Teacher Questioning and Construction of Opportunities for Chinese Language Learning[1]

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Abstract: In this study, adopting the sociocultural approach and the method of discourse analysis, we compared the classroom questioning behaviors of two Chinese language teachers. We examined how different patterns of teacher questioning create different opportunities for students' classroom discourse participation and influence the provision of scaffolded assistance for students' Chinese language learning. In the analysis, we focused on the dynamics of teachers' questioning process, paying close attention not only to the types of questions asked by the two teachers, but also teachers' questioning strategies and the interactional structure of teacher questioning. This study helps researchers as well as practitioners better understand the important role of classroom interaction in learning Chinese as a second language.

Keywords: Teacher Question, Chinese as Second Language, Socio-cultural Theory

提要：在社会文化理论框架内，利用话语分析的方法，本文对两名中文教师的课堂提问行为进行了比较分析。我们考察了不同模式的教师提问行为在创造学生课堂话语参与机会、为中文学习提供支架式帮助方面的差异。我们重点关注教师提问的动态过程，兼顾两名教师所提问题的类型，提问的策略以及提问话语的结构。本研究有助于我们进一步了解课堂互动在中文作为第二语言学习中的重要作用。

关键词：教师提问，中文作为第二语言，社会文化理论

Drawing upon the sociocultural theoretical framework and using the classroom data collected in Singapore, where Chinese is taught as a second language (L2) in the school setting, we aim to examine the structure and dynamics of dis-

[1] Writing of this paper was supported by the CORE Project (#CRP 7/03 AL) at the Center for Research in Pedagogy and Practice, Nanyang Technological University. We thank the teachers and the students for participating in this study. We are also grateful for the comments from two anonymous reviewers that have helped improve this paper. All mistakes, however, are our own.

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course underlying how teacher questioning constructs opportunities for students' discursive participation and mediates their learning of Chinese. To this end, we compare two Chinese language teachers' questioning behaviors. We focus our analyses on how the two teachers differ in constructing opportunities for the learning of Chinese in the classroom with their questioning process. We pay close attention not only to the types of questions asked by the two teachers, but also their questioning strategies and the interactional structure of questioning.

1. Teacher Questioning and Second Language Acquisition

The interaction between teacher and students in classroom discourse has been an important area of studies in the field of education in general and L2 education in particular (Cazden, 2001; Hall & Walsh, 2002; Johnson, 1995; Mehan, 1979). Among the various studies on teacher-student interaction in L2 classrooms, one area that has received much attention in the past decade is teacher questioning, one of the important discourse strategies used by teachers in classroom pedagogy. Research has examined from different perspectives how teachers' questions can contribute to students' L2 development (Chaudron, 1988; Ellis, 1994). A majority of these studies focused particularly on the effects of different types of teacher question in eliciting output from students, especially display and referential questions, which respectively refer to those to which the teacher knows (e.g., What does the word *computer* mean in Chinese?) and does not know the answer (e.g., Do you like Chinese culture?) (Brock, 1986; Long & Sato, 1983; Nunn, 1999). Based on the Output Hypothesis proposed by Swain (1995), which argues that pushed output from L2 learners is conducive to their L2 syntactic development, these studies showed that referential questions contribute more to students' L2 development as they tend to elicit longer and grammatically more complex utterances from students. Therefore they suggested that more referential questions be asked than display questions (Brock, 1986; Tsui, 1995).

In a pioneering study on the functions of L2 teachers' questions, Long and Sato (1983) found ESL (English as a Second Language) teachers asked predominantly more display questions than referential questions in the classroom setting, which marked a clear contrast to the proportional distribution of questions asked by native English speakers in conversation with non-native speakers where there was minimal number of display questions but very high percentage of referential questions. However, Long and Sato's study didn't relate these types of questions to students' responses. Therefore, while helping enhance the understanding about teachers' use of questions, the study didn't specifically address how these questions contribute to the acquisition of L2 linguistic and communi-

cative competence.

This research gap was addressed later in Brock's (1986) study, which directly examined the effects of L2 teachers' questions on learners' language production. In the study, Brock assigned four ESL teachers of adult learners into two experiment conditions. The two teachers in the treatment group received training in incorporating referential questions into their classroom activities, while the other two teachers in the control group were not provided with any such training. It was found that teachers in the treatment group asked significantly more referential questions than display questions. More importantly, the analyses of students' responses to the two types of questions, with regard to their length and syntactic complexity, showed significant advantage of referential questions over display questions, suggesting that teacher's referential questions should increase the amount of target language use by learners in the classroom. Corroborating Brock's findings, Shomoossi's (2004) study found displayed questions asked by university EFL teachers in Tehran significantly outnumbered referential questions, and the latter type of questions produced more classroom interaction, both between teacher and students and among students themselves.

While studies on teachers' questions in L2 classrooms seem to support the benefits of asking more referential questions, it should be noted that these output-based studies take language mainly as a system of linguistic forms and focus on the linguistic side of student interlanguage development. They pay little if any attention to the social processes of language use and the discourse dynamics underlying how teacher discourse affects students' L2 learning in classroom pedagogic practice. Therefore, there is recently in the field of L2 education a trend of adopting the Vygotskian perspective, which views learning as a dynamic meaning-making process with language as an important mediation tool, for examining classroom interaction and students' L2 learning (e.g., Donato, 1994; Hall & Verplaetse, 2000; Lantolf, 2000).

2. Sociocultural Theory and Teacher Questioning

The sociocultural approach to learning and classroom pedagogy views learning as a mediated process within social and cultural context (Lantolf, 2000; Wertsch & Toma, 1995). Vygotsky (1978) took social interaction as a prerequisite to the learning process, and he situated learning in the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD), which is described as the difference between the original independent capability of a learner and what he or she is able to achieve when given some intellectual guidance and support. According to Vygotsky, learning involves the transition from the social, intermental domain to the individual, intramental

domain, which takes place within the ZPD where the novice appropriates from the expert the cognitive functions necessary for carrying out a task or solving a problem (Kinginger, 2002; Lantolf, 2000).

The conception of outside assistance in the development of children is similarly expressed by Wood, Bruner and Ross (1976) as scaffolding, which refers to the supportive behaviors of an expert in assisting a child to solve a problem that he or she might not have been able to do unassisted. In classroom pedagogic practice, the notions of the ZPD and scaffolding highlight the way teachers can fine-tune their discourse and adapt the cognitive support to assist the participation of children in classroom activities, for example, by directing attention to key aspects of a task, simplifying a task, monitoring ongoing performance, and providing appropriate feedbacks depending on the children' level of understanding in classroom interaction (Mercer, 2000; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988).

Following this view of mediated learning, teacher questioning, the first move in the triadic dialogue between teacher and students which elicits most of student discourse, is a mediational tool that helps teacher assist and regulate students' reasoning and knowledge construction (Cazden, 2001; Tharp & Gallimore, 1988). In L2 classes, where language is the objective of learning as well as the medium of instruction, teacher questioning not only mediates knowledge construction as in content subject classes, but creates opportunities for students' use of the target language for classroom discourse participation, which contributes to their L2 learning (Johnson, 1995).

However, not all teacher questions are equally effective in constructing opportunities for students' discourse participation and scaffolding their L2 learning. Research has shown that interaction between teacher and students follows different patterns, and teacher-student interactional discourse of various forms may imply different opportunities for students' L2 learning (Hall, 1998; Hall & Walsh, 2002; Johnson, 1995; Walsh, 2002). With regard to teacher questioning behavior, while it is true that a referential question, which requires students to give their personal responses, tends to involve students in authentic communication, it may also fail to do so in that the students may have difficulty in answering the question. Also, although a display question asks students to display knowledge without being involved in authentic communication of ideas, it also functions as an important means that teachers use to check students' understanding in order to decide the next move of their discourse. Thus, whether or not a type of questions contributes to student learning seems to be dependent upon teachers' pedagogical purposes (Nunn, 1999; Walsh, 2002).

So far, there is only a small amount of research on L2 teacher questioning within the sociocultural theoretical framework. However, findings from a few

studies did provide some insights into how teacher questioning functions in L2 classrooms and how it scaffolds L2 learning. For example, McCormick and Donato (2000) examined the scaffolding functions of one university ESL teacher's questions and explored how her use of questions scaffolded L2 learning in relation to her pedagogic goals for student comprehension, comprehensibility, and participation. Using a sequential analysis of interaction between ESL teachers and students, Lee (2006) demonstrated that display questions are actually resources that teachers and students use to organize lessons collaboratively, and he argued that it would be premature to treat display questions simply as an ineffective instructional device for L2 learning without knowing how they are used in unfolding interactional discourse between teacher and students.

Overall, findings from existing studies seem to suggest that whether or not teacher questioning serves scaffolding and whether opportunities can be constructed in teacher-student interaction for L2 learning depends on how classroom discourse unfolds moment-to-moment as teachers fine-tune their discourse, such as adjusting questioning strategies and giving appropriate feedback to student response, to provide contingent help to guarantee maximal student participation (Hall, 1998; Hall & Walsh, 2002; Johnson, 1995). However, these findings largely come from ESL/EFL classrooms. So far, very limited empirical research has been conducted on teacher questioning and L2 learning in Chinese as a Second/Foreign Language (CSL/CFL) classrooms, and it is not clear to the CSL/CFL community how Chinese language teachers' questioning would influence students' learning. Therefore, by comparing two CSL teachers' questioning behaviors sampled from classroom data collected in the Singapore context, we aim to examine how the structure and dynamics of teachers' questioning discourse constructs opportunities for students' discursive participation and mediates their learning of Chinese.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Context and Participants

Under the bilingual policy in Singapore, English is the dominant language used as a *lingua franca* for administration, global business, science and technology; it is the *de facto* language used for wider communication among Singaporeans of different ethnic and social backgrounds (Shepherd, 2005; Silver, 2005). With the language-in-education planning in Singapore in the past decades (Kaplan & Baldauf, 2003), English is now taught as the first language and used as the medium of instruction in the school setting, and at the same time, Chinese one of

the mother tongues of the Singaporeans, is maintained and taught as an L2 with its proficiency seen as enabling direct access to Chinese cultural traditions and related values of the Singaporean Chinese community as well as a principal means of maintaining and developing Chinese cultural heritage (e.g., Chan, 2000; Shepherd, 2005).

Due to such important status of the Chinese language in Singapore, Chinese language education has always been given high priority in the agenda of education policy makers in the country. Recently, in line with the initiative of the Ministry of Education to reform Chinese language education by adopting a more student-centered, communicative-oriented pedagogy, Chinese language teachers in Singapore are encouraged to build a supportive and interactive environment to maximize students' engagement in classroom discourse to facilitate the development of communicative competence (Chin, 2003). However, there are so far few empirical studies examining what is going on in Chinese language classrooms, including teachers' pedagogic practice and students learning.

This important issue began to be addressed in 2003 when the Center for Research in Pedagogy and Practice (CRPP) at Nanyang Technological University started to carry out a large scale longitudinal CORE research project on Singapore schools (for detail, refer to Luke et al., 2005). The CORE project aimed to give, as one of its foci, a description of what happens in about 1,000 classroom lessons in the core curriculum areas in Singapore, including Math, Science, Social Studies, English and mother tongues (Chinese, Malay and Tamil). These lessons were coded "in real time" and were aggregated from a whole week of observation of instructional units in randomly sampled schools for two years from late 2003 to late 2005 by using the Singapore Pedagogy Coding Scheme. The coded data were analyzed statistically to identify different patterns and relationships for various purposes. At the same time, these lessons were also audio-taped (with some videotaped) and transcribed for building a computer corpus of classroom interactional discourse.

As a part of CRPP's CORE project, a corpus of Chinese language classroom data has also been built, and it contains transcribed data of about 150 hours out of 38 units of Grade 5 and Grade 6 classes. The data of this paper are drawn from two Grade 5 classes. The two classes are selected for the current study because they are similar in composition (about 40 students); the teachers of the two classes, one female and one male, have similar years of experience (two-three years) in teaching Chinese in elementary schools in Singapore; the two classes also follow the same curriculum that offers the same textbook and evaluation procedure, but there are considerable variations in actual teaching practices between the two teachers in terms of their questioning behaviors and the learning

opportunities constructed for students learning.

The two interactional excerpts we will compare in the following section are typical of the two teachers' questioning behaviors in the four lessons of a whole-unit classroom teaching. The interactions in the two excerpts reflect two different ways in which questions are used to engage students through classroom discourse participation. However, we should point out that the analyses that follow are by no means a comprehensive examination of teacher questioning behaviors in Chinese language classrooms in Singapore. Rather, these are "telling cases" (Mitchell, 1984, p.239) of how teachers' questioning strategies affect the construction of opportunities for students' classroom discourse participation and the development of their communicative competence in Chinese.

3.2 Method of Analysis

We use Discourse Analysis as the method for the examination of how teacher questions are structured interactionally in constructing opportunities for student learning. Discourse Analysis focuses on the study of extended talk in natural settings rather than individual utterances in isolation (Riggenbach, 1999; Stubbs, 1983). It considers context to be of primary importance and pays close attention to the surrounding text and the sociocultural environment that frames the production and interpretation of message (Riggenbach, 1999). Because its power in elucidating and interpreting discourse processes, Discourse Analysis has now gone far beyond its original discipline as a linguistic inquiry and become a powerful methodological tool in addressing sociolinguistic issues of talk in classroom learning and teaching (Cazden, 2001; Gee & Green, 1998).

For classroom L2 learning, discourse analysis, by describing in detail how interaction is carried out in classroom contexts, provides a good explication of how language is used by teacher and students to construct and negotiate meaning for the development of students' L2 competence. Therefore, through the analysis of the discourse dynamics of teacher-student talk, the process of how teacher uses and adapts his or her talk to engage students' participation and language learning can be revealed and how questions are used in interaction to facilitate students' discourse participation and scaffold L2 learning can be better explicated and understood.

In what follows, through comparison of two interactional excerpts using the method of Discourse Analysis, we explicate the communicative dynamics of teachers' classroom questioning behaviors and its effects on the construction of opportunities for students' discourse participation. In the comparison, we pay close attention to the dynamics and structure of teacher questioning and the roles

of different types of questions and questioning strategies in promoting negotiation of meaning between teacher and students. We describe what teacher and students do within the evolving sequence of talk and analyze how teachers ask questions, how students make sense of them and how teachers deal with student contributions. The classroom audio data are transcribed in Chinese characters with the software *Transcriber*, following its transcribing convention (see Appendix). An approximate English translation for each turn in the excerpts is provided right beside the turn, and the salient paralinguistic features are also noted. All the names in the excerpts are pseudonyms.

4. Dialogic Interaction: Learning Facilitation

The interactions in Excerpt 1 in this section and Excerpt 2 in the next section take place right after students' silent reading of the texts in question and before the session of teacher's systematic explanation of the text in the first class of a new lesson unit. Both of the two teachers try to, through asking students questions, involve students in classroom interaction. However, as we will see in the following analysis, the interactions between the teacher and students in the two excerpts reflect two different ways in which questions are used to construct opportunities for students learning.

Excerpt 1

1	Teacher	好，那你们在德丰小学已经读了五年的书， %% 今年是第五年。有谁能够告诉老师你们这五年来有没有碰过一些 %% 同学啊，自私的行为，不要讲名字，只能够说他一些自私的行为，讲出来。 %% 来，耀东，说说看。	Ok, you have been studying in Defeng Primary School for 5 years, %% this year is the 5th year. Who can tell me some selfish behaviors of your %% classmates that you found in these 5 years. Don't tell the name. You can only tell his selfish behaviors. %% Ok, Yaodong, have a try.
2	Yaodong	大概 *[$]-* 就是我 *-[$]* 。	Perhaps *[$]-* it is my *-[$]*.
3	Teacher	你要说你自己很自私，怎样个自私法，都可以，没问题。	If you want to say you are very selfish, how selfish, it's ok, no problem.
4	Qiying	老师，我讲。	Teacher, me.

5	Teacher	Hah？ %% 你自己有自私的行为呢，你要讲出来也行，不一定是说你朋 _ 同学的。 好，来，齐英。	Hah? %% If you have selfish behaviors of yourself, you can also tell them. Not necessarily of your friend _ classmates. Ok, Qiying.
6	Qiying	我的一个朋友 hor。	I have a friend hor.
7	Teacher	Ah。	Ah.
8	Qiying	他自己有 _ 那个笔 hor，and then hor，	He had his _ own pens hor, and then hor,
9	Teacher	Ah。	Ah.
10	Qiying	向我借。	Borrowed from me.
11	Teacher	他自己有笔却向你借。	He had his own pens but wanted to borrow from you.
12	Qiying	Ah。	Ah.
13	Teacher	那你怎么知道他自己有笔呢？	Then how do you know he had his own pens?
14	Qiying	因为我坐在他旁边 hor，然后 hor，我知道他有一个笔嘛。	Because I sat beside him hor, then hor, I knew he had a pen.
15	Teacher	Ah，那么，他有说出他的理由吗？ 为什么他要向你借笔呢？	Ah, then, did he say his reasons? Why did he want to borrow a pen from you?
16	Qiying	没有。	No.
17	Teacher	没有。那你凭什么能够判断他是 = 这种是一种自私的行为呢？ 明白我的意思吗？既然他跟你借笔，你又知道他的文具盒里有很多支笔，他又没有把理由告诉你，你又怎么能够判断这是一种自私的行为呢？ 来，有谁能够帮他回答？ 来，班长。	No. Then on what basis did you make the judgment he is = this is a selfish behavior? Understand me? Since he wanted to borrow a pen from you, you knew he had many pens in his pencil box, and he didn't tell you the reasons, then how could you judge it as a selfish behavior? Ok, who can help Qiying to answer? Ok, monitor.
18	Monitor	Hah？	Hah?
19	Teacher	刚才我问的问题明白吗？	Do you understand the question I just asked?
20	Monitor	Ah。	Ah.

21	Teacher	啊。齐英说，他的同学跟他借笔，但是齐英发现他的文具盒里有很多支笔。 然后呢，他的同学又没有告诉他借笔的理由， %% 好，他凭什么能够判断呢，是这个同学很自私？	Ah. Qiying said, his friend borrowed a pen from him, but Qiying found there were many pens in his pencil box. Then, his classmate didn't tell him why he wanted to borrow a pen, %% Ok, how could he make the judgment that his friend was selfish?
22	Monitor	啊，因为 hor，可能他知道他的朋友，因为 hor，他觉得他 = 他 = 他的那些笔没有什么用，觉得齐英的那些笔比较好用，所以就向他 _ 跟他借。	Ah, because hor, maybe he knew that his friend, because hor, he felt that he = he = his pens are of no use, felt Qiying's pens are good to use, so from him _ borrowed from him.
23	Teacher	Ah，但是这能够证明呢，他的同学是自私的吗？	Ah, but can this prove, his classmate is selfish?
24	Student	不能 *[* 够。*]*	Can *[*not*]*.
25	Student	*[* 不 *]* 对！	*[*No*]*.
26	Teacher	自私，我们 = 我们的定义是什么？	Selfishness, our = our definition is what?
27	Monitor	自私就是 *[(..)* 只为自己 *]* 着想。	Selfish means *[*only think of oneself*]*.
28	Student	*[*自己东西。 *]*	*[*One's own things.*]*
29	Teacher	Ah。那么他那，刚才那个借笔的那_ 这件事情呢，有没有 _	Ah. Then his, his behavior of borrowing pens _ is it _
30	Monitor	Ah，有 = 有 = 有。	Ah, yes = yes = yes.
31	Teacher	有吗？	Yes?
32	Monitor	他自己用那个 ink hor，然后不想到 ah，齐英 hor，以后会可不可以用，人家用完了 *$*。	He used that ink hor, then didn't know, ah, Qiying hor, later will use his or not, he used already *$*.
33	Teacher	那是 *[$]-* 你的推断，对不对？ *-[$]*	That's *[$]-* your deduction, right? *-[$]*
34	Monitor	*$*	*$*
35	Teacher	好，但是他有没有真正这样想呢？齐英有没有 _ ok，比	Ok, but did he really think like this? Does Qiying _ ok, for example, did Qiying

		方说，齐英你有没有跟那个同学借那支笔？ 有没有跟他借笔过？	borrow pens from the classmate? Have you ever borrowed pens from him?
36	Qiying	*(.)* 有。	*(.)* Yes.
37	Teacher	有。他有没有借给你？	Yes. Did he lend to you?
38	Qiying	## 有。	## Yes.
39	Teacher	啊，他如果有借给你，怎么 = 你怎么能够说 *[$]-* 是自私 *-[$]* 的呢？	Ah, if he lent his pens to you, how come = how can you say *[$]-* he is selfish *-[$]* ?
40	Class	*$$*	*$$*
41	Teacher	*[$]-* 对不对 *-[$]* ？	*[$]-* Right *-[$]* ?

The exemplar text of this unit is about how a selfish boy (selfish in terms of not willing to help his classmates with their studies) finally changed his attitude after he received much help from his classmates when he was back to school from hospital. In asking students questions to discuss what constitutes selfish behavior, the teacher creates a context in which students have the floor to share their personal experiences through interaction with their teacher. Throughout the interaction, most of the questions the teacher asks are those to which he does not have an answer (such as in turns 1, 13, 15). To put it another way, the students, rather than the teacher, are the primary knowers, and the teacher is seeking opinions rather than facts from the students. For example, after Qiying says that his friend wanted to borrow a pen from him even though the friend had his own pens (turns 6, 8, 10), the teacher builds upon the responses, asking a referential question ("Then how do you know he had his own pens" in turn 13) to scaffold Qiying to think further about the behavior of the friend to understand what constitutes selfish behavior. And in so doing, the teacher engages Qiying further in classroom discourse by requiring him to use the target language to reason for his argument.

The effect of the questions on students' language use can also be found in the strategies used by the teacher when he reformulates questions. In turn 17, thinking of the difficulty in putting the factors together ("Then how do you know he had his own pens?" in turn 13 and "Why did he want to borrow a pen from you?" in turn 15) on the part of the student, the teacher summarizes the points and builds upon the responses given by Qiying with a probing questioning ("… then how could you judge it as a selfish behavior?"). This also takes place when the monitor is nominated to answer the questions. The teacher by repeating the question in turn 21 provides the monitor with necessary scaffolded assistance to help him get a whole picture of the task in question and asks him to make a

judgment on whether the behavior of Qiying's friend is a selfish one or there are some scenarios that might make the behavior a selfish one. This summary of points and repetition of the questions engages students with each other's idea and provides a good chance for students to think critically and reason dialogically (turn 22).

Another point related to the construction of opportunities for students' discourse participation by teacher questioning is the appropriate feedback strategies of the teacher. While interacting with the students, the teacher uses many back-channeling cues to show his attention to and acknowledgement of student discourse contribution while withholding evaluations on students' responses. By withholding evaluations, the teacher on the one hand encourages students to use the target language to express themselves, on the other hand, makes the interaction more like authentic communication where participants rarely provide evaluations on each other's discourse. For example, when Qiying is telling his story in answering the teacher's question, the teacher acknowledges his contribution with back-channeling cues ("Ah" in turns 7 and 9), and re-voices the story (turn 11) to get more students to think about it. What is more important is that the teacher often builds upon student responses with follow-up questions (e.g., "how do you know he had his own pens?" in turn 13, "Why did he want to borrow a pen from you?" in turn 13, "how could you judge it as a selfish behavior" in turn17), thus making the interaction more dialogically constructed.

Generally, the conversation is coherently constructed around the questions raised by the teacher for the understanding of text with students communicating in the target language. In the excerpt, the teacher skillfully integrates the use of different types of questions. While he uses referential questions for students to use Chinese for self-expression, he also uses display questions to recap and consolidate existing knowledge in class and link students' existing knowledge to the problem in question (such as checking students' understanding of the definition of "selfishness" in turn 26). By using these display questions, the teacher diagnoses the students' ZPD for the fine-tuning of his ensuing discourse to promote students' understanding and discourse participation. In addition, in the interaction, the teacher consistently acknowledges students' contributions while withholding evaluations. These feedbacks provide students with necessary encouragement and support while they are expressing themselves, thus making the interaction coherent and sustained. The conversation very much features dialogic interaction where teachers ask referential questions and build upon student responses with probing questions for collaborative knowledge building. This dialogic feature of the interaction can also be found in the sequential organization of the interaction in which the teacher directs the question for Qiying to the monitor (turn 17) and

finally directs the question back to Qiying (turn 35). This distribution of cognition in dialogic interaction perfectly fulfills the teacher's pedagogic purpose of getting students to understand what selfishness is while engaging them in using the target language for classroom discussion, which is conducive to the development of students' communicative competence in Chinese.

5. Teacher Dominance: Limited Opportunity for Learning

Excerpt 2

1	Teacher	可以吗？请问义斜，故事中发生在什么地方？ 故事发生在哪里？	Ok? Please tell us, Yixie, where this story took place? Where did this story take place?
2	Yixie	学校。	School.
3	Teacher	好啊，故事绝对不是发生在我们的学校。那间学校有自己的名，请问是什么？刚在我好像已经说了，而且	Ah, the story absolutely didn't take place in our school. The school has its name, what is the name? I seemed to have said it just now, and…
4	Yixie	英国威廉皇家学院。	Yingguo Wilian Huangjia Xueyuan.
5	Teacher	以后请你站起来啊，你的屁股不要粘在那边啊。Okay， 好。彦卫，请你告诉我故事中的其中一个人物，一个就好。	Next time please stand up. Your butt never sticks there. Okay, alright. Yanwei, please tell me one of the characters in the story, one is enough.
6	Yanwei	什么意思？	What?
7	Teacher	故事中有提到某一些人物，请你告诉我其中一个。	In the story there are some characters. Please tell me one of them.
8	Yanwei	布拉格 ((ge4))。	Bu la ge ((ge4)).
9	Teacher	布拉格 ((ge3))。另外 一个是他的？	Bu la ge ((ge3)). Another one is his?
10	Yanwei	父亲。	Father.
11	Teacher	父亲。还有提到谁？如果讲到学院，学校，应该会提到	Father. Who else are mentioned? If college, school is talked about, there should be…

12	Yanwei	*[*学生。 *]*	*[*Students*]*.
13	Class	*CHORUS* *[*校长。 *]*	*CHORUS* *[*Headmaster*]*.
14	Teacher	校长。还有？	Headmaster. Who else?
15	Yanwei	老师。	Teacher.
16	Teacher	没有老师。	No teacher.
17	Class	*CHORUS*同学。	*CHORUS* Student.
18	Teacher	同学们，对。而跟这故事很有关的是什么东西？	Students, right. What is closely related to this story?
19	Yanwei	大皮鞋。	Big leather shoes.
20	Teacher	大皮鞋。你们脚穿的是皮鞋吗？	Big leather shoes. Are the shoes you wear on your feet leather shoes?
21	Class	*CHORUS*不是。	*CHORUS* No.
22	Teacher	不 *[*是，是什么？*]*	No. *[*It is what?*]*
23	Student	*[*是袜子。 *]*	*[*Socks.*]*
24	Student	袜子。	Socks.
25	Student	鞋。	Shoes.
26	Teacher	袜子，放在外面的是？	Socks, then outside of the socks are?
27	Class	*CHORUS* 鞋子。	*CHORUS* shoes.
28	Teacher	哪种鞋？	What kind of shoes?
29	Student	布鞋。	Cloth shoes.
30	Teacher	不叫布鞋。	Not called cloth shoes
31	Student	白鞋。	White shoes.
32	Student	学校鞋。	School shoes.
33	Teacher	也不叫白鞋。只有 *[E]*- Mr Yeo -*[E]* 穿皮鞋， 那你们都穿什么？	Not called white shoes either. Only *[E]*- Mr Yeo -*[E]* wears leather shoes, then what do you wear?
34	Student	学校的鞋子。	School shoes.
35	Teacher	那种布料叫什么？	What is the name of the material of the shoes?
36	Student	白鞋。	White shoes.
37	Teacher	不叫白鞋。*[* 白色 *]* 是因为他的颜色。	Not called white shoes. *[*White*]* is the color of the shoes.
38	Student	*[* 皮鞋。*]*	Leather *[*shoes.*]*
39	Teacher	*[E]*- Mr Yeo -*[E]* 才穿皮鞋。	*[E]*- Mr Yeo -*[E]* wears leather shoes.

40	Student	学校穿的鞋。	Shoes worn in school.
41	Teacher	这个东西！这是什么？	This! This is called what?
42	Student	老师，我知道。船鞋。	Teacher, I know. Boat shoes.
43	Teacher	英文说 *[E]*- Canvas shoe *-[E]* 对吗？	In English *[E]*- canvas shoe *-[E]*, right?
45	Student	啊。	Ah.
46	Teacher	华文叫什么？	What is it called in Chinese?
47	Student	帆布。	Canvas.
48	Teacher	对，帆布鞋啊，你们穿的都是这一种。这个故事跟大皮鞋有关系。这双大皮鞋 (..) 大到 (.) 怎么样？继续看下去。	Right, canvas shoes, this is the type you all wear. This story has something to do with big leather shoes. This pair of big leather shoes (..) how big (.) are they? Let's continue.

There are similarities between this excerpt and the one discussed earlier: both classes are similar in size, composition and level, and the teachers' aims are more or less the same, focusing on engaging students in classroom interaction for better understanding of the text. Yet, there are significant differences in teachers' questioning process, the length of student response and overall quality of teacher and student contributions. While there obviously exist some variables which make direct comparison difficult – teacher beliefs and teaching styles, different texts in terms of content (the former is a story about the selfishness of a school boy, while the latter is a story about a British boy who came from a poor family but later became a famous scientist), to mention just a few – there are nonetheless substantial differences in teacher's questioning behaviors which contribute to the different discourse patterns and the construction of opportunities for student learning.

While in Excerpt 1 the questions asked by the teacher are often referential, the questions the teacher asks of the students in Excerpt 2 are almost all display questions (e.g., "Where did this story take place?" in turn 1, "In the story there are some characters. Please tell me one of them" in turn 7), which very often only require students to give only one or two words for factual recall or reproduction of knowledge (such as, "School" in turn 2, "Bu la ge" in turn 9, "Father" in turn 10, "Student" in turn 17). By asking these questions, the teacher in Excerpt 2 wants to check whether students understood the target text in question after their silent-reading of that text. Whether or not students could display their knowledge to answer these questions is valuable to her pedagogical decision-making in the next move. Therefore, the teacher's use of display questions at the initial stage of

her talk with students seems to serve her pedagogical purpose well, as students give pertinent answers to her questions.

Beyond this initial similarity, however, there is a clear difference between the two teachers in terms of the specific questioning strategies they use, which suggests different level of student involvement in classroom discourse and opportunity for learning. While in Excerpt 1 the teacher can adapt his questioning strategies to meet the need of the students, the teacher in Excerpt 2 obviously lacks means to fine-tune her discourse, which provides a very limited amount of scaffolded assistance for students' classroom learning with regard to constructing opportunities for target language use. In the interaction, to get students to use the Chinese word for *canvas* to describe their shoes, the teacher asks a series of closed questions (e.g., "Are the shoes you wear on your feet leather shoes?" in turn 20, "Socks, then outside of the socks are?" in turn 26, "What kind of shoes?" in turn 28). However, there is obviously no uptake of the teacher's question whose purpose is not clear to the students, and the teacher lacks means to scaffold students in arriving at the answers with appropriate questioning strategies. All that the students do is to guess what the teacher wants (e.g., "Socks" in turn 24, "Cloth shoes" in turn 29, "White shoes" in turn 31), and the teacher rejects students' answers one after another until the correct answer has been produced ("Canvas" in turn 47). In general, the interaction becomes a guessing game in which the students try best to guess what is in the mind of the teacher. Therefore, the questions asked by the teacher have very limited contribution to constructing opportunities for students' classroom discourse participation.

The feedback strategies used by the teacher in Excerpt 2 are also different from those used in Excerpt 1. While in Excerpt 1 acknowledgement is given and direct evaluation is withheld to encourage students' discourse engagement, the teacher in Excerpt 2 evaluates students' responses very frequently and many of them are negative evaluations (e.g., "No teacher" in turn 16, "Not called cloth shoes" in turn 30, "Not called white shoes either" in turn 33). These negative feedbacks always keep the students on the track to arrive at correct answers, and discourage the potential for long and sustained student output. More importantly, the teacher cannot adapt her questioning strategies to scaffold the students after the negative evaluations are given.

While there is clear evidence that teacher-student exchanges in Excerpt 1 feature dialogic interaction where students and teacher are involved in meaningful communication, the discourse in Excerpt 2 is very pre-scripted where the teacher as the primary knower of knowledge controls the flow of the talk with the questions she asks of the students. Students are only involved in reproducing information that is already known to the teacher without chances to give personal

responses. From turn 20 to turn 48, the students, by giving short answers, are put in a position to guess what their teacher wants and their answers are often negatively evaluated or rejected by their teacher. In such a case, few communicative opportunities are constructed for students to use Chinese for participating in classroom discourse, and scaffolded assistance for students learning is very limited.

6. Conclusion

In this study, drawing upon the sociocultural approach, we compared the questioning behaviors of two Chinese language teachers. We examined the dynamics of teachers' questioning process and its effects on constructing opportunities for students' language use and scaffolding students learning. We have shown that in one class, the teacher, by asking students' referential questions and adjusting his questioning strategies, successfully created opportunities for maximum learner involvement in meaningful communication. The teachers' withholding of evaluative feedback allows for further discourse engagement on the part of the students, and involves students in dialogic interaction for the development of their communicative competence. However, in the other class, the teacher hinders student communicative involvement and discourse participation because of her predominant use of display questions and use of negative feedback, and lack of fine-tuning of discourse in providing students with necessary scaffolded assistance.

In the literature, teacher questioning is believed to play an important role in facilitating students' L2 learning. However, many studies on teacher questioning behaviors treat teacher questioning as isolated and discrete pedagogic behavior, while paying little if any attention to the dynamics of the questioning process. Recent development in research on L2 teaching and learning suggests an alternative approach, that is, Sociocultural Theory, for examination of classroom discourse process and L2 learning. Studies already show that different patterns of teacher-student interaction can create different opportunities for students' use of the target language in classroom discourse participation, and therefore their effects on students' L2 learning are different (Hall & Walsh, 2002; Johnson, 1995).

Our study adds to this line of research by focusing on teacher's questioning process. In our analysis of teacher questioning behavior within its discourse context, we showed that teacher questioning is a complex discourse phenomenon. It can be of different discourse patterns which construct different opportunities for students' L2 learning. Its effects on students' L2 learning depend largely on how questions are asked rather than merely on what types of question are asked, such

as teachers' fine-tuning of discourse to meet the needs of students by repeating or simplifying a question, and building upon student's response with follow-up questions.

If we consider language learning as a process of students' engagement with active problem-solving, a process in which students use the target language for communicating ideas through participating in classroom discourse, then the question-answer exchanges between teacher and students are not merely teaching activities, but learning opportunities as well. The quality of teacher questioning to a certain extent determines the opportunities for language learning. The study reported in this paper, from a pedagogic perspective, shows how teacher's questioning behaviors can contribute to the construction of opportunity for students' discourse participation and scaffolding language learning.

The study should help Chinese language teachers and teacher educators, not only in Singapore but in other contexts as well, build a better understanding of the dynamics in L2 classroom interactions and the influence of teacher-student interaction on CSL/CFL learning. As mentioned at the beginning of this paper, insights into the effects of classroom interaction in general and teacher questioning in specific on students' L2 learning largely come from studies on ESL/EFL classrooms; very limited research has been conducted on CSL/CFL classroom interaction and learning. Recently, a few Chinese language researchers (e.g., Jin, 2004) have highlighted the importance of teaching questioning in CSL/CFL learning and called for training on Chinese language teachers' questioning skills. However, what is actually happening in the "black-box" of Chinese language classrooms is still not clear to the Chinese teaching and research community. In addition, previous discussions in the Chinese community on Chinese pedagogy have not systematically built classroom discourse analysis into their rationale of instruction design. In these regards, the current study would provide Chinese language teachers with an understanding of the nature of CSL classroom interaction, and a framework whereby they can reflect upon their own pedagogical behaviors (for example, by asking such questions as "What was the purpose of my asking this question?" and "Did my questioning achieve the expected effect in getting learners to use the target language?") and conduct appropriate action research to fine-tune their pedagogy to meet the communicative needs of learners. In addition, this study would provide a methodological tool that Chinese language educators can use in designing appropriate pre-service or in-service professional development materials, and raising teachers' awareness of how classroom discourse structure and dynamics influence the extent to which students are given the opportunity to participate in classroom interaction for CSL/CFL learning.

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Appendix: Transcription Conventions

%%	Inaudible background conversation
$	Laughter
$$	Extended laughter
[$]	Laughter quality in utterance
_	Cut off (after incomplete utterance)
=	Latching (without any pause)
[	Overlap onset
]	Overlap termination
[E]	Code-switch to English
##	Background noise
(.)	Gap between utterances
(..)	Extended gap between utterances
. . .	Trail off
(( ))	Transcriber comment on the utterance
CHORUS	Chorus voice
Teacher	Teacher
Qiying etc.	Names of students nominated by teacher
Student	Student whose name is not identified
Class	Whole class