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## A Discourse Study of Rhetorical Silence in Persian and English Literature

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### Abstract

Silence is a complex phenomenon and embodies diverse concepts. It is not speaking, so it seems the very opposite of language. However, a closer examination of words and speech reveals that silence can also convey various meanings and perform a range of functions. The rhetoric of silence, either lacking or having form, has meaning and function and serves the communication. Its functions and meanings vary according to the context, culture, setting, topic and interlocutors in communication. This study is concerned with the effects and implications of silence in Persian and English languages. It is also aimed to investigate the pragmatic aspect of silence in the literary works of the two languages regardless of their history. In so doing, some cases of silence were derived from the literary works of Zoya Pirzad (1952), a contemporary Persian novelist, and Shakespeare (1564-1616), the English playwright respectively as samples of Persian and English literature. Jacobson's model of communication (1960) was used as the theoretical framework to identify the functions of cases of silence. The results showed two criteria, one is the cultural and the other is the contextual dependency of silence realization and interpretation which strongly support the pragmatic concept of silence in Persian and English languages. The culture and context specific nature of silence in the given languages is closely linked to such attitude towards the aspects of rhetoric of silence within Persian and English literature.

**Keywords:** Discourse, Rhetoric, Silence, Pragmatics, Sociocultural Theory, Persian Literature, English Literature

### Introduction

Nothing has changed the nature of man so much as the loss of silence. The invention of printing, technics, compulsory education—nothing has so altered man as this lack of relationship to silence, this fact that silence is no longer taken for granted, as something as natural as the sky above or the air we breathe. Man who has lost silence has not merely lost one human quality, but his whole structure has been changed thereby (Picard, 1936, p. 221)

Discussions of silence inevitably circle back to concepts of mystery and enigma. This study is no exception. The word "silence" itself is predicated upon an absolute phenomenon: "absence of sound" (Oxford Paperback Dictionary), and so inevitably carries a metaphysical connotation. The many different contexts the word 'silence' is encountered in, however, stretch the concept in various subtle and sometimes ambiguous ways. Much of the ambiguity

encountered in the usage of the word to describe relative conditions can be found in this grounding of the word in an absolute condition.

Hence, silence is a complex phenomenon and embodies diverse concepts. In most usages of the word, silence has some degree of relativity and often refers to states, which may not be silent at all. When we leave a noisy class, full of young children's loud voices, and walk along a street, we find the street silent, though there are the usual street sounds. However, if we have just returned from the woods where we can hear a stream trickle, we may not view the same street as silent at all because this time we are more aware of the noise of the traffic.

Silence is an active meaningful means of communication demonstrated to have different functions. (Saville-Troike, 1985 & 1994) It can be defined as meaningful absence, which leaves its traces back in the signifying empty place in a text. These traces are taken as markers of silence which are represented in various forms (Sojudi & Sadeghi, 2010). In conditions where it has intentional communicative function, silence is a basic unit of linguistic communication (Saville-Troike, 1982).

This study examines the sociocultural concept and various manifestations of silence in the literature as evidence. It is not an empirical examination of a particular form of silence, but of the rhetorical silence in Persian and English languages with respect to the literary works of Zoya Pirzad, a contemporary Persian novelist, and Shakespeare, the English playwright respectively as samples of Persian and English literature, regardless of their history, and the social patterns which shape and interpret it.

### ***Rhetorical Silence***

Silence can be regarded as to be communicative and non-communicative. Communicative silence and non-communicative silence have been differentiated from each other. The former was called "Eloquent Silence" or "Rhetorical Silence" in order to prevent any confusion. This silence is also called active means chosen by the speaker to convey his or her message. Based on this definition, pause, stillness and silencing are excluded, as these are assumed non-communicative. Eloquent silence refers to the silences, which deliberately have been chosen by the speaker and is actually an internal choice. This absence of speech in language is interpreted contextually using the present elements in the text or benefiting readers or listeners' presuppositions. It can be an absence of signifier or representation of a meaning by a nonverbal signifier. This conversational silence occurs when talk is absent while it could have been present (Ephratt, 2008).

This linguistic phenomenon is culture and context specific (Jaworski, 1993) as it conveys meanings depending on cultural norms of interpretation, context and sometimes on the participants (Ephratt, 2008). The illocutionary force of silence is universal and shows the cultural variance (Sifianou, 1997) and its interpersonal functioning varies regarding persona, relative social status and social distance (Halliday, 1994). To support the pragmatic nature of silence, this linguistic phenomenon was examined in several cultures and contexts. It was demonstrated that in Japanese culture silence appears as a sign of refusal and rejection. In this culture, disagreement is expressed via silence not to violate off record politeness (Nakane, 2007). The application of silence in Japan and Britain and a group of people with a wide range of background was compared and it revealed that silence has more significant role among Japanese respondents rather than British ones. To British interviewees on the other hand, visual nonverbal communication was more applicable than Japanese. Surprisingly, the study demonstrated that all groups experienced situations and circumstances during which

their silence acted to express feelings and thoughts (Wong, 2003). Silence has been shown to be a symbol of superiority in some African cultures while it represents the inferiority in some others (Agyekum, 2002). It was studied in Turkish political discourses as a specific context in a specific culture. The study accentuated the context dependent interpretations of silence, where it can have various functions including approving, seeking for approval, challenging, and refusing to speak (Nuray & Sevgi, 2011).

This research is an attempt to contribute the functioning of rhetorical silence from pragmatic point of view, specifically focusing on silence in Persian and English languages in regard with the literary works of Zoya Pirzad, a contemporary Persian novelist, and Shakespeare, the English playwright respectively as samples of Persian and English Literature irrespective of their history. Therefore, in this study we aim to uncover the following questions:

- To what extent sociocultural norms and values underlying talks influence the rhetoric of silence in Persian and English literature with reference to the literary works of Zoya Pirzad and Shakespeare?
- Is the rhetoric of silence a pragmatic concept in Persian and English literature with reference to the literary works of Zoya Pirzad and Shakespeare?
- How meaning is communicated via silence in Persian and English literature with reference to the literary works of Zoya Pirzad and Shakespeare?

The reason for the overall breadth of this study is simply due to its introductory nature. Silence is so fundamental to communication, to the understanding of systems, that the absence of research dealing with silence in its greater context of discourse and sound and metaphysics demands a corrective, a more inclusive approach. From here, I hope, it will be easier to develop a framework for further research into silence which accommodates a more holistic and context-oriented approach. This study is unavoidably broad because silence is everywhere, and yet poorly understood.

### **Review of the Related Literature**

Silence is generally performed during communication in a culturally determined way. Even micro silences in speech which occur largely on the edge of awareness are performed according to conventions and codes of conduct. Our use of these hesitations is in a signature pattern which identifies us, but we do this within the frame of reference supplied to us by our culture. We learn to use our silences just as we learn to use sound. Because silence is fundamental to communication, it could be said to be a global human constant; however, the differences between cultures means that silence is valued, performed, and interpreted in hugely different ways.

### ***Negotiated Silences***

The feedback involved in all cultural processes becomes negotiation in the adjustment to that feedback. This occurs at various levels of consciousness, continuously and in most if not all communication. When this ongoing negotiation breaks down, social disrhythmia and patterns of abuse appear (Watzlawick et al., 1967; Hall, 1983). Since this negotiation is primarily situational and dependent upon physical relations, it occurs frequently in the realm of silence.

### ***Social Constraints: Kinesics***

Kinesics is the way we communicate with the movement of our bodies (Hall, 1981). One significant finding of kinesics is that the majority of the information in face to- face interaction

actually occurs in the context of the situation, rather than in the semantics of the spoken message (as is commonly assumed); and a large portion of that information is expressed through gesture, body position, and minute muscular movements. Vocally, kinesics are silent, although it is not clear to what degree sound plays in their observation (aside from the obvious, such as the impatient drumming of fingers or foot tapping). This pushes kinesics into the realm of visual communication, and silence becomes a visual property over the acoustic.

We are incredibly sensitive to even the subtlest shifts of position of other face-to-face interactants. Condon suggests that we are able to synchronize our movements with others with accuracy of *fifty milliseconds* of response time — a finding that challenges our assumptions about known channels of communication, since it is much faster than reaction time for mechanical tasks (Condon, 1982). Fascinatingly, much of this sensitive observation of others' movements occurs out of conscious awareness. A vast amount of the information we receive from one another comes in a form that is subtle beyond language-filled observation. Culture resides primarily in communication which is not language and is thus not easily accessible to analysis (Hall, 1981) — which means that most cultural expression is silent.

Much of what we would call non-verbal communication or 'body language' is kinesic, and it is crucial to the development of our identity — different cultures have considerable variation in their interpretation of kinesics, and this is founded on basic cultural patterns of rhythm.

One's concept of self, of identity, is derived from culture as a means of self-representation and expression. Manfred Clynes' study of minor muscular responses by conductors to different composers' music indicates a consistent and identifiable difference in rhythmic emotional intensity and expression (Clynes, 1977, cited in Leonard, p. 60). Many studies on cross-cultural communication and kinesics have found that a major distinction in cultural interaction styles comes out of different uses of rhythm.

The interpretation of and response to the kinesics of others is the cultural codification and constraint of movement. Silence is particularly important for kinesic communication: the rhythmic function of silence is essential to the development of entrainment, and vocal silence in interaction facilitates sensitivity to the quiet movements of the body and increases our reliance on visual cues. Within this mode of communication, there is a corollary to acoustic silence, 'postural silence', the immobilization of the body to refrain from exhibiting clear visual information (Key, M., p. 117). Encoders and decoders are able to influence each other's use of slow and fast-time experiences of silence through kinesic signals. This is a use of silence in which individuals develop either synchrony or a sense of difference (Bruneau, p. 27).

### **Roles**

Each interaction involves roles, which involve rules of expected behavior for each of the participants. Roles are negotiated by cultural codes of rank and formality. With vocal silences we are able to establish and emphasize the formal distance between individuals, such as between strangers or between those of different ranks or family positions. Ambiguity in roles often draws out intense silences until the ambiguity is resolved. Shyness and reserve typify this response (Basso, 1972).

The roles set out within the rules of discourse are often negotiated through silence. Turn-taking in conversation is the best example of this, where a pause varies in significance. Fore-and-after silences can provide an opening for others to speak, if the accompanying kinesics of the speaker indicates a closure of the utterance, or if the context directs the conversational weight to another speaker. Turn-taking is an obvious case where the cultural

rhythms of groups come into play, since the range of different rhythms is quite broad, from a tendency to allow for extremely long pauses to being comfortable with overlapping speakers, an 'interlocking' conversational style (Lomax, 1982, p. 170).

### **Emotions**

In the description of a couple whose furious fights are hidden from the rest of the household, Denis de Rougemont has a psychiatrist describe the nervous symptoms of their daughter in terms of the emotional intensity of the silence around the fights:

I tell you [the children] know everything without hearing anything. What they hear best is everything you don't say, when you are before them at the table, so polite. Little Mary is not mad, but how could the nerves of a child stand the sound and fury which are unleashed in your conjugal silences?

(from *The Devil's Share*, cited in Leonard, p.167)

Silence is a frequent, culturally wide-spread response to emotional intensity. During periods of mourning, many different peoples respond with deferent silence to the mourner's pained silence (Nwoye, 1985; Basso, 1972; Bruneau, 1973). This is not merely ceremony, for emotional intensity defies words; its ambiguity demands a linguistic silence.

Silence is also a means of managing intense emotions, where a 'grim' vocal silence, such as in the generally emotionally expressive northern Italians, is the last resort before violence in unresolvable, angry conflicts. It is a strategy which asserts the seriousness of the matter through the context rather than the usual means of verbal negotiation, and allows for the volatility of an emotionally expressive cultural manner to 'cool off'. Likewise, as a response to unreasonable or violent behavior, the Apache purportedly respond with the kind of reticence reserved for strangers (Basso, 1972).

Emotional intensity draws the person inward, which can create a kind of psychic isolation which involves an involuntary silence and silencing of events around one, through repetitive sounds or psychoacoustic closure (Bruneau, p. 34).

### **Symbolic Uses**

Although silence has remained underconsidered in communication studies and undervalued in many dominant cultural modes, it carries considerable symbolic significance. The caesuras, pauses, rests, and gaps of musical and verbal arts are effective in various ways beyond their rhythmic emotional effect when they suggest to us a greater silence. More than the syncing of nervous systems or facilitating clairaudience, symbolic silences rely on deeply complex cultural codes and require participation in the shared meanings of performers and audience.

In aesthetic considerations, the underlying ubiquitousness of silence as a fundament of communication often becomes interwoven with its signifying functions as a sign of the ineffable. In writing, rhythm and the interplay of expression and omission are crucial:

It doesn't seem to matter whether the writer is a "hard-hitting journalist" or the farthest out constructor of experimental poems. The writer's noise is finally an attempt to shape a silence in which something can go on. Call it the silence of interpretation, if you will; but even that's too restrictive. The silence of response is probably better- if not just silence itself. The writer tries to shape it carefully, conscientiously; but both forming and hearing it today can be equally hard. . . The writer will mold it differently in terms of what she or he wants us to do with it, do in it, using a variety of codes. And the variety of codes that make that writing

meaningful will differ here will overlap there, depending on the writerly mode. Nevertheless, we can still, when it is useful, designate all writerly enterprises with the same terms: shaping the silence. (Delaney, 1987, p. 164)

Hall (1983) introduces the Japanese concept of 'MA' as an example of the deep differences between the European-American and Japanese experiences of time, context, and expression. He maintains that "in the West we pay particular attention to the arrangement of objects, and in Japan it is the arrangement of the spaces — the intervals, MA — that are attended. (p. 189)". He gives this as the reason for the greater sensitivity of the Japanese to the silences, which arrange speech, and thus to the context of any expression. Although MA is a basic principle of Japanese culture, and thus beyond simple explication (it is a cultural, contextually supported, experientially substantiated concept), Hall attempts this description:

MA is time-space. The two cannot be considered separately. Like everything else [cultural], and particularly Zen, MA does not lend itself to technical description. MA apparently underlies almost everything and is an important component of communication. . . . MA is much more than a silence between events (our interpretation) or events punctuated by silences (ibid.).

In this description MA seems very much like the overall sense of silence that is used in this study, which integrates the silence referred to both physically and metaphorically in discourse with the silence inherent in the soundscape as well as the silence as the horizon of theoretical physics' observations.

## **Cultural Difference of Rhetorical Silence**

### ***Variations in contextual sensitivity***

Culture as a naturalized set of learned behaviors has been investigated by E.T. Hall, who claims that one's cultural frame of reference is largely hidden to oneself until it is compared as such with other cultures. Silence is an excellent example of 'hidden' culture: it is such context-dependent as communication that the holistic processes of interpreting and responding to silence are difficult to access in linear, slow, constrained language (Hall, 1981). We resist making such rapid, non-linguistic high-context processes explicit because to expose context introduces uncertainty, signals a hitch in relations, and slows interactions down (pp. 85-103).

Cultural variations in the use of silence can be as vast as the difference between languages. The meaning of each silence depends not only on the situation, but upon the value assigned by cultural convention to silence in each situation. This is the bulk of the context that allows us to comprehend specific intentions and motives, or derive explicit codes, from silence.

Variations of the pragmatic use and interpretation of silence are likely to be related to contextual sensitivity. There are considerable differences in this, of course, between individual characteristics, but cultural differences are largely consistent (Ishii and Bruneau, p. 314). One measure of contextual sensitivity is the degree of conscious awareness of kinesic and proxemic information, information discerned mainly in silence. In fact the more organized, codified, and respected silence is as communication, the higher the contextual sensitivity.

For traditional societies who live in a close and sensitive way with 'nature', high quality acoustic conditions are of paramount importance. Safety and the overwhelming presence of natural events demand that sounds be clear, detailed, discrete and well defined, audible over as great a distance as possible and in as great a dynamic range as possible, and interpretable.

High fidelity soundscapes are generally accompanied by attentive listening and careful sound making, which means an abundance of acoustic silence. This silence can be maintained by cultural codes which demand and enforce the silence of individuals, and prescribe particular times (such as celebrations and ceremonies) for loud sound making (Truax, 1984, p. 75; Schafer, 1980, ch.19).

### ***Cross-cultural encounters***

Misunderstanding by assuming shared contexts is all too common and easy. We need to acknowledge and understand silence as a fundamental and culture-specific form of communication in order to develop a healthy rapport with another culture. We likewise need to acknowledge cultural difference to understand silence. Scollon (1985) raises the problem of researchers who interpret the silences of others according to their own cultural standards, citing the case of Athabaskan people who have suffered ethnocentric malignment in research on speech patterns, due to their use of silence. For those from a verbose culture, especially a low-context culture where self-disclosure is expected, dealing with people from a culture which favors reticence and ambiguity is risky. (pp. 21-30)

Different norms of appropriate communicative behavior exist [across cultures], and a variety of intercultural misunderstandings can occur if one does not know when, where, and how to remain silent. To promote natural and effective interaction, especially with Japanese, people in the United States need to learn to feel more comfortable in situations where silence and vagueness prevail. Learning the general rules for silence plays a more important part than generally thought for all people attempting to communicate successfully across cultures. (Ishii and Bruneau, p. 317)

Failing to understand both one's own cultural frame of reference for silence — the values which inform the structures of silence one participates in — and the frame of reference of another culture one is in contact with, will surely result in interpersonal misunderstanding and can lead to serious prejudice.

Sensitivity to silence (and context) can be increased with training and cross cultural exposure (Hall, 1981). Ishii and Bruneau go so far as to conclude that:

Whereas verbal communication plays a very important role in promoting intercultural as well as interpersonal understanding, we should recognize that the ultimate goal-stage of communication- interpersonally or interculturally- may be communication through silence. Silence lends substance to speech and gives it tensive direction- being supports becoming. (p. 318)

### ***Silence is Both Differentiating and Unifying***

At root, cultures hang together because of a consistency in communicative practice and the need for much of the information in any communication to be internalized in the communicants- to be interpretable from the context. Silence carries a privileged position in this as a communicational constant, and a sign of contextuality.

Between cultures, silence can signify inexpressible differences. In Lewis Nkosi's novel *Mating Birds*, the communication between a white woman and a Black man which occurs over the segregation line on a South African beach is characterized as an intercultural (and deeply political) silence:

The gulf of silence — the absence which is indicated in the man's surrender of speech and his entry into the linguistic vacuum of the situation iconized by the divided beach — stands as the signifying difference of the post-colonial text. It



captures that profound silence between cultures which finally cannot be traversed by understanding. Only by denying the authenticity of the line and taking control of the means of communication can the post-colonial text overcome this silence. (pp. 86-87)

The silence of difference permeates every aspect of life. Even while we speak we are engaged in a silence beyond pauses and hesitations: the unsaid. "In everything said there is the latent horizon of the unsaid which situates the said. Yet . . . the horizon is that which withdraws." (Ihde, 1986, p. 166) That is, what goes unsaid is the context crucial to understanding a word — the cultural programming and the lexical cross-references which give meaning yet remains indescribable without creating new meanings.

However, to the uninitiated, those who don't have access to this unsaid group information, it is experienced as a silence and exclusion. All that is implied in a statement and not understood becomes a signifier of difference, a social gap. The physical interactive silence in response to diversity is an extension of the mental and social silence of misunderstanding. These interpersonal gaps can either expand to become, or are derived from, massive cultural rifts. This is particularly true where there is a denial of the need for mutual yielding, which is another way of defining oppression (Ihde, 1976, p. 166-167).

Overall, the complex cultural codifications and structures of silence provide ample depth for reinterpreting human behavior in respect to silence as a communicational fundament. This brief and partial overview has merely served to demonstrate that silence can be understood in many different ways from different cultural positions, and that these differences must be acknowledged. Hopefully, this section of the study has also revealed that the cultural treatments of silence in discourse and in the soundscape are intertwined and originate interdependently. That is, silence as an acoustic state is cultivated in a manner directly related to how silence is cultivated in discourse.

### **Rhetorical Silence as a Pragmatic Concept in Literature**

Silence can be found in various forms in arts and literature. In terms of the absence of words, painting is silent whereas drama is most loquacious. In the sense of the absence of sound, painting is silent while music is non-silent (Hafif, 1997, p. 340). While painting neither uses words nor makes sounds, we can still appreciate silence in this most silent form of art. The fundamental medium of communication in painting is in shapes and colors, and silence in painting can be expressed by the absence of these crucial materials. Monochrome represents a kind of silence in respect that it lacks colors. In the same way, abstract painting embodies silence in that it misses definite shapes and thereby arouses ambiguity, an essential characteristic of silence. Just like silence in speech, which can signify and convey various messages without saying anything, abstract painting suggests meanings without distinct depiction. When colors and shapes are parts of the elemental medium of painting, there are other elements to be considered, such as size, surface, material, brush work, and so on. Sculpture is even more silent than painting because those elements of the figurative arts are highly restricted or excluded in it. Thus the whiteness of sculpture can represent a form of silence.

In music, silence involves more than a mere absence of sounds; it is as much the material of composition and performance as is sound. Silence contributes basically to the form of music as pauses within movements, as it gives and acquires meaning "through its reciprocal relationship with the ambient musical sounds" (ibid. p.313). Sounds in music are bound by silence, which is the environment of their being. Silence in this respect is analogous

to the white margins of the page in poetry. Both in music and in poetry, sounds gain their meaning from the silence surrounding them. In poetry, words are surrounded by the silence of the blank spaces on the white page. Like pauses within movements in music, silence in poetry contributes to the forms of the poem. We recognize words, lines, caesurae or stanzas in poetry by silence. Like music, poetry begins with silence and ends with it. Poetry, as an intense use of words, depends on the nature of silence as much as on verbal communication.

If the essential element in literature were words, then silence, the absence of words, would seem most anti-literary. However, silence in literature is not only an important element as in other arts, but also embodies more complex forms, functions, and meanings than in the other arts. Silence, in its relative sense, can be associated with the use of words. So, not only the non-verbal silence of the speechless moment but also the verbal silence, which occurs with the use of speech, can be observed most distinctively in literature. Silence as an important element in literature can be most clearly apprehended in drama, which is probably the least silent of literary forms. On the stage where words are performed aloud, and where even silent thought is often delivered in the form of speech like an aside or monologue, for example, a deliberate absence of words attracts and gains special meanings.

Whereas poets and novelists must describe and invoke silence with words, playwrights can directly provide silence and express various emotional or situational states such as grief, wonder, hesitation, acquiescence and so on. (ibid. pp.339-49)

### **Data Analysis**

There are two major types of silence. One when no word is spoken. The other when perhaps a torrent of language is being employed. This speech is speaking of a language locked beneath it. That is its continual reference. The speech we hear is an indication of that which we don't hear. It is a necessary avoidance, a violent, sly, anguished, or mocking smokescreen which keeps the other in its place. When true silence falls we are still left with echo but are nearer nakedness (Pinter, 1972, p.18). The second kind of silence involves employing words and occurs when something is left unsaid during speech. Both Persian and English Literature abounds with cases in which, although the characters may fill the air with words, they are doing so to camouflage the fact that they either have nothing important to say or they are hiding something that may break into the conversation in embarrassing ways. Though they speak, their speech continuously points to the presence of silence behind it.

The present study has been conducted with the aim of pragmatic investigation of rhetorical silence in Persian and English languages. As its focus is on the criteria which affect silence interpretation and functions, Jakobson's model of communication (1960) has been taken as the theoretical framework for the assignment of the functions. Jakobson's model of language functions distinguishes six functions for the language as: (1) referential, (2) emotive, (3) conative, (4) phatic, (5) metalinguistic, and (6) poetic. (Ephratt, 2008)

Since the research focuses on aspects of rhetoric of silence in Persian and English literary works regardless of their history, the data of the study for Persian literature was gathered from some works of Zoya Pirzad, a prominent author of Persian contemporary literature, and the data of the study for English literature from some Shakespeare's literary works as samples to study English literature.

In this descriptive and analytic study, some cases of rhetorical silence in the corpus are identified in the given literary works, then the functions and features of each case including any relations may operate between them will be thoroughly elaborated.

### Rhetorical Silence in Persian Literature

Among the big load of eloquent silence cases, some are dependent on the culture of the spoken language for their interpretation. That is, the silence first is realized and then interpreted, knowing some cultural concepts and customs, as well as the philosophy behind those customs.

To explicate the subject, it must be mentioned that there are some eloquent silences, which are specific to certain cultures and languages. A speaker of another language or another culture might not perceive these silences because their interpretations are cultural dependent.

(1) *"Masha Allah (Praise to the Lord) to such a taste!"* (Pirzad, 1996, p.133)

First, it must be noted that empty words (for example Masha Allah) are one of the manifestations of eloquent silence. In this case, the conative function of silence can be conceived considering the cultural meaning of the empty word "Masha Allah/praise to the Lord". Here it must be taken into account that in the culture of language of intended corpus, it is believed that there are always some jealous people who make an evil eye. Therefore, it is preferable not to utter one's virtues. The jealous people might put curses (even unintentionally) on the person having the virtues. It is also believed that by telling "Masha Allah" that evil's eye would be neutralized. As the speaker here is praising his addressee's virtue, he tells this empty word in order to prevent unlucky events. Linguistically, as he has some addressee evil in his mind the silence function (based on Jakobson's model) is conative. This function assignment would be impossible without knowing this cultural belief.

Another example of this type is

(2) *"It's been a few days that, knocking on wood /(devil may care), we have not fought"* (Pirzad, 1996, p.100)

Similarly, in this case, "Knocking on wood" is a culture-specific notion, which means, "devil may care." It refers to the belief that one's jealousy would put you, your loved ones, and your blessings in trouble. In addition, in this culture it is believed that by knocking on wood, one can prevent evil's eyes. That is why the woman in the story uses these empty words to express her feeling of fear from misfortunes and actually losing a good relationship with her husband. That is why emotive function is assigned to this case of silence. As in this culture it is believed that by "knocking on wood" you may neutralized the bad events caused by evil, by telling this and by performing her words i.e. knocking on wood, she tries to affect evil's eyes too. As it is observed, detection and understanding of the motive silence and conative one are dependent totally, on the familiarity of the reader to these cultural beliefs and concepts.

During the process of finding cases of eloquent silence and analyzing them in order to decide which function (among the functions modified in Jakobson model of communication (1960) fits more to be designated to them, we concluded that there are numerous cases of eloquent silence whose functions are completely in line with the context they occur in. In other words, context has a very significant role in the way a silence may function i.e. a silence may have different functions based on circumstances or interlocutors and generally, based on the context.

Examples of this dependency are:

(3) *She married an Armenian doctor whom Alice, while smiling and staring at an unspecific point, frequently described as "the most handsome and the most sophisticated man I have ever met"* (Pirzad, 2001, p.32)

In this case, Alice by her silence, which is aided by non-verbal language items (smile), expresses her wishes, desires, and positive feelings toward the man she is talking about and describing. So that this case of eloquent silence here is considered as emotive.

(4) *He smiled to everybody as he passed through the hall*" (Pirzad, 1990, p.43)

In this example, however, the same silence depicted by same nonverbal language element, has a different function i.e. conative. Here the man does not smile to express his feelings; rather, his smile is a way to show his respect to everybody in the office. As he is considering some addressee (the people in the office) during his silence, this silence, which is accompanied by his smile, is considered as conative.

In two examples mentioned above, although both silences are manifested by the same non-verbal item (smile) they are assigned two completely different functions i.e. emotive and conative respectively.

### Rhetorical Silence in English Literature

One of the most powerful and eloquent silences in classic English literature occurs in Shakespeare's drama *Coriolanus*. In fact, Coriolanus's reply to his mother's appeal is described as one of the great speaking silences in Shakespeare. Noticing that originally in Plutarch's story which is the source of this play, there was no awkward pause between the supplication from Volumnia and Coriolanus's surrender, in fact, Shakespeare invents "the most eloquent of stage-directions" with silence in order to stretch a moment in which Coriolanus experiences an intense conflict concerning his country, his family and his honor. Before his speech surrendering to his mother's appeal for the rescue of Rome, Coriolanus reaches "the most terrific silence of all" (Sicherman, 1972, p. 195).

The stage direction is explicit:

[Coriolanus] *holds her by the hand, silent.*

*O mother, mother!*

*What have you done? Behold, the heavens do ope,*

*The gods look down, and this unnatural scene*

*They laugh at. O my mother, mother! O!*

*You have won a happy victory to Rome;*

*But, for your son, believe it O, believe it*

*Most dangerously you have with him prevail'd,*

*If not most mortal to him. But let it come. (5.3. 183)*

(My interpolation in brackets)

By the gesture of holding his mother's hand and through the significant moment of silence before his emotional outburst, Shakespeare supplies Coriolanus's most complex and intense feelings, which would be difficult for eloquence or rhetoric to express as powerfully and effectively as this still moment. Coriolanus's silence adds more significance to the words he utters afterwards. His acceptance of his mother's appeal means severe danger to him. As he foresees, his surrender will lead him to a tragic and violent end. During this silence, all of these complicated feelings - his love for the country and family, hatred for the people of Rome, worries over the breach of the new alliance, determination to save his country to his own cost- may occur to him. This speechless moment epitomizes unspoken compound emotional turmoil within him and most effectively conveys it in the simplest but most powerful way by evoking intense silence. Therefore, this case of eloquent silence here is considered as emotive.

The counterpart of this powerful and eloquent moment of silence can be found in another Shakespeare's work, *Astrophil and Stella*, Sonnet 71 where an evitable pause after the impulsive interjection of desire "ah" in the last line, creates an intense moment of silence, filled with strong feelings and acute conflicts:

*Who will in fairest book of nature know  
How virtue may best lodged in beauty be,  
Let him but learn of love to read in thee,  
Stella, those fair lines which true goodness show.  
There shall he find all vices' overthrow,  
Not by rude force, but sweetest sovereignty  
Of reason, from whose light those night-birds fly,  
That inward sun in thine eyes shineth so.  
And not content to be perfection's heir  
Thy self, dost strive all minds that way to move,  
Who mark in thee what is in thee most fair;  
So while thy beauty draws the heart to love,  
As fast thy virtue bends that love to good.  
But ah, [pause] desire still cries; 'Give me some food.'*

(My interpolation in brackets)

Astrophil celebrates Stella in neo-platonic fashion proclaiming that her beauty is the best home of virtue. He continues to explain the ideal course of beauty, love and virtue and builds the poem towards a climax in lines 12 and 13. Though he rhetorically claims the ideal course of love to which her virtuous love leads in the first thirteen lines, the unexpected cry and the blunt direct speech of desire in the last line effectively stand out against this generally held view of love and powerfully reveal the poet's private reaction.

The brief but intense pause between the interjection of "ah" and the plain speech of desire represents the poet's unavoidable realization of the insistent presence of his desire in spite of Stella's powerful platonic influence and indicates his complex feelings such as frustration, indignation, pain and fear torn between virtue and desire. It effectively and powerfully adds a depth of significance to the following plain speech of desire.

Another powerful and expressive Shakespearean silence occurs in *King Lear*. When it comes to her turn to prove her love for Lear in front of the court, Cordelia says, "nothing," which is no better than silence. However, her "nothing" embodies her profound love for her father and her acute conflict between the superficial and insincere rhetoric of her sisters and her inexpressible love for him. Whereas Coriolanus is considered to be the least eloquent of Shakespeare's tragic figures, Cordelia may be his female counterpart (Danson, 1974, p. 142).

Coriolanus and Cordelia have this trait of honesty and antipathy to flattery in common. They reject ornate and flattering speech because it is not only untrue but also superfluous and superficial. Their mistrust of language and their reticence are associated with their need for the truth. Coriolanus, begged by Menenius to entreat the Roman citizens' support for his consulship, protests that "I cannot bring/ My tongue to such a pace" (2.3.54), because he thinks that this ritual of asking is invested with false content and therefore meaningless (Calderwood, p. 211). Cordelia, requested by Lear to speak her love for him in front of the court, attests that "Unhappy that I am, I cannot heave/ My heart into my mouth" (1.1.91) as she watches "a bout of severe linguistic inflation" in her sisters' insincere declarations of love (Eagleton, T., 1986, p. 76). Neither Coriolanus nor Cordelia depends on words or uses

superficial rhetoric in order to decorate what they really feel and think and thus gain something.

In contrast Goneril and Regan, without hesitation, use words prescribed by custom for the occasion of public avowals of love. Goneril declares that her love goes beyond words and all other values:

*Sir, I love you more than [words] can wield the matter,  
Dearer than eyesight, space and liberty,  
Beyond what can be valued, rich or rare,  
No less than life, with grace, health, beauty, honor;  
As much as child e'er lov'd, or father found;  
A love that makes breath poor, and speech unable:  
Beyond all manner of so much I love you. (1.1.55)*

These words are highly decorous and full of the conventional motifs. Though she begins her speech by saying that "I love you more than [words] can wield the matter," and ends it with such a phrase as "A love that makes breath poor and speech unable," she puts her case rhetorically and earns what is supposed to be given her by this "glib and oily art" (1.1.224). Depending on the ineffability topoi, she may claim to understand the power of silence to express profound love, but she is unable or unwilling to let such silence speak for her as Cordelia does.

While Goneril uses the general motif of ineffability to prove that she loves Lear more than anybody else, Regan uses the rhetoric of repetition to put herself above her sister in competition in weighing their love for Lear:

*I am made of that self metal as my sister,  
And prize me at her worth. In my true heart  
I find she names my very deed of love  
Only she comes too short, that I profess  
Myself an enemy to all other joys  
Which the most precious square of sense [possesses],  
And find I am alone felicitate  
In your dear Highness' love. (1.1.69) (My Italics)*

Her speech is full of a grandiose self-referential gush with many "I"s and "my"s. At first, she seems to admit that Goneril has defined her own love precisely. Then, she begins to add more rhetoric in order to emphasize her act of praise by use of the personal pronoun repeatedly and thus deliberately tries to surpass her sister's effort. They are not competing for the sincere love for Lear, but just competing in expressing love for him. He promises to give his largest bounty to the winner. Participating in this competition, Regan creates even more severe linguistic inflation making words just a bundle of flowery but empty signifiers.

Watching language degraded to mere superficiality and insincerity with nothing but a decorous exterior, Cordelia becomes noticeably ill at ease and determines to remain silent: "What shall Cordelia speak? Love, and be silent" (1.1.62). Her asides are a dramatic technique to display her silent thought to the audience while it is still silent and inaudible to the other characters of the play. These asides can be described as half silence and half speech, just like a soliloquy in which an actor talks to himself, either being isolated from other characters of the play or alone on the stage. As half-silent speech, asides and soliloquies achieve a profound interior mode of discourse and effectively convey a deep subjectivity (Newell, 1991, p. 19).

Amid her sisters' "glib and oily art/ To speak and purpose not," Cordelia can no more depend on words as she assures herself in an aside, "I am sure my love's / More ponderous than my tongue" (1.1.76). Thus, when it comes to her turn, she can only utter one simple word, "nothing." Eagleton argues that Cordelia's "nothing" is "the only sound currency" especially "when meaning has been inflated beyond measure, nothing *but* nothing, a drastic reduction of signs to ciphers, will be enough to restabilise the verbal coinage" (Eagleton, 1986, p. 76). In her refusal or inability to say what is expected by Lear and custom, she articulates this one word but speaks it "with pregnant precision" (Sicherman, 1972, p. 189). Whereas Coriolanus's silence before his surrender to his mother's appeal is a most complex one, implying that he feels too much to articulate, Cordelia's silence is relatively simple. Her briefest utterance of "nothing," which is most close to what literally silence is, holds her true feelings, whereas all the words uttered by her sisters are no more than insincere verbiage. When words fall short of what they must express and merely seem superficial, the least possible can be said. Jill Levenson describes Cordelia's silence in the opening scene as the fullest and most important moment in the play (pp. 216-17). Her "nothing" affirms her love while it nullifies the wordy vows of her sisters. Her silence is interpreted at once as reassuringly emotive and affirmative and at the same time as dangerously disobedient. As we see in these conflicting interpretations, silence represents two contradictory values. As a positive value it is associated with the expression of one's inner truth while in a negative sense it is associated with a refusal to speak or an inability to speak. Because silence entirely depends on the receiver or listener for its interpretation, and because silence can signify complex meanings, a silent speaker is frequently subject to misunderstanding.

The apparent literal distrust of language and the use of silence as an alternative way to articulate, which we have observed in Shakespeare's plays, are a cultural concern in the early modern period as well as in the modern era.

In Pinter's play *The Birthday Party*, the following seemingly insignificant but compulsively repetitive conversation between Meg and Petey is tantamount to silence in its lack of significant reference:

*Meg. Is it nice out?*

*Petey. Very nice.*

*Pause.*

*Meg. Is Stanley up yet?*

*Petey. I don't know. Is he?*

*Meg. I don't know. I haven't seen him down yet.*

*Petey. Well then, he can't be up.*

*Meg. Haven't you seen him down?*

*Petey. I've only just come in.*

*Meg. He must be still asleep*

As it is evident from the above lines, their conversation functions as a means to avoid total silence. It is not carefully attended, but rather rambling with a peculiarly redundant contrast of "up"s and "down"s and "in"s and "out"s. Though they keep a conversation going, their dialogue reveals emptiness and intensifies the sense of silence that they are doomed to face, but try to fill in with meaningless repetition of words. (Pinter, 1976, pp. 59-61)

This kind of silence in a torrent of language is something we also find in the representation of silence in the sonnets. Back in the Early Modern period, facing the silence of the beloved lady, facing unspoken or unspeakable inward experience, and facing silence as an alternative against insincere and superficial rhetoric, sonneteers continue to write in a way

to avoid total silence. They repeat the same thing again and again but rhetorically and impressively. They are hardly silent, but their speech unavoidably reveals these silences that they face.

Unlike drama, in which silence is clearly seen and most easily found, in poetry silence needs to be described and created with words. Thus the silence in *Astrophil and Stella* is not limited to pauses or such a simple word as Cordelia's "nothing." Its representation is much closer to Pinter's second kind of silence, which has more to do with the vigorous use of "a torrent of language" than with the denial of words. Like Cordelia and Coriolanus, Astrophil claims that he chose a sincere rhetoric of silence instead of the falsifying words of rhetoric, as he insists in Sonnet 54:

*But you fair maids, at length this true shall find,  
That his right badge is but worn in the heart;  
Dumb swans, not chattering pies, do lovers prove;  
They love indeed, who quake to say they love. (9-14)*

However, unlike Cordelia and Coriolanus, he is a most loquacious character. His silence in *Astrophil and Stella* is as profound, complex and ambiguous as their silences, but its representation is far more complicated than theirs because the poet-lover is hardly silent and never gives up writing. Thus there seems a paradox in this discourse of silence: the poet would rather keep silent because silence can be the ultimate form of speech, but he has to speak of this silence, because "for silence to have an effect, it must be heard" (Bindeman, 1981, p. 16).

If there are different ways of saying something, there are also different ways of not saying something, and silence can be manifested in a variety of ways. Adam Jaworski also suggests that silence forms an integral part of speech and can have a range of complex verbal forms. Noticing that the English phrase "to be silent" represents not only the absence of speech but also the absence of any noise, he argues that in Polish there is a distinctive verb *milczec*, meaning "to be silent" or "to refrain from speaking," while there is another term *cisza* in the sense of the absence of sound (p. 71). By illustrating the various uses of *milczec*, in which speech does occur in order to signify someone's silence or failure to mention something, he argues that silence appears in speech. In order to read silence in literature, it is necessary to focus on languages: mysterious, ambiguous, obscure, paradoxical, and the secret languages of silence within it.

## Conclusion

Silence is the intentional or imposed state of muteness. It denotes an inaudible condition or moment of complete stillness. Silence is a threshold, the limit to language, the very realm Hamlet witnesses as he remarks in his parting words, "the rest is silence." Silence, as a verb, inscribes itself in its very act: to silence is to silence an argument. To be silent is to neglect or fail to communicate. In a monastic context, silence functions as a vow, a deference to a spiritual force or sublime awareness. Silence can also be a spiritual state, an aesthetic, and a cultural device. Silence, in its paradoxical materiality, carries a broad massing of weights-heaviness, weightlessness, plenitude, and emptiness.

Silence, in the sense of abstaining from speaking, can be graded from the most prototypical silence of not uttering any word to the least prototypical cases of silence in which someone appears to be speaking, though the speech is perceived as silent because the speaker fails to produce specific utterances. Such an attitude towards silence accounts for complex and indiscrete forms of silence with the use of speech.



As silence represents ambivalent qualities, a full understanding of literary work requires an investigation of various representations of silence in relations to their potential expressive significance. If we adopt a definition of silence, which includes not only not speaking at all but also not speaking clearly or successfully, it is possible to study the various strategies and methods that conceal or evade the writer's intention as important aspects of silence. A torrent of language can be silence in a sense that it fails to produce specific utterance. If there are different ways of saying something, there are also different ways of not saying something and silence can be manifested in a variety of ways.

Rhetorical or eloquent silences can have several functions based on the culture and the context in which they occur. The same manifestations of silences in various contexts demonstrated various functions i.e. the interpretation of an eloquent silence in the majority of circumstances depends on the contexts they appear in. Silence is the common denominator and the fundament to communication in a given language and literature. If silence can be characterized as the ground we communicate on, the basis of listening, expressing, and experiencing, then it has been fractured and disrupted by the capitalist mode of production and all its underpinnings. Communication studies are on shaky ground without addressing this condition.

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