

# Study of the Pragmatic Function of Echo Questions in Teachers' Questioning in Chinese Language Classes

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**Abstract:** Echo questioning, as a conversational phenomenon, occurs frequently and expresses many emotional attitudes. However, in terms of teaching Chinese as a foreign language, the research on the role of echoic questioning in teachers' questioning is insufficient and little attention has been paid to it. This paper takes the discourse in the classroom as the corpus, discusses the use of echo questions in the Chinese as a foreign language classroom from the perspective of the pragmatics of echo questions, takes the teacher's questioning as the focus of the analysis, and discusses the pragmatic function of echo questions in the teacher's questioning from the four aspects of rephrasing echo questions, explanatory echo questions, discourse gaps, and affective attitudes.

**Keywords:** Echoic Questioning; Teacher's Questioning; Teaching Chinese as a Second Language.

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## 1. Introduction

Echo questioning refers to verbal communication activities in which the speaker-writer sometimes repeats all or part of the other person's words in the form or tone of a question for a specific communicative purpose and asks the other person to restate or confirm something that has just been said (Pan, 2008). For example, "You lost your wallet." "My wallet?" Or "I've bought a new car. Have you?" Because they echo like parrots, we can also call echo questions "parrot questions". To put it plainly, when we don't understand what the important information in the word or sentence means, after repeating the information in the previous sentence, raising the tone of voice, or asking a question with the key information in the form of an echo question, we can get more information or express the speaker's feelings and attitudes. The key to echo questions is that they are used to highlight the focal information in a dialogue and have the characteristics of interrogative sentences and repetition in communication.

Based on the characteristics of echoic questioning, we can use it to analyze discourse in the Chinese as a foreign language classroom. Discourse analysis focuses on the "three discourses" (Sinclair & Coulthard, 1975), i.e. teacher elicitation, student response, and teacher feedback. Teacher elicitation, also known as teacher questioning, refers to a classroom situation in which the teacher provides expressions of doubt that include certain instructional goals and content. Teacher questioning is key to triggering sustained classroom interaction, and the type of questioning the teacher chooses is a test of the teacher's pedagogical skills. Student responses and teacher feedback are both answers to teacher triggers, and in teacher feedback, teachers can use echo questions for feedback, which are characteristically found in dialogue and serve as a type of responsive questioning in classroom questioning that allows teachers to test for student understanding, clarify facts, or confirm correctness or incorrectness.

Such as:

TEACHER: Did you go to the cinema the day before yesterday? (triggered)

STUDENT: I didn't go to the cinema the day before yesterday. (Reaction)

TEACHER: You didn't go to the cinema the day before yesterday? (Feedback: confirm, restate)

STUDENT: Oh, I didn't go to the cinema the day before yesterday. (Reaction)

Studying the role of echoic questioning in classroom discourse can help teachers ask questions more effectively in the classroom, thus improving students' effective input and output.

This paper explores the role of echoic questions in teacher questioning in terms of the discourse function of echoic questions.

## 2. The Pragmatic Function of Echoic Questions and Teachers' Questions

One of the basic roles of echo questioning in communication is to reflect the focus of the listener's understanding, and its pragmatic features include: reflecting the focus of understanding, forming new topics, and expressing doubts (Shao, 1992). Quirk (1985) classified echo questioning according to its pragmatic functions into restatement echo questioning, which emphasises on confirming and confirming, and explanatory echo questioning, which emphasises on asking for clarification from the other party.

### 2.1. Restatement Echo Questions

In classroom conversational discourse rounds, when the student's response is questionable as the content of the antecedent sentence, the posterior sentence, i.e., the teacher's feedback, will confirm the student's content with an echo question. This is a common method used by teachers. Confirmatory checking, restatement, repetition and other discourse correction strategies are often used, such as:

Teacher: what do you want? (triggered)

Student: a pair of spoons please. (Reaction)

TEACHER: A pair of what, please? (feedback: confirmatory check)

STUDENT: A pair of chopsticks. (Reaction)

In the above example, since the students used incorrect quantifiers and collocated nouns, the teacher echoes the questioning information with confirmatory checking so that

the students realize the error and thus output the correct sentence.

Another example:

TEACHER: Where is Damien going? (triggered)

Student: Damien went back to the dormitory. (Reacting)

TEACHER: Where did he go back to? (Feedback: confirmatory check)

STUDENT: He went back to the dormitory. (Reaction)

In the above example, students have learnt compound tendency complements, but the position of the object of the premises is easy to make mistakes, the teacher uses the echo question to correct the mistakes in time, the echo part of speech form, and the implicit correction of the mistakes to make the students aware of the problem so that they can output the correct sentences.

## 2.2. Explanatory Echo Questioning

During a conversation, if a student's response is problematic or not easily understood, the teacher can use interpretive echo questioning to ask the student to explain his or her words. Confirmatory checking, restatement, repetition and other discourse modification strategies are often used to highlight the focus of the conversation to get students to explain their explanations. E. g:

Teacher: How often do you take Chinese lessons? (elicited)

Student: Once a month. (Response)

TEACHER: Once a month? (Feedback: Repeat)

STUDENT: Because I'm too busy. (Response)

In the above example, after hearing the student's response, the teacher restates the student's response to elicit an explanatory response as to why the student takes so long to come to class.

Another example:

TEACHER: What is your impression of Lijiang? (triggered)

Student: It's not bad. (Reaction)

Teacher: Not bad? (Feedback: repeat)

STUDENT: Yes, it's not too cold or too hot there, I like it. (Response)

In the above example, the teacher asked what the impression of Lijiang was, and the students' responses were rather simple. In order to keep the conversation going and to confirm the students' impression of "not bad", the teacher repeated the students' responses with an echo question in order to get a more detailed explanation from the students.

## 2.3. Using Echoic Questions to Bridge the Dialogue Gap for Reflection

In her analysis of the discourse function of echoic questioning, Tian Yali (2014) also points out that speakers can take advantage of dialogue gaps by echoing back the other person's words to think about how to respond. This function is more common in both students' responses and teachers' feedback. E.g.:

TEACHER: What is a place where it rarely rains and there are few flowers and trees?

STUDENT: It rarely rains .....?

STUDENT: The desert.

Another example:

Student: Teacher, what does "not too expensive" mean?

Teacher: Not too expensive?

TEACHER: It means that you don't think the price of this thing is too expensive.

All of the above examples make use of dialogue gaps, echoing words to pause and reflect, and this echoing also emphasizes the focus of the dialogue.

## 2.4. Using Echo Questions to Express Emotional Attitudes

In addition, echo questions can also express human emotional attitudes. By summarising previous studies and actual teaching cases, echo questions can roughly express six kinds of emotions: surprise, anger, doubt, irony, helplessness and regret.

The author has analysed his own teaching videos of 200 lessons of HSK level 4 to 5 and summarised the emotional attitudes expressed by echo questions in teachers' questions: in classroom teaching sessions, echo questions express more doubt and surprise than other emotional attitudes. Teachers can make use of the affective attitudes expressed by echo questions to convey information in conversations and guide listeners to understand the speaker's intention in order to achieve common communicative purposes.

## 3. Conclusion

As a common linguistic phenomenon, echo questioning can play an important role in the Chinese as a foreign language classroom. Teachers use echo questions to eliminate barriers in communication content or language form, and we can also regard this form of questioning as input implicit correction to help students achieve the effect of implicit input. The objects of restatement and explanation are the focus of the conversation, which can help students correct their mistakes and also help them understand the smooth output of information. Therefore, in addition to direct error correction in the classroom, teachers can also use echo questions for input implicit correction to focus students' attention on the form.

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