states of many individuals create a precarious environment  
378 where one learner’s silence can interact with other variables to derail this harmo-  
379 nious, albeit idealistic, classroom. Additionally, a teacher’s emotional knowledge  
380 necessarily impacts the pedagogical choices they make, which has quite explicit  
381 consequences for the students (Zembylas 2007). So, what happens when emotional  
382 management fails, or the emotional demands become too high for the teacher?

383 Stress is the first phenomenon which comes to mind when discussing emotional  
384 labour, as teaching is widely acknowledged as a high-stress profession (Kyriacou  
385 2001). Teachers often suffer from high stress when they feel negative emotions  
386 about an aspect of their job and when they feel that their well-being is threatened.  
387 Teachers who are not able to effectively manage these negative emotions often  
388 experience great feelings of self-estrangement, leading to emotional dissonance  
389 between what is felt and what is performed. The result is often an emotionally  
390 detached view of their professional lives, leaving them completely isolated from  
391 their personal identities (Hargreaves 2000; Kyriacou 2001; Tsang 2011). Where  
392 negative feelings are not mitigated and continue to negatively impact well-being,  
393 teachers experience burnout, a phenomenon whereby they cannot continue to  
394 manage their emotions in a way which meets institutional expectations (King 2016;  
395 Näring et al. 2006; Näring et al. 2012). The implications of teacher burnout and  
396 emotional exhaustion (see Acheson et al. 2016) are equally serious for students,  
397 potentially leading to decreased student engagement and increased negative student  
398 emotion, harkening back to Frenzel et al.’s model (2009), highlighting the  
399 reciprocity of classroom emotions and behaviours.

400 It would be misleading to associate emotional labour with only negative emo-  
401 tions. Research has also suggested positive impacts on teacher identity construction  
402 if the teacher believes that through their emotional labour students can achieve  
403 educational goals (Isenbarger and Zembylas 2006). It can also help students and  
404 teachers achieve good interpersonal relationships, especially in socializing young  
405 children (Chang and Davis 2009). However, these positive feelings do not always  
406 prevail, as abstract goals are difficult to keep in mind when regularly faced with  
407 very present and real negative emotions. Positive emotions only overcome the

408 negative if teachers are willing to experience negative emotion in order to achieve  
409 professional goals, which many teachers, like people in general, are not willing or  
410 able to do.

### 411 *5.1 Mediation for Teachers to Mitigate Affective Silence*

412 Finding emotional regulation strategies for teachers has become a prerogative for  
413 educational researchers as the emotional labour of teaching has come into focus.  
414 Most strategies focus on teachers' influence over their own emotions, traditionally  
415 with the goal of increasing positive emotions or decreasing negative emotions  
416 (Gross 1998). The two most common strategies to achieve these ends are preven-  
417 tative (antecedent-focused) and responsive (response-focused) methods of emo-  
418 tional regulation. As the name suggests, preventative methods try to modify internal  
419 feelings (cognitive change, attention deployment) or external situations (selecting/  
420 modifying situations) prior to emotional onset (Sutton 2004). Common preventative  
421 strategies include preparing for lessons, thinking about the positive aspects of  
422 teaching, and talking to oneself (Sutton 2004; Jiang et al. 2016). Responsive  
423 strategies are performed after emotional onset to "intensify, diminish, prolong, or  
424 curtail the ongoing emotional experiences, expression or physiological responding"  
425 (Gross 1998: 225). Self-talk and deep breathing are common responsive methods,  
426 as are exercising or talking to peers after class. These strategies are often used  
427 together to cope with the experiential, cognitive, and physiological dimensions of  
428 emotional labour. For example, deep breathing may relieve physiological symp-  
429 toms, while self-talk may provide cognitive relief from emotionally stressing situ-  
430 ations. In Jiang et al.'s (2016) study of emotional regulation, they found that  
431 preventative strategies were more successful than responsive methods, as students  
432 perceived the teachers who used preventative strategies to regularly display positive  
433 feelings, like inspiration and happiness, and rarely display negative emotions.  
434 Similarly, teachers in King's (2016) study of emotional labour in L2 Japanese  
435 classrooms found that improving knowledge of Japanese socio-cultural norms  
436 helped them mitigate negativity about student silence and prepare for silent beha-  
437 viour. Socio-cultural awareness could be useful in regulating negative emotions by  
438 giving a more nuanced view of student conduct and help them mitigate misinter-  
439 pretations of that behaviour due to cultural differences (see Harumi 2011). Jiang  
440 et al. (2016) also suggest that emotional reappraisal working to up-regulate positive  
441 emotions is more effective than suppressing negative emotions, with regard to  
442 psychological health. These findings are consistent with Gross's (1998) research,  
443 which notes that while suppression somewhat reduced negative emotions, it did not  
444 fully relieve those feelings. Gross (1998) also found that in many cases suppression  
445 equally stifled positive emotions. Emotional reappraisal can also tie into other  
446 educational goals, such as gaining inspiration from increasing student confidence  
447 (Jiang et al. 2016), while suppression often only has one immediate goal: to isolate  
448 and dispose of negative emotions.

449 Related to reappraisal and suppression are the concepts of deep acting and  
450 surface acting (Grandey 2000; Hochschild 1983, 1990). In deep acting, teachers  
451 actually try to feel institutionally desired emotions, which can be accomplished  
452 through use of mental imagery or engaging in self-talk. Conversely, surface acting  
453 requires that teachers essentially fake emotions, as they physically display emotions  
454 which they do not feel. This phenomenon can add greatly to emotional labour, often  
455 encouraging teachers to emotionally distance themselves from their professional  
456 identities. In King's (2016) study of emotional labour of L2 teachers in Japan, he  
457 interviews teachers who, in surface acting, distance themselves from their roles as  
458 teachers in order to suppress any negative emotions related to teaching. Two  
459 teachers likened preparing for teaching to preparing for a performance, while in a  
460 more extreme case one instructor admitted to frequently lying to her students about  
461 her life. To highlight her disconnection from what occurred in class, she noted that  
462 she often "ma[de] up stories about her family to suit the situation" (King 2016:  
463 107). This prolonged depersonalisation and subsequent dissonance can lead to  
464 serious psychological consequences, including emotional strain, exhaustion, and  
465 burnout (Näring et al. 2006; Näring et al. 2012).

466 Situation modification is a common preventative and responsive regulation  
467 method in the classroom because it entails teacher control over external factors,  
468 such as moving students around. Certain pedagogical methods which help teachers  
469 modify situations may also be helpful in mitigating emotional labour. Teachers in  
470 Sutton (2004) noted that if they felt unprepared to engage in a difficult lesson, they  
471 would adapt the lesson plan to make it easier on the instructor. The methods varied  
472 by teacher, from having students do collaborative work to sitting silently at their  
473 desks. In King (2016), one teacher applied knowledge of teacher wait time to  
474 control negative feelings about student silence. While past literature focuses on the  
475 effects of increased wait time on student achievement (e.g. Rowe 1974; Ingram and  
476 Elliott 2014), there it provided the teacher with valuable time and cognitive space  
477 for reappraisal when faced with student silence himself. It is important to recognise,  
478 however, that regulation strategies are a type of emotional behaviour by the teacher  
479 and, as such, can interact complexly with student emotional behaviour. Students  
480 often pick up on teacher emotions and situationally regulate their own behaviour. If  
481 students perceive negativity, they may improve their behaviour to mitigate the  
482 teacher's emotions or, conversely, may try to further provoke the teacher if they  
483 sense negative emotions (Sutton and Wheatley 2003).

## 484 6 Conclusion

485 Student silences and emotion have complex manifestations in the classroom which  
486 cannot be easily predicted or mitigated by even the best pedagogical methods.  
487 Silences stemming from negative emotional states affect not only those experi-  
488 encing the emotion, but other classroom participants, both students and teachers  
489 alike. The causes of each type of affective silence are difficult to pinpoint because



490 silence tends to stem from various co-occurring factors, which neither the teacher  
491 nor students have any hope of wholly controlling. However, acknowledging the  
492 ecological nature of classroom emotions may help teachers in choosing which  
493 methods of emotional regulation work best for their own classrooms. The research  
494 reviewed herein emphasizes preventive regulation, but it is equally important for  
495 teachers to be familiar with responsive methods, particularly regarding student  
496 silence. Even teachers who regularly face silence often have difficulty in adequately  
497 preparing for what can be an anxiety-inducing phenomenon, particularly novice  
498 teachers. They may also find it difficult not to internalise the silence as a reflection  
499 of their pedagogy. Thus, emotional regulation methods should aim to positively  
500 influence teacher well-being rather than suppress negative emotions, which risks the  
501 deflation of all emotions and subsequent detachment from the teaching profession.  
502 This chapter also highlights the subjectivity of a classroom's emotional state and  
503 finds that part of regulation involves awareness of this subjectivity and bias from  
504 the outset. We would like to emphasise here the need for further research on  
505 emotional regulation in language classrooms, as the factors (cognitive, social,  
506 cultural) which contribute to the emotional climate of the L2 classroom can be quite  
507 different from those in L1 classrooms. The emotion regulation methods outlined  
508 herein are simply a starting point from which teachers can mediate their feelings in  
509 response not only to negative affective silences, but to all student emotions  
510 encountered in the emotional cauldron of the language classroom.

### 511 **Recommended Readings**

- 512 – Gregersen, T. (2007). Breaking the code of silence: A study of teachers' non-  
513 verbal decoding accuracy of foreign language anxiety. *Language Teaching*  
514 *Research, 11*(2), 209–221.  
515 An intriguing study on a little-researched topic, Gregersen investigates how  
516 accurate the trainee L2 teachers in her sample were at spotting whether learners  
517 were anxious or not during a speaking test based purely on the students' body  
518 language.
- 519 – Humphries, S., Burns, A., & Tanaka, T. (2015). "My head became blank and I  
520 couldn't speak": Classrooms factors that influence English speaking. *The Asian*  
521 *Journal of Applied Linguistics, 2*(3), 164–175.  
522 In response to difficulties implementing a communicative language teaching  
523 approach within EFL classes at Japanese universities, Humphries and his col-  
524 leagues report on a questionnaire-based study which aimed to explore learners'  
525 perceptions of their capacity to speak during L2 lessons. Based on the findings,  
526 a series of classroom-based strategies are provided that teachers can implement  
527 to help improve oral participation levels.
- 528 – King, J. (2013). *Silence in the second language classroom*. Basingstroke:  
529 Palgrave Macmillan.  
530  
531  
532

This book provides a comprehensive overview of L2 classroom silence, exploring the multiple forms, causes and meanings of different silences that can occur during the complex process of learning a foreign language. Linking the psychological to the social, King paints a picture of language learners in Japan for whom in-class emotions and silence are indelibly linked.

- King, J. (2016). “It’s time, put on the smile, it’s time!”: The emotional labour of second language teaching within a Japanese university. In C. Gkonou, D. Tatzl, & S. Mercer (Eds.), *New Directions in Language Learning Psychology* (pp. 97–112). Dordrecht: Springer.

In one of the first empirical studies to investigate L2 teacher’s emotions from an emotional labour perspective, King provides an account of the ways in which a group of expatriate English teachers working at a private university in Japan managed their emotions in order to conform to what they deemed were ‘appropriate’ emotional displays for the classroom contexts in which they taught. The chapter also discusses the links between emotional labour, teacher stress and eventual burnout.

- King, J., & Smith, L. (2017). Social anxiety and silence in Japan’s tertiary foreign language classrooms. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney, & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New insights into language anxiety: Theory, research and educational implications* (pp. 92–110). Bristol: Multilingual Matters.

Building upon King’s (2014) study, King and Smith discuss the ways in which psychological and emotional factors interact with both micro and macro-level contextual issues to support the silent behaviour of socially inhibited learners. The chapter includes a cognitive-behavioural model of a silent L2 learner’s social anxiety which illustrates the links between an anxious learner’s thoughts, behaviours and environment, and offers practical suggestions aimed at helping educators reduce social anxiety within classrooms and better understand silence incidents when they occur.

### Questions for Reflection and Discussion

- What are some likely factors that contribute to silence among language learners in your own classroom?
- Do you normally interpret student silence as a negative phenomenon, and if so, how does that affect your teaching/learning?
- When faced with silence, should teachers place more agency on themselves or on their students, and for what reason?
- Which (if any) of the emotional management strategies mentioned here do you use or would you likely use in your future teaching?



## References

572

- 573 Acheson, K., Taylor, J., & Luna, K. (2016). The burnout spiral: The emotion labor of five rural U.  
574 S. foreign language teachers. *The Modern Language Journal*, 100(2), 522–537.
- 575 Agyekum, K. (2002). The communicative role of silence in Akan. *Pragmatics*, 12(1), 31–52.
- 576 Basso, K. (1990). ‘To give up on words’: Silence in Western Apache culture. In D. Carbaugh  
577 (Ed.), *Cultural communication and intercultural contact* (pp. 303–320). Hillsdale, NJ:  
578 Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.
- 579 Brown, P., & Levinson, S. (1987). *Politeness: Some universals in language usage*. Cambridge:  
580 Cambridge University Press.
- 581 Chang, M.-L., & Davis, H. A. (2009). Understanding the role of teacher appraisals in shaping the  
582 dynamics of their relationships with students: Deconstructing teachers’ judgments of disruptive  
583 behaviour/students. In P. A. Schutz & M. Zembylas (Eds.), *Advances in teacher emotion  
584 research: The impact on teachers’ lives* (pp. 95–127). New York: Springer.
- 585 Denzin, N. (1984). *On understanding emotion*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- 586 Frenzel, A. C., Goetz, T., Stephens, E. J., & Jacob, B. (2009). Antecedents and effects of teachers’  
587 emotional experiences: An integrated perspective and empirical test. In P. A. Schutz &  
588 M. Zembylas (Eds.), *Advances in teacher emotion research: The impact on teachers’ lives*  
589 (pp. 129–152). New York: Springer.
- 590 Gilmore, P. (1985). Silence and sulking: Emotional displays in the classroom. In D. Tannen &  
591 M. Saville-Troike (Eds.), *Perspectives on silence* (pp. 139–162). Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.
- 592 Gorsuch, G. (1998). Yakudoku EFL instruction in two Japanese high school classrooms: An  
593 exploratory study. *JALT Journal*, 20(1), 6–32.
- 594 Grandey, A. A. (2000). Emotional regulation in the workplace: A new way to conceptualize  
595 emotional labor. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 5(1), 95–110.
- 596 Gregersen, T. (2007). Breaking the code of silence: A study of teachers’ nonverbal decoding  
597 accuracy of foreign language anxiety. *Language Teaching Research*, 11(2), 209–221.
- 598 Gross, T. T. (1998). Antecedent- and response-focused emotion regulation: Divergent conse-  
599 quences for experience, expression and physiology. *Journal of Personality and Social  
600 Psychology*, 74, 224–237.
- 601 Hargreaves, A. (2000). Mixed emotions: Teachers’ perceptions of their interactions with students.  
602 *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 16, 811–826.
- 603 Harumi, S. (2011). Classroom silence: Voices from Japanese EFL learners. *ELTJ*, 65(3), 260–269.
- 604 Hino, N. (1988). Yakudoku: Japan’s dominant tradition in foreign language learning. *JALT  
605 Journal*, 10, 45–53.
- 606 Hochschild, A. R. (1983). *The managed heart: The commercialization of human feeling*. Berkeley,  
607 CA: University of California Press.
- 608 Hochschild, A. R. (1990). Ideology and emotional management: A perspective and path for future  
609 research. In T. D. Kemper (Ed.), *Research agendas on the sociology of emotions* (pp. 117–  
610 142). Albany, NY: State University of New York Press.
- 611 Ingram, J., & Elliott, V. (2014). Turn taking and ‘wait time’ in classroom interactions. *Journal of  
612 Pragmatics*, 62, 1–12.
- 613 Isenbarger, L., & Zembylas, M. (2006). The emotional labour of caring in teaching. *Teaching and  
614 Teacher Education*, 22(1), 120–134.
- 615 Jaworski, A., & Sachdev, I. (1998). Beliefs about silence in the classroom. *Language and  
616 Education*, 12(4), 273–292.
- 617 Jiang, J., Vauras, M., Volet, S., & Wang, Y. (2016). Teachers’ emotions and emotion regulation  
618 strategies: Self- and students’ perceptions. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 54, 22–31.
- 619 King, J. (2013). *Silence in the second language classroom*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- 620 King, J. (2014). Fear of the true self: Social anxiety and the silent behaviour of Japanese learners of  
621 English. In K. Csizér & M. Magid (Eds.), *The impact of self-concept on language learning*  
622 (pp. 232–249). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.



- 623 King, J. (2015a). *The dynamic interplay between context and the language learner*. Basingstroke:  
624 Palgrave Macmillan.
- 625 King, J. (2015b). Classroom silence and the dynamic interplay between context and the language  
626 learner: A stimulated recall study. In J. King (Ed.), *the dynamic interplay between context and*  
627 *the language learner* (pp. 127–150). Basingstroke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- 628 King, J. (2016). “It’s time, put on the smile, it’s time!”: The emotional labour of second language  
629 teaching within a Japanese university. In C. Gkonou, D. Tatzl, & S. Mercer (Eds.), *New*  
630 *directions in language learning psychology* (pp. 97–112). Dordrecht: Springer.
- 631 King, J., & Ng, K-Y. S. (in press). Teacher emotions and the emotional labour of second language  
632 teaching. In S. Mercer & A. Kostoulas (Eds.), *Teacher psychology in SLA*. Bristol: Multilingual  
633 Matters.
- 634 King, J., & Smith, L. (2017). Social anxiety and silence in Japan’s tertiary foreign language  
635 classrooms. In C. Gkonou, M. Daubney, & J.-M. Dewaele (Eds.), *New insights into language*  
636 *anxiety: Theory, research and educational implications* (pp. 92–110). Bristol: Multilingual  
637 Matters.
- 638 Kurzon, D. (1998). *Discourse of silence*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- 639 Kyriacou, C. (2001). Teacher stress: Directions for future research. *Educational Review*, 53(1),  
640 27–35.
- 641 Larsen-Freeman, D. (1997). Chaos/complexity science and second language acquisition. *Applied*  
642 *Linguistics*, 18(2), 141–65.
- 643 Larsen-Freeman, D. (2007). On the complementarity of chaos/complexity theory and dynamic  
644 systems theory in understanding the second language acquisition process. *Bilingualism:*  
645 *Language and Cognition*, 10, 35–37.
- 646 Lebra, T. (1976). *Japanese patterns of behavior*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.
- 647 Li, H. (2001). Silences and silencing silences. In *Philosophy of Education Studies yearbook*.  
648 Champaign: University of Illinois.
- 649 Long, M. H. (1996). The role of the linguistic environment in second language acquisition. In  
650 W. C. Ritchie & T. K. Bhatia (Eds.), *Second language acquisition: Vol. II. Handbook of*  
651 *language acquisition* (pp. 413–468). New York: Academic Press.
- 652 Losey, K. M. (1997). *Listen to the Silences: Mexican American interaction in the composition*  
653 *classroom and community*. Norwood, N.J.: Ablex.
- 654 McVeigh, B. J. (2002). *Japanese higher education as myth*. Armonk, NY: M. E. Sharpe.
- 655 Nakane, I. (2007). *Silence in intercultural communication*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins.
- 656 Näring, G., Briët, M., & Brouwers, A. (2006). Beyond demand-control: Emotional labour and  
657 symptoms of burnout in teachers. *Work & Stress*, 20(4), 303–315.
- 658 Näring, G., Vlerick, P., & Van de Ven, B. (2012). Emotion work and emotional exhaustion in  
659 teachers: The job and individual perspective. *Educational Studies*, 38(1), 63–72.
- 660 Op’t Eyende, P., & Turner, J. (2006). Focusing on the complexity of emotion issues in academic  
661 learning: A dynamical component systems approach. *Educational Psychology Review*, 18,  
662 361–376.
- 663 Pavlenko, A. (2005). *Emotions and multilingualism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 664 Philips, S. U. (1976). Some sources of cultural variability in the regulation of talk. *Language in*  
665 *Society*, 5(1), 81–95.
- 666 Prior, M. (2015). *Emotion and discourse in L2 narrative research*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.
- 667 Reda, M. M. (2009). *Between speaking and silence: A study of quiet students*. Albany, NY: State  
668 University of New York Press.
- 669 Rowe, M. (1974). Pausing phenomena: Influence on the quality of instruction. *Journal of*  
670 *Psycholinguistic Research*, 3(3), 203–224.
- 671 Shrum, J. L. (1985). Wait-time and the use of target or native languages. *Foreign Language*  
672 *Annals*, 18(4), 305–314.
- 673 Sifianou, M. (1997). Silence and politeness. In A. Jaworski (Ed.), *Silence: Interdisciplinary*  
674 *perspectives* (pp. 63–84). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- 675 Sinclair, J., & Coulthard, M. (1975). *Towards an analysis of discourse*. Oxford University Press.

- 676 Smith, L., & King, J. (2017). A dynamic systems approach to wait time in the second language  
 677 classroom. *System*, 68, 1–14.
- 678 Sutton, R., & Wheatley, K. (2003). Teachers' emotions and teaching: A review of the literature  
 679 and directions for future research. *Educational Psychology Review*, 15(4), 327–358.
- 680 Sutton, R. (2004). Emotional regulation goals and strategies of teachers. *Social Psychology of*  
 681 *Education*, 7(4), 379–398.
- 682 Swain, M. (2005). The output hypothesis: Theory and research. In E. Hinkel (Ed.), *Handbook of*  
 683 *research in second language teaching and learning* (pp. 471–483). New York: Routledge.
- 684 Tsang, K. K. (2011). Emotional labor of teaching. *Educational Research*, 2(8), 1312–1316.
- 685 Tsui, A. (2001). Classroom interaction. In R. Carter & D. Nunan (Eds.), *The Cambridge guide to*  
 686 *teaching English to speakers of other languages*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- 687 Watts, R. (1997). Silence and the acquisition of status in verbal interactions. In A. Jaworski (Ed.),  
 688 *Silence: Interdisciplinary perspectives* (pp. 87–115). Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- 689 Yashima, T., Ikeda, M., & Nakahira, S. (2015). Talk and silence in an EFL context: Interplay of  
 690 learners and context. In J. King (Ed.), *The dynamic interplay between context and the language*  
 691 *learner* (pp. 104–126). Basingstroke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- 692 Zammuner, V. L., & Galli, C. (2005). Wellbeing: Causes and consequences of emotion regulation  
 693 in work settings. *International Review of Psychiatry*, 17(5), 355–364.
- 694 Zembylas, M. (2007). Emotional ecology: The intersection of emotional knowledge and  
 695 pedagogical content knowledge in teaching. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 23(4), 355–367.

## 696 Author Biographies

697 **Lesley Smith** holds a Master's degree in TESOL from the University of Leicester and will begin  
 698 her Ph.D. in Second and Foreign Language Acquisition at the University of South Carolina this  
 699 fall. She previously worked as an English language instructor at the University of Notre Dame and  
 700 for Richland County, South Carolina. She is particularly interested in social anxiety in adult  
 701 English language learners and in group dynamics in second and foreign language contexts.

702 **Jim King** is Lecturer in Education at the School of Education, University of Leicester, UK. Before  
 703 gaining his Ph.D. in Applied Linguistics from the University of Nottingham, Jim taught in various  
 704 Higher Education, EFL and EAP contexts around the world, including spells in Japan, Australia,  
 705 Poland, Hungary and Italy. His research interests focus on the issue of silence in education and on  
 706 psychological aspects of second language learning and teaching. His publications include the 2013  
 707 monograph *Silence in the second language classroom* and the 2015 edited volume *The dynamic*  
 708 *interplay between context and the language learner*, both published by Palgrave Macmillan.

709