

Forms and Functions of Communicative Silence in Jordan

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Abstract In this paper it is aimed to shed light on the significance of silence as an effective tool in communication that is no less powerful than speech or writing. The attempt was also made to show how language sometimes fails as a means of communication in conveying the message. Silence, therefore, could be regarded as an important and complementary alternative for language.

Keywords: Silence, communicative silence, silence and culture, silence and politeness

Ürdün'de İletişimsel Suskunluğun Biçim ve İşlevleri

Öz Bu çalışmada iletişimde etkin bir araç olarak "susma"nın konuşma veya yazmaya kıyasla azımsanmayacak bir öneme sahip olduğu hususuna ışık tutulmaya çalışılmıştır. Çalışmada dilin bir iletişim aracı olarak mesajı aktarmada zaman zaman ne derecede başarısız olduğu da gösterilmektedir. Bu açıdan bakıldığında "susma" dilin önemli ve tamamlayıcı bir seçeneği olarak kabul edilebilir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Susma, iletişimsel susma, susma ve kültür, susma ve nezaket

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Introduction

Silence belongs to non-verbal communication which is basically based on conveying the message without the use of verbal words. Silence is defined by Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary as "the absence of sound or noise: stillness." Silence could be an effective means of communication. There are moments and situations where silence is needed in social interaction. Sultan (2007:682) states "silence is the most impressive element that complements, enhances and even sublimates the meaning." He also adds (ibid:683) "silence takes various manifestations such as pauses, speech/easness or dumbness which activate the expressiveness of the dramatic act."

Communication is the exchange of ideas between two or more people. All forms of communications can be categorized as verbal or non-verbal. Chomsky (1979:35) stresses the relationship between the linguistic and non-linguistic aspect in human life. Non-verbal or silence communication is the process of communication among individuals through gestures, body language, facial expressions, and eye contact. Nankane (2003:17) says silence can convey multi-meanings such as "impressions, attitudes, emotions and intentions with illocutionary force." Bruneau (1973:37) adds "silence is the language of all strong passions, such as love, anger, surprise and fear." It reveals the inner state of the individual. Lebra (1987:343) argues that silence can be associated with hiding the state of emotion, distress, hatred, or anger.

Sound Inventories of Arabic

The Jordanian Arabic alphabet is sorted as follows: 'alif (ʔ), baa' (b), taa' (t), ʃaa' (ʃ), jeem (dʒ), ʃaa' (ʃ), xaa' (x), daa' (d), ʃaa' (ʃ), raa' (r), zayn (z), seen (s), feen (f), sʃaad (sʃ), dʃaad (dʃ), tʃaa (tʃ), ʃʃaa' (ʃʃ), ʃyn (ʃ), ʃayn (ʃ), faa'(f), qaaf (q), kaaf (k), laam (l), meem (m), noon (n), haa' (h), waaw (w), jaa' (j).

Arabic has twenty-eight consonants in terms of their place of articulation as table 1 displays:

Table 1: Arabic consonant Phonemes (Adapted from Khalil, 2010:14)

	L	LD	I	D	A	P	V	U	Ph	G
Stop	b			t , tʃ d , dʃ			k	q		ʔ
Affr.						dʒ				

Arabic has a triangular vowel system that consists of three pairs of short and long vowel phonemes as stated in table 2:

Table 2: Arabic vowels (Adapted from Khalil, 2010 :20)

	Front	Central	Back
High	ii i		uu u
Low		aa a	

Communicative Silence in Jordan

Communicative silence in Jordan expresses emotions and shows respect where words fail to do so. Silence in Jordan associates with truthfulness. Abundant speech is discouraged and silence is encouraged, because it is believed that the effective message of truthfulness is better conveyed via silence and not through talking much. Some Jordanian proverbs, for instance, warn against abundant use of language, as it is obvious from the proverb that says: "xajru alʔaʕmal hiʔu alisan" "The appreciated character is when one keeps one's tongue" or "The best thing one can do is to hold one's tongue." This proverb implies that one should say only a few useful and important words in his communication with others. This, in turn, means that the speaker must be honest and tell only truth.

Communicative silence in Jordan also represents respect, kindness, and acceptance of the other. It may also imply scorn, hate, and disagreement. Silence may be more expressive than the spoken language. The proverb "Qad jakuun alsukuutu dʒawaban" "silence is the answer" indicates that silence expressed through frowning and nodding the head is considered as a reply. Ephratt (2008:1909) says that "the silence following the statement "as long as you do not pay off your debts" is a realization of the threat. It may also be said that silence in Jordan is often related to another form of non-verbal behavior, namely to smiles which are used as social communicators' interaction. Smiles in Jordanian society indicate satisfaction, respect, acceptance, scorn and refusal depending on the context of the situation. Silence in Jordan is also used to convey defiance. Defiant silence may be used

in connection with other non-verbal gestures like facial expressions. In such situations, some Jordanian people tend not to use language most of the time as a hint of appreciating the value of being silent. Silence is considered as wisdom, as it is obvious from the following Jordanian proverb "ʔiða tama alʕqal naqasa alkalam" "less talk more wisdom, but more talk less wisdom" or "when reasoning becomes perfect, speech lessens." The Jordanian proverb "ruba raʕsin hašiida lisan" "a head may be the price for a slip of the tongue" gives advice to people to be careful when speaking and to keep silent most of the time.

To sum up, silence may function as conveying emotions, showing respect, asking questions, giving answers, and above all it is good for avoiding conflict among people, so "ʔiða kaan alkalam min fidʕah alsukuut min ɗahab" "Talking is silver and silence is gold" is true in Jordan. Silence has the same value as gold. This expresses the great appreciation Jordanians have towards silence. Silence then does not mean the absence of communication. The view is expressed by Jaworski (1993:46) when he states "the absence of speech does not imply the absence of communications."

Silence and culture

Silence and culture are related and interrelated. Culture norms determine where and how to use silence as a means of communication. In some cultures, it is used more abundantly than others. Erkman (1976:15) assures that "every culture has a set of symbolic gestures familiar to most of its members and may have different meanings in different cultures."

The following question is interpreted in different ways based on the culture. "Do you like to visit London?" Silence as a response to this question means uncertainty in English. In contrast, for Japanese, silence may be used as an acceptance, whereas, in Jordan, it is considered as a denial or acceptance according to the context. Americans tend to use silence to express sorrow, regret and embarrassment. Japanese, in turn, consider silence as a key of success, and tend to keep silent most of the time. They follow their own proverb that says "silence is also speech". People may use gestures and silence to convey the message in their communication which is linked with social differentiations. Davanizhad (2009) states that most people use hand movement regularly. Each movement gives a particular meaning. For example, "putting your index finger in your thumb" means for Americans that everything is good; while in France it means a sign of insult. In Jordan, it is used to indicate a warning.

Silence and Politeness in Jordanian Society

Communication among people does not only imply the exchange of ideas and information, but it also shapes the people's interpersonal relationships. People may also use silence to convey the message of politeness in their communication. It means that what is polite and impolite is based on cultures, conditions and contexts. Politeness is defined by Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary as "showing or characterized by correct social usage." Silence and politeness are related and interrelated in Jordanian culture. Silence can be used as a politeness aspect in different contexts in Jordan. It conveys the message of respect, rapport and love. Brown and Levinson (1987:1) state a model for politeness theory. They introduce "the notion of face in order to illustrate politeness in the broad sense." Jordanian people use their faces during conversation in order to avoid being rude and impolite. They usually use smiles as an index of politeness during conversation. In Jordanian culture, silence is connected with the illocutionary force of warning, satisfaction, boasting, denying, threatening, questioning, answering, etc. They all are based on contexts. Silence also has perlocutionary effects because the receivers of the speech may react against the illocutionary force as the following examples show:

Example 1:

Student: Teacher! Can I leave the classroom?

Teacher: Silence with anger (illocutionary force)

Student: Sorry; I will not leave (perlocutionary force)

Example 2:

Student: Teacher! Can I leave the classroom?

Teacher: Silence with smile (illocutionary force)

Student: Thank you (perlocutionary act)

In the first example stated above, teacher's silence indicates to the illocutionary act of refusal. The perlocutionary effect of teacher's response is not to leave. The teacher's silence with smile in the second example signifies the illocutionary act of approval, so silence with smile has perlocutionary force which let the student leave the classroom.

Silence in the Classroom

Silence is an area of interest to linguists and educationalists. Its application to education has recently gained significant interests. The teacher can be silent in the classroom to convey a message to the students. He may, for

instance, nod his head as a signal of agreement and give a message that what is done is right. And he may be silent as a way of showing disagreement so that the student can change or modify his answer. The students themselves may also be silent to convey a message to their teacher. Their silence expresses that they are upset because they do not get the idea. Miller (1982) considers the appropriate use of silence as one of the most useful aspects of learning the language.

The importance of using semiotics, the science of signs, in education is due to the fact that culture may play an important role in facilitating learning. Culture is intermingled with social signs. Signs used inside the classroom have different meanings in different cultural contexts. Accordingly, foreign language learning is considered as a product of foreign culture. The teacher may use gestures and visual materials associated with the target culture which is part of a foreign language.

Using signs in the classroom gives learners a lot of information about different fields such as using visual materials like flashcards and wall pictures which help learners contextualize the meaning of the vocabulary items and facilitate the learning process by passing information to the long-term memory.

The attitude of the teacher is revealed when using facial expressions. For example, a smile may express the acceptance of the learner's answer, or it can be used as a stimulus to the learner to give an answer. Curriculum is also influenced by the visual materials. Books, flashcards and wall pictures ought to contain a set of symbols which can be useful in carrying out the objectives of the lesson. Erton (2006) also emphasizes this view when he says that different colors in a textbook might represent different sections of language studies: speaking, reading, listening, etc. (p.85).

The teacher can accompany the educational signs like no-smoking sign with a sentence or phrase so that the learners could recall it easily. Sert (2006) notes that "while teaching new vocabulary, if new words are reinforced with referent pictures, the result will be the long-term coding of this target language items." (p.109). Learning becomes effective when signs are used, for example a no-smoking sign helps in learning the modal "mustn't".

Conclusion

Language as a means of communication has been under focus in the last century by prominent researchers and linguists like Saussure (1913), Jacobson (1974), Chomsky (1957), Kristeva (1986), and others. Their main

concern, among other things, has been communication among individuals in a way other than the spoken language and the transfer of the cultural elements to the language environment. Communication can be classified as verbal and non-verbal. Non-verbal communication is the process of communication among individuals through wordless message, such as silence. Silence is defined as a pause in the dialogue where neither the speaker nor the listener speaks. Silence is an effective way to be used in the classroom. It attracts learners' attention to what the teacher is doing or saying. Teacher can be silent in the classroom to convey a message to his students, and the students themselves may keep silent to convey a message to their teacher.

Silence in Jordan represents different aspects which are based on culture and their use depends on the situation. It represents respect, kindness, acceptance, scorn, hate and disagreement and many other feelings.

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