

Research article

# An Exploration of Silence in Communication

## Exploración del silencio en la comunicación

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### Abstract

**Introduction:** Silence is vital in human communication, extending beyond mere absence of sound to express respect, attentiveness, and comprehension. It is viewed as a form of active listening that promotes deeper engagement and strengthens relationships between people. Despite misconceptions linking silence to breakdowns in communications, it is an intricate and essential part of the communication process. **Methodology:** The article explores the significance of silence in human interaction, examining its varied applications and changes across different settings. **Results:** Through analyzing literature and examples, the study displays how silence can be a potent tool in verbal and nonverbal communication context, highlighting its potential for enhancing precision and authenticity when combined with other elements like body language. By incorporating silence into communication strategies, individuals can achieve greater completeness and authenticity in their exchanges. **Conclusions:** The research underscores how silence fosters understanding and connections in conversations, emphasizing its versatility and importance in promoting genuine interactions. **Discussions:** Ultimately, the study affirms the multifaceted function of silence in communication, underscoring its role in helping meaningful and authentic connections between people.

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**Keywords:** silence; communication; strategies; interaction; connections; conversations; significance; tool.

## Resumen

**Introducción:** El silencio es vital en la comunicación humana pues va más allá de la ausencia de sonido para expresar respeto, atención y comprensión. Es visto como una forma de escucha activa que promueve un compromiso más profundo y fortalece la relación entre personas. A pesar de las ideas erróneas que relacionan el silencio con la ruptura de la comunicación, se trata de una parte esencial en el proceso comunicativo. **Metodología:** Este artículo explora la importancia del silencio en la interacción humana, examinando sus aplicaciones y cambios en diferentes contextos. **Resultados:** A través de ejemplos, el estudio muestra cómo el silencio es una herramienta potente en la comunicación verbal y no verbal. Al incorporar el silencio a las estrategias de la comunicación, los individuos pueden mostrar una mayor precisión y autenticidad en sus intercambios de mensajes. **Conclusión:** La investigación subraya cómo el silencio fomenta la comprensión y las conexiones entre las conversaciones, destacando su versatilidad e importancia para promover interacciones genuinas. **Discusión:** En última instancia, el artículo afirma la multifacética función del silencio en la comunicación, subrayando su papel a la hora de ayudar a establecer conexiones significativas y auténticas entre las personas.

**Palabras clave:** silencio; comunicación; estrategias; interacción; conexiones; conversaciones; significado; herramienta.

## 1. Introduction

There is a misconception that silence is also associated with lack of response. However, an active silence that simultaneously communicates, expands, and prevents mistakes can be especially important. People who speak perfectly are supposed to control speech, and people who communicate perfectly control silence. When the concept of silence is thoroughly explored—including its meaning and discriminatory implications—, deeper issues emerge. These issues have been said to add to social contexts and have reflected silence's spiritual nature, as well as its linguistic and communicative significance, since the 19th century. It is important to remember that the history of linguistics "has already completed a century of life with an abundant narrative production" (Laborda Gil, 2009, p. 1, our translation). Its founder was the Danish linguist Vilhelm Thomsen, who lived between 1842 and 1927.

The concept of silence includes the complete absence of sound and the chorus chosen from verbal exchanges in human interaction. Even in the absence of auditory stimulation, silence does not entail a failure in the conversation process. Rather, silence facilitates moments of introspection that encourage clear understanding of our actions, thus fostering reflection. Silence allows for a reflective process that grants individuals with a number of possibilities which range from discussing principal issues, to seeking help from colleagues before responsibilities overwhelm them. Moreover, through silence, individuals can explore diversity and eventually value themselves. Finally, their information is valued and considered authentic due to this reflective exchange of information.

Silence is an integral part of verbal and nonverbal communication and is often central to communication. Speech deficits can provide valuable insights, enabling more accurate assessments of individuals. Silence is critical to communication and its function requires further investigation. Individuals often use silence in response to ambiguous communication, as elucidated by Charles A. Braithwaite (2009).

Silence serves a multifaceted purpose. It can express fear, aggression, and denial. It is sometimes used as a simple gesture of empathy, understanding, and respect. Silence is a form of communication that is easily overlooked or misinterpreted. This applies to people in business and other industries, especially in multicultural or international contexts. In conclusion to this introduction, please note the communicative value of the following quote: "There is power in silence. It allows for thinking, listening, and holding the attention of the audience" (Jagannathan, 2024).

## 2. Theoretical Framework

The word "silence" comes from the Latin "silentium," which means to avoid the absence of speech or noise. Silence is also a paraverbal element that can be used in communication. Communication is a permanent and important process in human interaction. As social beings, we are constantly exchanging messages, transmitting, and interpreting signals to those around us. Although there may be nonverbal moments during communication, the nonverbal form always provides information. For instance, in *La comunicación no verbal* (1994), Fernando Poyatos emphasizes the importance of understanding the literal meaning of nonverbal signals, as silence is communication. These cues provide important insights into the speakers, their messages, and their intentions. Despite the extensive research on silence, theoretical debates persist on the issue, demonstrating its complexity and importance over time. In his discussion of the concept of silence, Raúl Pannikar paradoxically argues that "it is precisely in this way, by contradicting it, that it is understood" (1996, p. 35, our translation). Perhaps due to its paradoxical and contradictory nature, the study of silence has received considerable attention from researchers from various fields for many years. The concept has been considered in terms of communication, analyzed as an important linguistic marker through the lens of philosophical language, emphasizing linguistic and pragmatic elements.

Furthermore, silent communication was found to vary across cultures around the world. Silence is everywhere prevalent, and, in modern times, its undeniable communicative logic has been widely recognized. Messages are transmitted and received through silence; therefore, it is important not to misunderstand the role of silence in religious traditions. Elisabeth Schweiger and Kerstin Tomiak (2023) have explored the multidimensionality of silence and its role in contexts such as silent awakening, theater, and film. They also discuss how silence can be used as a strategy to counter dominant discourses. Moreover, they shed light on the ways in which silence is used to marginalize certain voices, particularly feminist and postcolonial scholars who construct active silences that prevent certain individuals from participating in political discussions on the emphasis.

## 3. Methodology

In examining the role of silence in human communication, this study employs a methodological approach that focuses on analyzing and evaluating relevant literature including articles, literature, and scientific research. Descriptive data analysis consists of identifying significant patterns in the available data and extracting conclusions from these patterns. This approach is guided by research on silence and its cultural implications in different countries around the world. Silence in communication is also explored through linguistics and behavioral science. In addition to the role of silence in modern technology and how young individuals use silence in their communication through mobile devices and the Internet, it is important to acknowledge the historical and current meaning of silence in music, film, and literature. On the other hand, many pertinent questions can be explored in terms of how silence is interpreted in a particular context, the power of silence as a powerful communication tool, and whether it has greater communicative power than words.

## 4. Findings

There are many definitions of silence and its connection to the communicative process. Nearly all authors who study this subject conclude that nonverbal language (where silence is included) and body language provide extra pieces of information that, in most cases, are fundamental for the correct interpretation of the message received. A substantial number of researchers have extensively written about the role of silence as a form of communication. The literature on this subject is extensive. In this research paper, we have chosen to focus on four fundamental aspects of silence as part of the communicative process. These four traits are:

- The function of silence and its significance in communication across distinct cultures and countries.
- Silence from the perspectives of pragmatics and linguistics and its communicative function.
- The evolution of silence in communication through the use of mobile devices and the internet by the younger generations.
- Silence in cinema, literature, and music.

After reading and comparing the articles, book chapters, research papers, and all relevant documentation contributing to our research, we have proceeded to discuss them, indicating relevant changes, and emphasizing the importance of silence in both verbal and nonverbal human communication since the beginning of the modern history of linguistics established by Thomsen in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, today's world, and its expected future developments.

## 5. Discussion

In "Linguistics and Poetics," Roman Jakobson (1960) provides a detailed analysis and explanation of the basic elements of communication and presents a theoretical model of communication. According to this model, the communication process analyzes six elements, each corresponding to a function: sender (implicit function), receiver (conative), referent (referential), code (metalinguistic), message (poetic), and form (phatic). So, what does communication mean for Jakobson? Following the rules of linguistics, a message is a combination of a set of symbols, the purpose of which is to be transmitted through a medium to a receiver. The receiver then deciphers the message. Communication is thus defined as a relationship.

One may wonder the role silence plays in communication. The concept of silence can be defined in many ways. According to Adam Jaworski, silence acts as a means of speech and communication that can express cognitive, interpersonal, and textual tasks (2006, pp. 377-79). Silence can also refer to the absence of any sound or noise. It can mean a state of silence or muteness, as can be the exclusion of comments or concerns; in communication that involves the giving, receiving, and sharing of information. Silence often means the complete absence of noise and the absence of speech in communication.

However, the inability to speak does not mean that a person cannot communicate. Thus, silence proves to be a powerful form of communication. Where words are not enough, gestures help. According to Bethany Winston (2012), verbal or nonverbal communication

should be strong enough so that the receiver can fully understand the intended message. This intensity includes words, movements, gestures, eye contact, vocalizations, and posture. Silence can also express a variety of emotions and motives, such as hostility, respect, fear, assumptions, deliberate disdain, empathy, and as a space to encourage listening. In addition, silence can be contrasted with expressions of anger and respect. It also expresses sympathy and guilt. Additionally, silence can reflect ignorance, cynicism, and disagreement and has the ability to connote meaning or lack thereof. This depends on its intentional use and nature since silence is genetic content; in this way, the understanding of silence follows the logic dictated by different contexts. In line with Myriam Aroyave's theory (2013), silence is identified as a feature that not only interacts with and values sounds, but also positions itself as a mediator between them. In language, this does not necessarily enrich the sound, but simply fulfills a communicative function.

### *5.1. Interpretations of Silence Across Different Cultures*

The meaning and interpretation of silence varies from culture to culture. For example, a woman's tacit response to a marriage proposal can be seen as acceptance or rejection depending on her culture. According to Patricia A. Duff, non-native speakers of English remain silent due to fear or criticism and dissatisfaction with their language skills (2002, p. 289–322). In Western societies, moments of silence are often suppressed as people try to deal with communication problems associated with long pauses (Gould, 2008, p. 10). Tradition, class, and society all play a role in bridging the gap between understanding and the ambiguous nature of tacit, effective communication.

In her article "Cultural Function and Psychological Transformation in Psychoanalysis and Psychoanalytic Psychotherapy," Elsa Ronningstam (2006) discusses the importance of silence in diverse cultures and points out how in some cultures silence is viewed as a virtue. However, in societies where verbal communication is the norm, silence is often viewed as a problem or even a disability and dependent on the community – like in Spain, for example. The right to remain silent is considered a fundamental human right in many countries – most Asian countries or even northern European ones. Conversely, in places affected by terrorism, silence can mean the difference between life and death, which is crucial for survival. Some cultures, such as certain aspects of the Finnish culture, are often associated differently with the stereotype of silence.

On the other hand, Ronningstam also states that in cultures as diverse as Japan, the use of silence and nonverbal communication is overly complex, has historical and religious influences, and can unwittingly create significant challenges for individuals. In Japanese culture, silence has different meanings depending on the context. It can show respect, for example, when a person listens carefully or thinks carefully about his/her answer. However, it can also mean disagreement or doubt. Similarly, in other Asian cultures, such as Chinese, Korean, and Vietnamese, silence can be a sign of respect or a way to avoid conflict. Similar to Asian cultures, Nordic cultures prioritize listening over speaking and aim for peace and order in dialogue. Silence therefore refers to the formulation of thoughts or thoughtful responses. Carrie Shearer (2020) also indicates that in Africa, silence is meant as a way to enjoy each other's company, and it signifies the comfort of each other's company without having to fill in any time with noise.

Unlike Mediterranean countries like Spain and Italy, where high pitched voices and pauses between speakers are the norm, silence is considered odd. Arab countries are also noisy societies. Shearer notes that in some Western cultures, silence is often misinterpreted as non-commitment or even as disagreement in conversation. For example, Americans tend to see

silence as signs of indifference, anger, or disagreement. On the other hand, according to Margarita María Cepeda Diazgranados (2012), some authors argue that Western culture is a language culture, where language is always emphasized and listening is difficult through silence because these practices imply silence, examining themselves, and liking the other. In addition to the standard silences found in every culture, which may be misinterpreted, silences also arise in cases where speakers from an unfamiliar culture cannot understand each other, and silence may be used in response to this misunderstanding. In summary, silence can have different meanings, depending on culture, country, social class, gender, and, ultimately, context. Understanding these definitions is important to avoid misunderstandings.

## 5.2. *Silence from a Pragmatic Point of View*

M. Victoria Escandell Vidal (2006) defines the field of pragmatics as the use of language in communication and the influential factors that determine how information is used and interpreted in a particular context. Throughout her detailed exploration, Escandell Vidal introduces basic practical concepts such as sender, addressee, discourse, communicative perspective, and the role of context in communication. Mohammad Awwad, based on preceding research carried out by other linguists, elucidates pragmatics as “the field of inquiry that studies the factors which govern our choice of language in any social interaction and the effect of our choice on others” (2017, p. 251). Furthermore, he states that “Pragmatics emphasizes what is not explicitly said and how we interpret utterances in situational contexts” (p. 251).

The 1980s and 1990s were an important period of research in the communicative aspects of silence. During this time, a considerable number of pragmatic, ethnographic, and sociolinguistic publications emerged, establishing silence as a central feature of communication. The study of silence has been extensively investigated in practical research. Michal Ephratt (2008) characterizes silence as a deliberate choice and a way of expressing open communication. Similarly, Tim Wharton (2009) argues that silence can be conscious, purposeful acts (p. 18–25). Furthermore, Melani Schröter declares that silence can be deliberately used to convey complex or ambiguous messages at the discretion of the communicator (2013, p. 1–12).

Silence is often defined as nonverbal communication at a nonverbal level (Vallejo, 2011, p. 46; Méndez, 2014, p. 13–14). Choosing silence in response to such comments is a deliberate and useful pragmatic action when deciding not to communicate anything or doing so silently. In that case if silence is used instead of verbal expression, it serves to stand one’s perspective on the situation and it is intriguing to see what that behavior looks like when someone chooses not to communicate verbally. When confronted, it is natural to question the reasons for that choice: Is it out of fear, indifference, something hidden, or other reasons? Thus, silence has real communicative significance as an appropriate form of language (Escandell, 2006 p. 37). Clearly, individuals deliberately choose to use silence and it serves strategic purposes. When we choose silence, we do so with a unique nonverbal power, and often with a unique effect. Rosa Mateu Serra interprets silence as non-locutionary acts, possessing both illocutionary force (actions performed by not saying something) and perlocutionary effects (effects provoked by not saying something) (2001, p. 232).

In the process of discourse, both spoken and unspoken words have an impact on others according to the rules of language. Silences, alongside words and gestures, play a role that is influenced by the context; as pragmatic meaning, silence is rooted in actual communicative interactions, as stated by Escandell (2007, p. 78). Actions can be conveyed through various

linguistic forms, and none of them is inherently more important than the others in the process of communication (Mateu Serra, 2001, p. 235). When communication takes place through silence, it relies more heavily on the context than words, although this does not alter its meaning in any way (Bock, P. K., Tannen, D., & Saville-Troike, M., 1986).

### ***5.3. The Rise of Silent Communication: How Young People Embrace Mobiles as Vocal-Free Tools***

As has been stated, it is well known that silence is a phenomenon inherent to communication processes. However, nowadays and as a consequence of the massive irruption of the new information and communication technologies, silence is presented with manifestations that awaken a great interest, because it influences the way of being, knowing, and acting of people. In the current era, there has been a notable emergence of a new generation, predominantly comprising individuals aged between fourteen and twenty-four. This cohort tends to favor communication through text or audio messages rather than engaging in phone calls. In certain instances, this mode of interaction takes precedence over in-person meetings. It is now a well-established reality that this generation of youngsters has largely forsaken the practice of conversing over the phone. Many individuals within this demographic group experience discomfort when faced with a traditional phone call, as they perceive verbal communication to be more hazardous than written exchanges. The permanence of spoken words presents a challenge, rendering the individuals less in control of the situation and often making them feel invaded upon by the caller. Furthermore, these individuals find solace in having their cellphones on silent mode and often see themselves as taking refuge behind a keyboard. In this context, silence conveys a meaning that differs from its conventional interpretation. The tool, the cellphone, serves as a medium for both transmitting and receiving information, and—similar to earlier versions—it supports and improves the human ability to communicate (Lorente, 2002).

The use of technology has led to the normalization of interpersonal contact, which in turn, has led to the normalization of the absence of direct communication, something that can only occur face-to-face or, at the very least, through real-time interaction such as in the case of a phone call. It is not uncommon to see groups of young people in parks or squares with their heads bowed and eyes focused on their mobile phones. They may have gathered to spend time together, but do they use that time to check their mobile messages? Indeed, they do. They communicate through audio or text messages with others or groups while exercising silence in the presence of each other. It is interesting to observe in high school or university classes that, upon arrival, students often take out their phones and remain silent, thus prioritizing mobile communication over direct, verbal conversation. This phenomenon has been recurrent in recent years.

The current trend in this generation raises concerns regarding the increasing reliance on virtual communication, often at the expense of in-person interaction. The prevalence of WhatsApp (or similar apps) groups with constant messaging may create a false sense of companionship, yet individuals ultimately find themselves alone in front of their screens. Furthermore, the manner in which individuals interact has significantly shifted, with constant phone presence and the absence of audible notifications redefining their communication behaviors. This pervasive silence has become a defining feature of their communication patterns.

Since the latter years of the 20<sup>th</sup> century to nowadays, the evolution of human communication related to modern technological devices has been continuous. For instance, consider the mobile phone: communicating via internet messaging can lead to people's

isolation, as they replace face-to-face conversations with, instead, online messages by engaging in email or chat conversations with individuals who may be located in any part of the world. The solitude in the usage of these technologies and the use of emoticons as a new manner to convey specific feelings through instant messaging chats – such as WhatsApp and Telegram – represent some other form of the usage of silence associated with loneliness as a brand-new way of communication.

The language utilized in cyberspace follows exclusive guidelines and etiquettes that have to be taken into consideration when engaging in linguistic studies. From this perspective, Colin McCormack and David Jones (1998) have had extensive experience in designing and implementing online university programs. This is related to the way we communicate through the Internet and cellphones, and it is where McCormack and Jones outline some of these qualities:

- Geographical independence: Individuals in our online world can speak regardless of their region of starting place or where they reside.
- Temporal independence: Messages may be read and responded to synchronously. However, the technological functions of pc-mediated verbal exchange allow messages to be stored, study, and answered to asynchronously with the identical communicative ensures.
- Silent participation: In this form of conversation, it is commonplace to locate that messages are continually read; however, no longer usually replied to. In online groups, simplest a small fraction of members contributes.

Building on McCormack and Jones's findings, other scholars have also conducted research in the twenty-first century, such as García-Peñalvo and Seoane Pardo (2015).

The solitude in front of the computer could be one of the causes of the evolution of new forms of communication. This is why "a common complaint from distance students, including those who have taken traditional print-based distance courses taught by one of the authors, is the sense of isolation they have due to the lack of communication" (McCormack and Jones, 1998, p. 68). The example from Spain serves as a representative case study reflecting prevalent societal trends worldwide, specially concerning evolving communication patterns. Particularly significant is the inclination towards instant messaging among young people, sparking discussions about the "Generation Mute" in the English-speaking world, characterized by their preference for virtual collaboration and instant messaging over traditional phone calls. Notably, in 2018, a substantial 96.8% of young Spaniards aged between fourteen and twenty-four favored WhatsApp for communicating with family and friends. This trend underscores the profound societal impact of the evolving communication landscape. The increasing prevalence of silence, defined as the absence of sound in dialogue, symbolizes a significant shift in interpersonal interactions. The report on the 2018 digital society in Spain, published by Fundación Telefónica in 2019, illustrates the changing landscape of communication methods, especially through mobile and internet platforms. Traditional phone calls in Spain have markedly decreased, while the usage of instant messaging applications – such as WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, and Telegram – has notably surged. These applications are progressively becoming the primary mode of communication, with daily usage nearly doubling that of mobile and landline calls.

Furthermore, statistics from 2018, collected in the Fundación Telefónica report, reveal that instant messaging has surpassed face-to-face communication as the preferred channel for



95.1% of the Spanish population (Martín Carretero, J. M., Suso Araico, A., Suero García, C., & Torres Mason, J., 2019).

#### 5.4. Silence in Communication through Literature, Cinema, and Music

Cinema is like a big picture of life, showing us images, different sounds, dialogue, and even quiet moments that help tell the story. In almost all movies, there is a unique use of quiet times. Film makers use these quiet moments on purpose to make the story better, make us feel strong emotions, and connect more with the people watching the images. Many movie directors also use quiet times as a way to show their creativity, setting the film's mood, showing their unique ideas, or making their movie different from the ones with dialogue galore. A notable example of using quiet moments effectively is the Coen brothers' *No Country for Old Men* (2007), where music is largely absent, and dialogues are scarce. This lack of music makes other sounds even more important, and the film is rife with powerful moments in which quietness is used to make a significant impact. One instance is the scene where the character of Llewelyn Moss (portrayed by Josh Brolin) seeks refuge in a hotel room, awaiting the arrival of his pursuer, Anton Chigurh (played by Javier Bardem). The almost complete silence in this sequence, punctuated only by intermittent faint sounds, profoundly engages the viewers and creates an atmosphere of breathless anticipation. Another example demonstrating the utilization of silence in cinema can be found in Stanley Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey* (1968), where many images of space and the spaceship are shown with a complete absence of sound. In scenes with little talking, the quiet parts and the music are just as important as the pictures. Another example would be Swedish director Ingman Bergman's *The Silence* (1963). *The Silence* is a representative film that deals, among other things, with the total lack of communication, where silences have their place – between the two sisters – and are used to make of their relationship a strange mixture of exacerbated and pathological hatred. In relation to Bergman's filmography, Paula López Montero argues that silence "stands out within the speech immersed" (2018). She further elucidates that in Bergman's films, silence is:

...often interrupted or told through the hands of a clock. There is no film of his in which the rhythm between speech, music and silence is not perfectly balanced around what he wants to convey. Moreover, I believe that the silences in Bergman would say and would be an inexhaustible source for semiotics even more than the dialogues themselves. In silence the human being hides his truth, hides from his truth. (López Montero, 2018).

According to Ignacio Arias Puyana, the use of silence in early cinema has a long history (2018, p. 56). During the era of silent films, the lack of sound necessitated the inclusion of live music to complement the visuals. The main purpose of this music was to provide coherence and narrative to the imagery, which silence alone could not fully achieve (ibid). While silence was occasionally utilized in certain films to emphasize specific situations or gestures, these instances were rare exceptions. It is evident that there exists a significant correlation between the employment of silence in film, coupled with music, to facilitate a more thorough and, hence, more refined form of communication.

Silence also plays a critical role in music, serving as an essential element on par with sound. It acts as a vital component for the appreciation of music, providing a moment of rest and allowing for a pause akin to taking a breath. Moreover, silence serves as a powerful expressive resource within musical compositions. In the context of a musical piece, silence can be viewed as a note that remains unalloyed, carrying its own duration and corresponding to each musical figure. The functionality of silence in the field of music

originates from a purely communicative intention, thus carrying linguistic connotations. In music, silence takes on a remarkable artistic value and is essential for the transition between one note and another. However, it is an expressive element that is often overlooked due to the predominance of words and notes, given that silence is defined as their opposite, whose essence is nothingness as it is the absence of that something.

As stated, the absence of sound can function as a form of nonverbal communication, allowing us to convey messages using musical context and codes instead of audible content. In the context of music, silence takes on different communicative and expressive roles, such as being a structural element within a musical piece. It can also serve as a contrasting pause, creating a sense of communication through its juxtaposition with melody, harmony, and rhythm—for an illustrative analysis of silence in music, see Arias Puyana (2018).

A notable example of the significance of silence in music is evident in the renowned song *The Sounds of Silence* by Paul Simon (1964). In this piece, silence is not merely an absence of sound; it conveys the profound isolation experienced by the narrator, who finds solace only in the darkness and his own solitude. The song expands beyond the perspective of a single individual, shedding light on the universal experience of humanity seeking refuge amidst their own darkness and silence. Ultimately, *The Sounds of Silence* concludes with a poignant warning, condemning rampant consumerism and utilizing the plight of those already lost as a cautionary example of the potential consequences of solace if silence persists. It not only eloquently celebrates the significance of silence in human interaction but also incorporates multiple moments of silence within its musical composition, akin to many other musical pieces. There is also a very interesting example of a musical piece composed entirely of silence: *4'33"* by John Cage (CursosArteCIEC, 2016). This song was supposed to be experimental, to check the target audience's attitude to silence and prove that absolute silence cannot exist. With his musical piece, Cage proves that any kind of noise may be heard whilst listening to it—see also Arias Puyana (2018, pp. 42–44) for an analysis of Cage's iconic piece.

Silence has also played a relevant role in the realm of literature. In the context of literary works, the representation of silence encompasses absences, omissions, and the deliberate creation of empty spaces through language. This strategic use of language gradually reveals or suggests the message, while silence itself can also play a role in the narration. Words are often used to convey emotions and experiences. Yet, the absence of words, or silence, can also carry significant emotional weight. Authors employ silence as a means to represent intricate emotions and psychological states that may be challenging to express directly. Additionally, silence serves as a potent tool for authors to build suspense, hint at future events, and unveil a character's inner turmoil. Through an examination of how silence is employed in a specific literary work, we can develop a deeper comprehension of the characters, the storyline, and the overall atmosphere. This approach encourages readers' engagement in the narrative process. By leaving certain aspects unspoken, authors permit readers to fill in the gaps and formulate their own interpretations, intensifying the emotional impact of the tale. Ultimately, silence is a compelling tool that fiction writers can wield to significant effect. Employing silence in a pivotal moment can heighten emotion, while punctuating action with silence can amplify dramatic tension. Allowing a character to occupy a space devoid of action provides a moment of respite and an opportunity for contemplation.

The employment of silence in literature is exemplified by poet Emily Dickinson in her poem *Silence Is All We Dread*. This concise poem comprises a single quatrain, making it suitable for full presentation here:

Silence is all we dread.  
There's Ransom in a Voice –  
But Silence is Infinity.  
Himself have not a face.

*Five Kinds of Silence* is an in-yer-face theatre play by way of the playwright Shelagh Stephenson, first published in 1997. It tells the story of a circle of relatives living under the command of the vicious Billy, who bodily, emotionally, and sexually abuses his wife, Mary, and youngsters, Susan and Janet. Major subject matters in the play are manipulation and abuse within the family. The tale of abuse that Billy's family endures unfolds from interviews by the police and psychologists with the three ladies. Silence appears now, not only in the title of the play, but in the suffering and fear that women have because of the terror to their father and husband.

Several other examples of the use of silence in literature can be found in works such as William Shakespeare's *Titus Andronicus* (1593), Carson McCullers's *The Heart Is a Lonely Hunter* (1940), and Isabel Allende's *The House of the Spirits* (1982). The treatment and interpretation of silence varies greatly among these works. In Shakespeare's play, silence signifies the absence of communication and the oppression of abused women. Conversely, in Carson McCullers's novel, silence symbolizes the loneliness and social isolation experienced by a deaf-mute couple, assumed to be gay people, living in the conservative and close-minded society of mid-20<sup>th</sup> century North America. Isabel Allende, on the other hand, depicts the silence of women – particularly embodied by the matriarch, Clara – and how it is used to convey concepts of lack of communication, solitude, suffering, and profound isolation.

### 5.5. *Types of Silence*

Numerous authors have delved into the various types of silence, presenting diverse typologies that are contingent on the author's perspective. When discussing linguistics, a particular typology emerges, while a different one arises in the context of mere communication. The classification of types of silence varies depending on the specific focus. In light of various typologies posited by scholars and experts like Thomas J. Bruneau (1973), Sahar Khademi (2022), Dennis Kurzon (2007), and Remy Meraz (2023), among others, we can distinguish between two primary types of silence:

- Objective silence: characterized by the absence of noise.
- Subjective silence: denoting intentional silence.

Both types hold significance. Without objective silence, communication would descend into chaos since there would only be subjective silence which we could manage at our whim and individually. Thus, communication would be almost impossible. Within these primary types of silence, further classifications can be made based on their utilization. A plausible classification, aligning with the intentional nature of silence across different contexts, includes the one provided by Juan Carlos Casco (2021):

- Complicit Silence: committed, expressing active and dedicated compliance with others, thereby fostering trust and action.

- Deceptive silence: utilized to convey commitment when the true intention is otherwise, hindering growth, limiting future possibilities, and tarnishing reputation.
- Courteous Silence: employed to refrain from expressing anything that might vex others, preventing unnecessary enmity and respecting others as distinct and legitimate.
- Cautious Silence: steering clear of confrontation in the crucial game of garnering allies and avoiding detractors, safeguarding reputation in the pursuit of a Pyrrhic victory.
- Evasive Silence: reserved for calculated communication, where only essential information is divulged in adherence to a strategic approach, albeit at the cost of eroding identity.
- Silence of Concealment: nestled among the dubious arts of manipulation and half-truths, causing more harm than lies.
- Mystical Silence: The state of mystical silence reflects human contemplation in the face of the divine mystery that surrounds it. It transcends mere respectful silence, delving into a deep awareness of the indeterminate nature of the Mystery and the subsequent contemplation of its infinite aspects.

Mastering silence demands a delicate equilibrium. It endows the practitioner with the ability to perceive more and from diverse perspectives than those who are verbose. Additionally, it aids in establishing or preserving a favorable reputation when confronted with complex situations, bestowing power, and influence. However, if wielded passively and devoid of commitment to life, silence can also strip away power.

### **5.6. Silence and Religions**

According to Flores Olague (2022), various religions and philosophies, particularly those with an Eastern perspective—such as Judaism, Sufism, and Taoism—, view silence as the primary starting point for communicating with the Sacred, the Transcendent, or God. Flores Olague states that “the Sacred can be lived and experienced by man from Silence” (2022, p. 8, our translation). Those who remain silent in these religions (and some others), despite doctrinal differences, have a profound experience of something beyond their surface that stirs their conscience in a way that conventional language struggles to capture.

The concept of stillness, as the Dominicans—Dominicos España (2016)—put it, is believed to serve to reveal the presence of God. It provides the door to eternal experience in our mortal being. In contrast to the image of the presence of God, this presence through silence is palpable and unmediated. It does not preclude the possibility of encountering a spiritually enriching experience. The Dominicans encourage communication and dialogue in our lives. But these relationships must include silence, since it opens the way to God and shows that we are open to divine influence. So, silence is a sign of our acceptance and our desire to be with God.

Furthermore, the absence of sound provides a way to transcend the limitations of narrative and communicate with a higher power—God. This opportunity to embrace silence represents a unique skill that anyone can nurture and use to affirm spiritual beliefs. Moreover, silence enables people to acknowledge the divine. In addition, some religious traditions view silence as an admirable virtue. In the Christian faith, the Bible has some guidance on the appropriate times for silence and for speech. For instance, Ecclesiastes 3:7 states: “A time to rend, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (*The Bible*). This verse emphasizes the value of knowing when to remain quiet and when to

communicate. Staying quiet can be a challenge, but it is seen as a commendable virtue. The scriptures give an approval to people who bring peace and actually listen, but they also warn against keeping quiet out of fear.

### 5.7. Proverbs and Quotes that Exemplify Silence

English proverbs, renowned for their inspiring wisdom, are derived from the experiences of esteemed individuals who have traversed numerous tiers of life. These profound sayings offer invaluable lessons that shed light on the benefits of silence and the effects of verbal exchange. In his collection *English Proverbs and Sayings: Illustrated* (2020), Ian George Bolton, compiles some interesting silence-related proverbs (pp. 1-28). For instance:

- "A man must suffer in silence" is an African proverb underscoring the tendency of some people to hide their emotions and bear suffering without externalizing their feelings.
- "Noble deeds are done in silence" advocates for the discreet practice of benevolent moves, emphasizing the significance of altruism without searching for acknowledgment or gain.

Additionally, there are numerous quotations that are centered on the concept of silence. Many created by famous people, others anonymous or attributed to different people, have become part of popular culture and are used as set phrases to emphasize the message of the conversation. Some of them are:

- "Most of us know how to say nothing; few of us know when" – Anonymous.
- "Nothing strengthens authority so much as silence" – Leonardo da Vinci.

Furthermore, silence is extolled inside the following quote by Maurice Switzer, which is very well known and is used even in T-shirts: "Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to speak and to remove all doubt." All in all, these examples reveal the multifaceted significance of silence within different contexts and underscore its prominence in numerous components of lifestyles. The abundance of proverbs and sayings referencing silence displays its great function in communication within various contexts. These proverbs, rooted in folk awareness, shows the multifaceted importance of silence in human interplay.

## 6. Conclusions

Considering the complexity of the discussion of silence, whether this nonverbal gesture deserves significance, and whether silence should remain as ineffable as it has historically been, the paper starts when many researchers began to examine the role of silence in communication, that is to say, when Thomsen started to talk about the history of linguistics in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, it has become clear to us that speech and silence are inherently related and cannot be understood in isolation; both are key components of the basic triangular structure of communication and language. The main objective of this study is to emphasize that silence is as important as speech in communication. Although recognized in linguistics, it has not always been recognized as a fundamental feature of language. We believe that the absence of words can somehow convey meanings as words do. We have briefly outlined how a comprehensive analysis of silence in linguistics, social behavior, and communication domains is necessary to draw conclusions. In addition, special contextual and sociocultural influences in social pragmatics are important for the use and implications of silence.

Unlike language, silence is unambiguous when placed in context and is a genuine symbol that has been thoughtfully put together. Since silence is not a universal cultural construct, it can be interpreted positively or negatively, but never as empty objects, consistent with how words do not always function as such complete entities. This study especially focuses on defining the functions of silence in communication, and examines various writers' perspectives on the topic, rather than attempting an absolute definition of the concept. Consequently, it must be acknowledged that conclusive answers to the myriad questions raised in this study cannot be definitely answered, and it is undeniable that many of these questions remain, and new ones are likely to emerge. Nonetheless, the intention was to lay the groundwork for future research on silence, as it undeniably presents an intriguing challenge for potential researchers. This article concludes and suggests opportunities for future in-depth research on this fascinating topic about silence in communications.

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