

Active? Passive? Whose Fault? – Participation Pattern In Online English Language Learning Settings In A Chinese Tertiary Context

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Abstract: This article presents a study of the participation pattern within two online programmes which aim to facilitate tertiary students to practice their oral English in China. The programmes are conducted in bi-modal channel where text chat and voice chat are parallel. Three levels of analysis are conducted: participation balance, language output and exchange structure. The findings reveal that bi-modal chat provides learners with the opportunity to interact. However, there is no difference in their learning performance in the traditional F2F classroom. Generally speaking, they are reluctant to participate. In the meanwhile, it must be remembered that some individuals may be active, even aggressive. The degree of participants' activeness is greatly subject to teachers' performance. And the facts that affect participation pattern are complicated and perplexing. Therefore, it presents the warning that it may not be reasonable to expect that computer-mediated communication (CMC) can change the traditional perspective in China. Rather, it is teachers and learners who must make efforts to incite participation. The adoption of CMC in language learning must recognize the influence of traditional Chinese culture, as well as individual differences.

Key words: Prototype of Chinese learner, Online learning, Participation pattern, Language output, Exchange structure

Introduction

This paper is about Chinese learners' participation pattern in an online English language learning setting. Traditionally, Chinese learners are characterized to be reluctant to participate in classroom activities and are labelled as passive learners with the response to teachers' question in the face-to-face classroom. The factors are always contributed to traditional Chinese culture, such as paying respect to teachers, valuing face, collective benefits and valuing modesty. However, the prototype of Chinese learners is arguable and its causes are reinvestigated recently. Some scholars state that Chinese learners are active, even

aggressive. And they also claim that the causes of passive learners are situation specific rather than culturally pre-set” (Cheng, 2000, p.435).

In the 21st century, online education has become an educational development trend. Chinese learners have already injected great enthusiasm into online English language learning. However, with the stereotype and plausible variables in mind, it is still uncertain the participation pattern in the online setting, particularly when text-chat and voice chat are in parallel.

The motivation for the article is the recognition of the certain pattern of participation in bi-modal chat in a Chinese tertiary context. There are three aims. One is to see the participation balance in the online setting. Second is to see the degree of dominance of tutor/learner in text chat and voice chat. Finally it is to reveal the role of tutor/learner in the online bi-modal interaction. By fulfilling these aims, we are going to see the degree of participation and whether Chinese English learners are active or passive online, as well as the reasons behind their behaviour in this particular language learning setting.

According to Pilkington (1999), there are two ways to define active participants. The first is based on the number of words or propositions they produce. The other is based on the exchange structure in which the most active participants are defined as those who produce most Initiates (I)/Stand alone (SA) turns (Pilkington, 1999). The passive participants are referred to those who most adopt a respond role (ibid). She further points out that “Response Complement (Rc) may correlate with the active participant and with asymmetry in participant role –being more frequently associated with the facilitator or a cognitively dominant partner” (ibid, p.17).

The study starts with the review of classroom reality and the prototype of Chinese teachers and learners in the traditional face-to-face classroom, with talking about Chinese culture’s impact on teaching and learning. Then the plausible variables are discussed. In the following section, a description of methodology is addressed. Then the analysis and findings are presented, which is followed by discussion to close.

Literature Review

Classroom Reality and the Prototype of Chinese Teachers and Learners

The typical picture of English classrooms in Chinese tertiary institutions (actually the teaching mode at all levels of English education in China) is teacher-dominant and focuses on aspects of language (Guo & Li, 2006). Group work and discussion are very limited. The restricted interaction in the classroom is conducted mainly between the teacher and learners with the three-part exchange of IRF/IRE (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975) by which teachers initiate questions and evaluate students' responses. Personal experience, anecdotes and research all confirm this mode of teaching and learning, which is still greatly dominant even in the 21st century (Tan, 2008; Xie, 2010).

Within such a teaching model, Chinese learners of English are always viewed as being passive and teacher-dependent and reluctant to participate classroom activities (e.g. Huang, 2005; Tan, 2008). The concept of Chinese learners' behaviour is always attributed to traditional Chinese culture.

Taking Account of Context: Chinese Culture

Chinese social norms and culture have a great impact on teaching and learning, particularly Confucian philosophy, which still has a strong impact on the current Chinese educational system (Huang & Brown, 2009).

Historically in China, teachers are viewed as knowledge holders, sole legitimate knowledge providers and act as students' moral mentors and role models (Wang, 2006). Therefore Chinese students seldom evaluate their peers, because they think it is teacher's job and peers are not qualified to correct each other's work (Jones, 1995). In a word, Chinese teachers have been given great responsibility with regard to learners. Students are expected to "respect the teachers' authority without preconditions" (Wang & Mao, 1996:148). Therefore, learners are not encouraged to challenge and criticise activity. Asking questions and making jokes in the classroom are viewed as being rude and disrespectful (Huang & Brown, 2009).

Besides, face value, collective benefits and modesty value also are factors from the consideration of the cultural context in China (Littlewood, 1999). Studies ranging from large to small scale all reveal that face value is one of the important factors which prevents learners

from speaking out in public (e.g. Huang, 2005; Huang & Brown, 2009; Zhang, 2006). Additionally, Chinese students are educated to be collectivist rather than pay attention to their individualism since they are young. Therefore, they ingrainedly give priority to collective benefits. In the classroom, they try to restrain themselves from asking questions to bother teachers because these questions may only be of interest to themselves (e.g. Wang, 2006; Zhang, 2006). Chinese people are always educated to be modest. It is good practice to avoid seeking to be the centre of attention. Therefore, they are more willing to wait for others to speak first, or for teachers to nominate contributors (e.g. Cortazzi and Jin, 1996; Hu, 2002; Huang, 2005; Huang & Brown, 2009).

Plausible Variables

However, the alleged stereotype of teachers and learners is challenged these days from both teachers' and learners' perspectives. Firstly, the relationship between teachers and learners is questioned with regard to being cold or authoritarian. Studies show teachers and learners build up their casual and personal relationships outside the classroom (e.g. Cheng, 2000; Littlewood, 1999; Pratt et al., 1999). Secondly, the concept of respect for teachers and teachers' authority in the classroom is challenged from the perspectives of both teachers and learners. Various teaching strategies using multiple methods following the implementation of a more communicative-oriented curriculum are encouraged (Jin & Cortazzi, 2006; Wang, 2003).

The stereotype of Chinese learners' performance in the classroom also bears reinvestigation. Liu & Littlewood (1997) illustrate the conflicts between learners' quietness in the classroom and their willingness to participate. Littlewood's (2000, 2001) survey reveals that students have a strong desire to conduct communicative tasks and take a more active role in discourse. Littlewood's finding is supported by other scholars (e.g. Clark & Gieve, 2006; Xiao, 2006; Wray, 2008), whose studies concern Chinese learners who studied in a Western country. The new image of Chinese learners is described as showing "active and reflective thinking, open mindedness and a spirit of inquiry" (Clark & Gieve, 2006, p.55). Learners not only actively participate activities in the classroom, but also provide scaffolding help for each other (Li, 2004). Cheng's study reveals that learners have a strong desire to

participate in classroom activities and “many are extremely active and even aggressive” (Cheng, 2000, p.438).

The new image has further been confirmed and emphasised in online learning settings by limited studies. For example, Hao & Feng’s (2004) survey study reports that 71% of learners chose “collaborative learning” as the preferred way to conduct online learning (N=1090). Such findings are confirmed by small scale empirical studies (Li, 2009; Zeng & Takatsuka, 2009). In the meanwhile, some limited studies regarding Chinese learners’ online participation in Western countries have been conducted and report more participation than in F2F classrooms (e.g. Gerbic, 2005; Ramsay, 2005), although these reports also point out these Chinese students participate because they are required to do so.

Facing such a new image of Chinese learners, the concept that learners’ reticent and passive behaviour results from certain cultural aspects is arguable. Cheng points out that “learners are observed to be quieter than expected in certain circumstances; the causes are situation specific rather than culturally pre-set” (Cheng, 2000, p.435). Furthermore, such quietness may be not learners’ own preference, but could be due to teachers’ methods. Due to their status as learners, they have to accept teaching methodologies (Tan, 2008; Xie, 2010). Others claim that Chinese students’ low contribution in the classroom is because they are not provided with opportunities to use English for communicative purposes and lack English proficiency and confidence on their part (e.g. Liu, 2006; Xiao, 2006).

Methodology

The research described in this paper is part of a large project of using CMC to facilitate English language learning in a Chinese tertiary context. It is a multiple-case study which enables me to explore similar or contrasting results within and between cases (two programmes).

The aim of the two programmes was to provide a space in which online learners can practice spoken English by text chat and voice chat. They were delivered by a platform called VOB by which synchronous text-based and voice-based modes were run in parallel. On VOB platform, online learners can freely send text-based messages, but if they want to conduct an

oral conversation, they need to click an appropriate mode function. S/he can freely use this function to request an oral interaction. Moreover, learners can make a private interaction request, which means a conversation between participants cannot be heard/seen by anyone else. Both programmes try to provide a learning process which reflects the principles of interactive, collaborative and student-centred learning.

It is not compulsory for the learners to participate in Programme 1 and Programme 2. Thus, it is down to learners' preference as to which programme they attend. Some learners may attend both programmes, but some prefer Programme 1 or Programme 2. The online learners are from all over China and registered as part-time students for their bachelor degree.

The data is based on the discourse, or logs of written and spoken interactions, of seven sessions in Programme 1 and six sessions in Programme 2. Data analysis is computer-mediated discourse analysis, which is defined by Herring as “the analysis of logs of verbal/text interaction (characters, words, utterances, messages exchanges, threads, archives, etc.)” (Herring, 2004, p.339).

In order to see the participation pattern in online setting, three levels of analysis are conducted. One is based on the analysis of descriptive statistics of the number of attendees and the number of text and/or voice chat participants in two programmes. Attendees refer to those who are present in two programmes, with or without making any contributions in text and voice chat. Participants mean those attendees who make contributions to text or voice chat or both. Secondly, analysis is based on the language output by participants in both modes which help us to understand the degree of dominance of tutors/learners in bi-mode chat. The measurement of the language output is based on the counting the number of sending turns in text chat and oral words in voice chat. Thirdly, it is based on Exchange Structure analysis (Pilkington, 1999) to see the roles of tutors/learners in the interaction which are indicated by I, Rc and SA. To see the extent of I, Rc and SA in an exchange structure, I counted the number of these three elements of the exchange structure.

I used descriptive statistics to explore the unique features of online participation pattern. The reason is to make the study objective and reflect the real world what it happens. In the meantime, it helps me to be separate from the study and reduce my bias at the most degree.

Analysis and Findings

Participation Balance

Table 1. The number of online attendees and participants in Programme 1

Session	No. attendee	No. text chat participants	No. voice chat participants	No. participants in both
1	133	51 (38.3%)	5 (3.8%)	4 (3%)
2	55	27 (49%)	7 (12.2%)	7 (12.2%)
3	55	24 (43.6%)	11 (20%)	9 (16.4%)
4	37	24 (64.9%)	10 (27%)	9 (24.3%)
5	25	9 (36%)	11 (44%)	9 (36%)
6	21	12 (57.1%)	7 (33.3%)	7 (33.3%)
7	18	12 (66.7%)	9 (50%)	8 (44.4%)

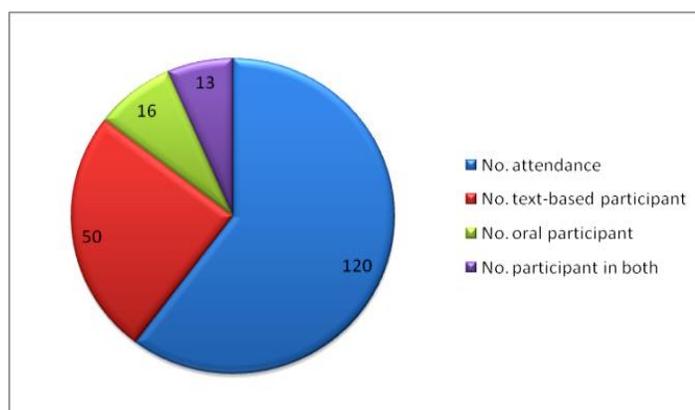
Table 1 illustrates the total number of attendees and participants in each session in Programme 1. Firstly, it can be seen that the programme started with a large number of attendees, but over time, fewer and fewer attendees log in for sessions, reducing from 133 in the first session to 18 in session seven. The number of text chat participants is 51, 27, 24, 24, 9, 12, 12 in each session, accounting for 38.3%, 49%, 43.6%, 64.9%, 36%, 57.1% and 66.7% of the total, respectively. There are only three sessions (Sessions 4, 6 and 7) in which participants numbered over half of total attendees. In voice chat, 5, 8, 12, 10, 11, 9 and 9 learners participated from Session 1 to Session 6, accounting for 3.8%, 12.2%, 20%, 27%, 44%, 33.3% and 50% of the total, respectively. When compared with total attendees in each session, it seems the number of participants is quite low. Regarding those who participated in both text chat and voice chat, the distribution of participants who participated in both modes is from 4 to 9. More participants are present in the middle of the programme (Sessions 3, 4 and 5) than at the beginning and end of the programme. Again, the rate of participants in voice chat is very low, compared with the total number of attendees. Moreover, not all participants who took part in text chat participated in voice chat, and vice versa.

Table 2. The number of online attendees and participants in Programme 2

Session	No. attendee	No. participant in text chat	No. participant in voice chat	No. participant in both
1	164	68 (41.5%)	10 (6.1%)	7 (4.3%)
2	86	29 (33.7%)	7 (8.1%)	5 (5.8%)
3	55	21 (38.1%)	7 (12.7%)	6 (10.9%)
4	194	104 (53.6%)	10 (5.2%)	10 (5.2%)
5	53	30 (56.6%)	9 (17%)	9 (17%)
6	41	16 (39%)	5 (12.2%)	5 (12.2%)

Firstly, similar to Programme 1, there is a steady decrease in attendees from the first session to the last session, except Session 4 which has an abnormal increase in attendees. Compared with Programme 1, the number of attendees in each session was greater than Programme 1, but there is no indication that more attendees leads to more participants in text or voice chat. In text chat, there are only two sessions (Sessions 4 and 5) in which participants were over half of total attendees, accounting for 53.6% and 56.6%, respectively. In voice chat, the number of participants is very low, compared with the total number of attendees, ranging from 5.2% to 12.7%. There is a trend that, over time, the number of participants in voice chat increased, reaching 10 in Session 4 and 9 in Session 5, but decreasing in Session 6. Similarly, as seen in Programme 1, not all participants who participated in text chat took part in voice chat, and vice versa. However, the small difference is that in voice chat, there are slightly more participants in each session in Programme 1 than in Programme 2.

Because learners were free to choose whether to attend these two programmes, one learner may join Programme 1 or Programme 2, or both. Figure 1 displays an overall view of those who participated in Programme 1 and Programme 2.

Figure 1. Overall participation balance

A total of 120 learners attended both programmes and 50 of them participated in text chat, 16 participated in voice chat, and 13 in both, accounting for 41.7%, 13.3% and 10% of the total, respectively. It again indicates that the rate of voice chat participation is very low and some individuals are active in voice chat, e.g. Learner 67 who may be described as aggressive.

Regarding the lower rate of participation in voice chat than in text chat, it is understandable that, in text-based chat, there is no trouble with taking turns and everyone can hold the conversational floor equally. However, in voice chat, the policy of one time one speaker may limit the number of participants. At least, if someone wants to express themselves orally, he/she first has to wait until it's his/her turn. However, there is no indication of a long waiting list in voice chat in any sessions in the two programmes. Thus, the low rate of oral participation may be not caused by this natural orating policy. Comparing text chat and voice chat, tutors continuously encourage learners, in addition to peer encouragement, to conduct voice chat, but there is no encouragement to conduct text-based chat. That is to say, learners voluntarily conducted text-based messaging.

Interestingly, although generally there are very few oral participants in all sessions in the two programmes, when comparing the beginning and later period of each session, it is found that more learners spoke orally in the later period. For example, in Session 3 of Programme 1, in the last half hour, because of an increased number of candidates on the oral waiting list, the tutor had to limit the oral messaging time. These circumstances may be

caused by an increase in learners' sense of community, which might make participants feel more relaxed and less nervous about oral conversation. However, this situation did not occur in text chat. In contrast, in most sessions of text chat, there were fewer participants in the later period of sessions than in the early period. Over time, there are fewer postings later in the session than in the early period of the session.

If the sense of community is the ingredient that leads to more participation, the ideal situation would be more and more learners participating in voice chat over the sessions in the two programmes. However, this is not the case, as analysed above. The participation rate fluctuates in voice chat in both programmes. So maybe there is another reason. In both programmes, it is possible that the degree of difficulty of topics may affect learners' participation. If the topics were related with personal experience or detailed in something with which learners are familiar, there were more participants than took part in abstract and foreign topics. This is the case in both programmes. For example, in Programme 1, Sessions 3, 5, 4 and 7 have 11, 11, 10, and 9 participants, respectively. The topics of these sessions are "kids", "lies", "gain or lose weight" and "doing housework". These topics are directly related to learners' own daily lives, so may be easy for them to discuss. However, the topics of Sessions 1, 2 and 6 are "foreign experience", "friendship" and "how to be a well-known person", which are abstract and based less on personal experience, so they may be difficult to talk about. A similar situation also occurs in Programme 2. The topics of Session 6, 2 and 3 are "environment and information highway", "development and education" and "healthcare and the business world". It may be understandable that these abstract topics resulted in fewer participants than those topics of "job and teaching", "food and crime" and "administration, life and work", relatively easy topics in Sessions 1, 4 and 5. This finding may also help to explain the slightly higher number of participants in Programme 1 than in Programme 2, as analysed above, because when comparing the topics, it can be seen that the topics in Programme 1 are more personal than in Programme 2.

Furthermore, in both programmes, with the exception of several active learners who participated in both programmes with relatively fluent speech, others' verbal expression is quite messy and switch between English and Chinese, particularly in Programme 1 in which the tutor is a native Chinese speaker. Although in Programme 2, in which the tutor is a native English speaker, there is no language alternation when the oral conversation is between tutor-

learner, a learner continuously conducted comprehension checks because she worried the tutor could not understand what she said because of her perceived poor oral expression. In Programme 1, one specific learner's oral expression is poor, with lots of grammatical errors and poor pronunciation, but he still bravely conducted oral discussion. Therefore, learners' personality may also affect their participation in voice chat, particularly personal self-confidence. Learners' language proficiency may not be the main issue that prevents learners from participating in oral chat.

Table 3. The distribution of text-based turns produced by tutors and learners in each session in text chat in Programme 1 and Programme 2, respectively

Prog. session	Programme 1				Programme 2			
	No. tutor turns	No. lear-part in text chat	No. learners turns	Learners mean	No. tutor turns	No. lear-part in text chat	No. learners turns	Learner mean
1	6	51	263	5.16	0	68	482	7.1
2	27	27	294	10.9	4	29	303	10.4
3	19	24	175	7.3	1	21	118	5.6
4	33	24	105	4.4	9	104	913	4.7
5	28	9	168	18.7	3	30	308	10.3
6	14	12	92	4.4	24	16	169	10.6
7	12	12	56	3.1	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
total	139	159	1153	10.2	41	268	2293	12.1

The Language Output of Participants

The distribution of learners' text-based turns is uneven in Programme 1. In Sessions 1 and 2 there are 263 and 294 turns, respectively, but in Session 7 there are only 56 turns. In connection with the learners' participation balance, it may be understandable that fewer participants produced fewer text-based turns. However, there is no trend that more participants lead to more text-based turns. For example, in Session 1, there are 263 turns produced by 51 participants, but 294 turns produced by only 27 participants and 168 turns

produced by nine participants. That means it is possible one participant might only produce one text-based turn, or might produce lots. Thus, the average turns per student greatly differ, from 3.1 to 18.7 over sessions. In this programme, the tutor produced 139 turns in total (10.8% of total turns in Programme 1), and learners produced 1153 turns (89.2% of total turns). Also, when comparing the turns produced in each session, it can be seen that the tutor's turns are not significant. In other words, the tutor was not dominant in text chat in this programme.

In Programme 2, there is a total of 2293 text-based turns (98.2% of total turns) produced by learners in six sessions. Again, distribution is very uneven in each session. Surprisingly, it can be seen that the tutor only produces a total of 41 text-based turns (1.8%), which can almost be considered negligible compared with the large number of learners' turns. Clearly, nobody will question the fact that learners are dominant here.

Table 4 shows that, in Programme 1, there is generally no big difference between the language output by tutors and learners (49.7% : 50.3%), just hundreds of words more or less to some degree. In Sessions 2, 4 and 7, the tutor clearly spoke more than learners (52%, 52%, 59%). The main reason behind the tutor speaking more in Session 7 is because there were no learners to speak intermittently in the first half hour of the session, which led to the tutor's monologue. In Sessions 1, 3, 5 and 6, learners produced more language output (57%, 52%, 58%, 52%); anyway, whether more or less, the difference is tiny. In this case, it is obviously not possible to reach the conclusion that learners or the tutor is dominant in oral chat in Programme 1. Both the tutor and learners took the floor to say something. It may be necessary to mention that, in this programme, the conversation is between tutor-learner. Even when there are some learners in the waiting list, they cannot message orally until the current conversation finishes. However, in Programme 2, the situation is different. The tutor encourages learners to conduct learner-learner conversation. Even when the conversation was between tutor-learner, if there was another learner applying to chat orally, the tutor would invite this learner to join them. Then, step by step, once the conversational model is build up, he exits the conversation and leaves learners to conduct conversation themselves. In the first two sessions, the tutor speaks more than the learners (59% and 54%). The reason is because, in these two sessions, the tutor reads instructions of how to conduct online oral conversation which is actually already in warm-up. However, from Session 3 onwards, the tutor does not

read these directions any more and from Session 3, learners speak more than the tutor. In Session 6, learners even produce about four times more turns than the tutor, accounting for 79% of total output. In all sessions, the tutor's talk is mainly aimed at creating a comfortable environment to guarantee learners' conversation continues smoothly. He only intervenes when necessary, such as vocabulary help or conversation management (stop talking, move to the next speakers, etc.). So, it is safe to say that, over the course of the sessions, with the tutor's reduced participation, the learners' language output steadily increased. When the two tutors' performance is compared with that of the learners, it may be safe to say that the tutor's performance affects learners' language output.

Table 4. The distribution of oral words produced by tutors and learners in Programme 1 and Programme 2, respectively

Words in voice chat in Programme 1					Words in voice chat in Programme 2				
	Tutor	Learner	No. of lear-part	Mean of learner		Tutor	Learner	No. of lear-part	Mean of learner
Session					Session				
1	1675 (43%)	2217 (57%)	5	443.4	1	5596 (59%)	3830 (41%)	10	383
2	4409 (52%)	4050 (48%)	7	578.8	2	4819 (54%)	4098 (46%)	7	585.4
3	3920 (48%)	4322 (52%)	11	392.9	3	3111 (41%)	4450 (59%)	7	635.7
4	3893 (52%)	3597 (48%)	10	359.7	4	3428 (41%)	4967 (59%)	10	496.7
5	3221 (42%)	4480 (58%)	11	407.3	5	2363 (35%)	4347 (65%)	9	483
6	3911 (48%)	4286 (52%)	7	612.3	6	1498 (21%)	5796 (79%)	5	1159.2
7	5269 (59%)	3623 (41%)	9	402.6	Total	20815 (43%)	27488 (57%)	37	
Total	26298 (49.7%)	26575 (50.3%)	37						

Surprisingly, half the oral words belong to 13 learners who participated in both text chat and voice chat in both programmes. These results confirm the above findings that there

is a great variety of learners' participation which leads to individual levels of language output. And some individuals are really active.

The Extent of Elements of the Exchange Structure

This section will present the findings regarding the position of tutors and learners in exchange by analysing the extent of elements of the exchange structure, which will reveal the detailed interaction of tutors and learners in text and voice chat.

Initiate (I)

Based on Table 5, In Programme 1 and Programme 2, TIt only accounts for 6% and 2%, respectively. However, LIIt accounts for 71% in both programmes. Another significant point is that, in both programmes, learners produced quite a lot of LIIt312 (23% in Programme 1 and 27% in Programme 2) which are related to voice chat. Such a situation implies that, although these students did not participate in voice chat, they were listening and thinking which resulted in simultaneous language output, which is impossible in F2F classrooms where learners can only listen and think while others talk. So, together with LIIt, learners produced 94% and 98% of all Initiates, respectively, in Programme 1 and Programme 2. Without any doubt, learners are absolutely dominant and active in this mode, which echoes the earlier findings by analysing the sending turns produced by learners in text chat. They act as the owner in text chat, controlling and directing the subjects they want to discuss.

Table 5. The distribution of I, RC and SA produced by tutors and learners in text chat in Programme 1 and Programme 2

Text chat								
Programme	It			RCt			SAt	
	TIt	LIIt	LIIt312	TRCt	LRCt	LRCt312	TSAt312	LSAt312
Programme 1	6.00%	71.00%	23.00%	5.00%	64.00%	31.00%	63%	37%
Programme 2	2.00%	71.00%	27.00%	3.00%	63.00%	34.00%	31%	69%

Table 6 The distribution of I, RC and SA produced by tutors and learners in voice chat in Programme 1 and Programme 2

Voice chat								
Programme	Io			RCo				SAo
	TIo	TIo311	Llo	TRCo	TRCo311	LRCo	LRCo311	TSAo
Programme 1	63.00%	0.00%	37.00%	67.90%	0.50%	31.60%	0.00%	100.00%
Programme 2	54.40%	0.20%	45.40%	45.80%	0.00%	53.80%	0.40%	0.00%

Looking back at the findings above, in voice chat the tutor and learners share the floor and produced a similar amount of target language in Programme 1 and the learners produced more output than the tutor in Programme 2. Surprisingly, however, in voice chat in both programmes, tutors still produced more Initiates than learners. This is despite the fact that, in Programme 2, based on the analysis above the tutor fades his position and lets learners conduct the conversation themselves; the tutor still produced 10% more Initiates than learners. Looking into the details, it seems that if a conversation is between tutor and learners, it is the tutor who is in the position to produce Initiates. From this point of view, when tutors are present and involved in a conversation, it seems tutors have the privilege of controlling the conversation.

Interestingly, although learners also hold the floor to Initiate, this priority of Initiate is lost very soon. If the conversation is conducted between tutor-learner in both programmes, the tutors always quickly take the floor to Initiate and become the main initiators. Such a situation, together with more tutors' Initiates, as seen above, may indicate the power of tutors in a classroom is not easy to subvert, unless teachers themselves are willing to give way.

Response Complement (Rc)

It is understandable that it is the tutor who is in the position to offer feedback/evaluation, comments and acknowledgment in the traditional F2F classroom (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975). And normally Rc is always correlated with the speaker who is in the role of Initiate (I) (Pilkington, 1999). Furthermore, in text chat, there can be unlimited Rcs produced by different potential participants. Therefore, it may be not surprising that quite a lot of Rcs are produced by learners who have significant Is, accounting for 64% and

63% of all Rcs in text chat in the two programmes, respectively and 31.6% and 53.8% of all Rco in voice chat in both programmes. Besides, because text chat and voice chat are in parallel, although an oral conversation is conducted between two oral speakers, learners also can join their conversation in text chat. Thus there are 31% and 34% LRct312 in two programmes, respectively. Interestingly, comparing significant LRct 312 related to oral message, there are only 0.4% of LRco311.

Regarding TRct, it may be understandable that there are more in voice chat than those in text chat considering their few contributions in text chat. TRc accounts for 5% and 3% in text chat, 67.9% and 45.8% in voice chat, respectively in two programmes.

However, interestingly, learners' Rc mainly expresses their comments and acknowledgements in this slot, but offers no evaluation/feedback, in contrast to their tutors.

Stand Alone (SA)

Regarding SA, tutors and learners all make a contribution in text and voice chat in the two programmes. Interestingly, all SAs in text chat are related to oral messages (63% TSA_t312 and 37% LSA_t312 in Programme 1 and 31% TSA_t312 and 69% LSA_t312 in Programme 2). Surprisingly, in voice chat, SA_o is produced by the tutor in Programme 1. There is no learners' contribution in either programme and Tutor02 does not contribute in Programme 2.

As mentioned when the term of SA was defined as the turn of unsolicited help without response, it seems tutors and learners are all in the position of knowledge transmission.

Discussion and Conclusion

There were generally a great number of attendees in both Programme 1 and Programme 2, although, over time, a sharp decline in the number of attendees occurred. However, the number of participants, whether in text or voice chat, is not directly proportional to the number of attendees. In other words, more attendees do not guarantee more participants. Actually, only a few sessions attracted participants numbering over half of attendees in text chat and only a small number of students took part in oral conversation.

This low rate of participation may reflect a similar situation in the traditional F2F classroom in the Chinese context, where students are viewed as reluctant to participate (e.g. Huang, 2005; Jackson, 2002; Tan, 2008). Furthermore, this general finding is in contrast to the findings of Zeng & Takatsuka's (2009) study that observed online learners actively engaged in collaborative dialogue. The main reason may be because their study is conducted on a small scale. Comparing with text chat and voice chat, there are more participants in text chat than in voice chat, which is compatible with some studies conducted in Western countries report that Chinese online students participate more in online text-based discussion than in the F2F classroom (e.g. Gerbic, 2005; Ramsay, 2005). In voice chat, it seems learners were more reserved about joining oral conversations. The main reason may be because oral conversation which is exposed publicly may be caused great anxiety and it has nothing to do with the place where it occurs, or online or face-to-face.

Although the participation rate is generally low, individually, some learners actively participate in both text and voice chat. There are 13 learners who participated in both modes and programmes, accounting for more than half the total contribution of all participants. Actually there are several aggressive learners, e.g. Learner67. This finding may help to justify the necessity of reinvestigating Chinese learners that some individual Chinese learners are active rather than passive, (e.g. Li, 2004; Wray, 2008; Xiao, 2006).

However, it can be argued that a small proportion of active learners should not obfuscate the reality of a significant number of non-participants. Actually, compared with more than three hundred attendees in two programmes, the number of 13 really is too low. Therefore, when Chinese learners in an online learning environment are discussed as a group, there is no difference in their learning performance in the traditional F2F classroom. Generally speaking, they are reluctant to participate. However, it must be remembered that some individuals may be active, even aggressive. Moreover, in the CMC learning environment, learners cannot be expected to suddenly change their traditional perspective. Therefore, in order to make full use of the benefits of online learning for Chinese online learners, it may be necessary to consider the universal context (say, the Chinese culture) and the local context (say, the specific situation in a particular online classroom).

From the overall perspective of language output, text chat learners made greater contributions than tutors. In this case, learners are active in text chat. Voice chat displays a different situation in Programme 1 and Programme 2. In Programme 1, overall, the language output remained balanced; learners' output fluctuated, but slightly increased over time. In Programme 2, it was very clear that, over time, learners' output increased greatly in line with the steady decrease of Tutor02's output. Based on the findings, in Programme 1, it is difficult to decide whether learners were active or not. In Programme 2, it can definitely be said that learners were active. The main reason why there was more language output in voice chat in Programme 2 than in Programme 1 is because Tutor02 in Programme 2 gave way to learners, but Tutor01 in Programme 1 always took the central position. From this point of view, it can be agreed that the tutor's performance affects learners' performance (e.g. Jackson, 2002; Tan, 2008; Xie, 2010).

From the view of exchange structure analysis, learners initiate more turns than tutors in text chat in both programmes. From this point of view, learners are active in text chat. However, in voice chat, in both programmes, tutors initiated more than learners. Furthermore, if the conversation was between tutor-learner, tutors were always in the position of initiate. From this point of view, there can be no doubt that learners are in the passive position with regard to the turn of responses. However, this does not mean learners are always in the passive position; they also took the role of initiate if they could. Furthermore, borrowing the convenience of bi-modal chat, learners produce significant SA and Rc which make learners locate in active role in the conversation. This again may mean that whether learners can be active or not depends on tutors who are willing to give learners opportunities to practice their active role because learners' status in the classroom decide that they have to accept teaching methodologies (e.g. Tan, 2008; Xie, 2010).

Although it cannot be denied that bi-mode chat, particularly text chat with the loss of visual cues and a lack of turn-taking, provides learners with more opportunities to interaction, which makes learners have possible to be in the active position, it may not be reasonable to expect that CMC can change this traditional tutors' power and learners' habit in China. Rather, it is the teacher who must make efforts to provide learners with opportunities to be as an active learner. Although some studies reveal that learners are keen to participate (e.g. Hao & Feng, 2004; Littlewood, 2000), it may be still a dream if learners do not actually contribute

to classroom activities, whatever in face-to-face or online classroom. Jin & Cortazzi (2006) may be right to claim that there is a great gap between aspirations and real practice in China, which really makes the situation complicated and perplexing.

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Appendix 1. Exchange structure coding system

Code	category		description
Initiate I	Tutor-initiate TI	tutor-initiate in text chat TI_t	Initial turn of an exchange.
		tutor-initiate in voice chat TI_o	
	Learner-initiate LI	learner-initiate in text chat LI_t	
		learner-initiate in voice chat LI_o	
Response R	Tutor-response TR	Tutor-response in text chat TR_t	Comments on a previous turn, e.g. acceptance/rejection or an answer to a question. Sometimes such Response
		Tutor-response in voice chat TR_o	

	Learner-response LR	Learner-response in text chat LRt Learner-response in voice chat LRo	maybe not comes from same one who is asked.
Response complement Rc	Tutor-response complement TRc	Tutor-response complement in text chat TRct	Comments, acceptance, endorsement, acknowledgement or feedbacks mainly on Response. However, it also can be to any elements in exchange structure as acknowledgment/acceptance/endorse. RC also can come from anyone who initially is not in the conversation.
		Tutor-response complement in voice chat TRco	
	Learner-response complement LRc	Learner-response complement in text chat LRct	
		Learner-response complement in voice chat LRco	
Stand alone SA	tutor-stand alone TSA	tutor-stand alone in text chat TSAt	A sequence of turns which provide unsolicited assistance without any understanding problem in previous turns. If there is an answer, it turns to Initiate.
		tutor-stand alone in voice chat TSAo	
		learner-stand alone in text chat LSAt	
		learner-stand alone in voice chat LSAo	

Appendix 2. Cross-mode interaction coding system

Category	Description
text-related 311	Refers to oral chat which is related to text-based messages, such as answering the text-based questions orally, comments to text-based messages, etc.
oral-related 312	Refers to text-based messages which are related to 1) the oral chat situation, such as low voice, echo, speak too fast, etc.; 2) oral chat content such as comments to oral messages, answering oral questions, repeating oral chat, asking an oral participant, correcting oral messages, etc.