

An Observational Study of Practice Opportunities in Chinese Tertiary English Classrooms

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This paper describes and analyzes interactions in tertiary English classrooms (for non-English majors) in the People's Republic of China. The specific focus is on teachers' strategies for providing practice opportunities for their students, and the language learning environment created as a result. Based on observations of 35 tertiary English classes, the study identifies question and answer as the most frequently used activity. This activity imposed heavy pressure on students to recall the content covered but made fewer demands on language processing skills, and therefore, did not allow much room for comprehension, manipulation, and production on the part of students. When textbook exercises were used, a mismatch was identified between the designated purpose and the actual method applied. There was no group-work or pair-work to maximize opportunities for interaction in the classroom. The data collected through semi-structured interviews with teachers provided clues to interpret and explain their behavior in the classroom. The study indicates that the classroom environment as such was not favorable for students to develop optimum language competence. Recommendations on how to improve the situation are made in the conclusion.