

The functions of silence

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Abstract

The roles of eloquent silence in each of the six functions of language in Roman Jakobson's communicative model (1960) are considered. First, pause, being outside language, is differentiated from (eloquent) silence, a means chosen by the speaker for significant verbal communication alongside speech; it is not the listener's silence nor the silencing of the speaker. Linguistic and non-linguistic contributions to the study of eloquent silence are then briefly reviewed. Next, the roles of eloquent silence in Jakobson's model are analyzed. (Eloquent) silence, as a linguistic sign, conveys information in the referential function (zero-sign and passive constructions); it is an iconic affective way of expressing emotions (e.g., emptiness, intimacy) in the emotive function. In respect of the conative function, (eloquent) silence performs direct and indirect speech acts. Caesura, metaphors and ellipses are just a few examples of poetic silence. Silence is a means of maintaining contact and alliance in the phatic function. The various roles of silence in the metalinguistic function range from its being a discourse marker to reflecting the 'right to silence'.

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1. Eloquent silence

Deborah Tannen (1985) entitled her paper on silence "Silence: Anything but" indicating that silence is anything but nothing: void. So what is it? You may ask. This paper studies that silence, which Cicero, a master of rhetoric, regarded as 'one of the great arts of conversation'. To denote this silence unequivocally we adopt the term 'Eloquent Silence'.¹

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¹ According to the OED, the word "eloquent" first appears in 1390, and, concerning silence, in 1862. It is also used in papers concerning silence, e.g., Sontag, 1969:11; Labov and Fanshel, 1977:313; Schmitz, 1990. Saville-Troike (1985:6–7) uses the phrase "propositional-verbal silence"; Bilmes (1994) has "conversational silence"; Sobkowiak (1997) writes "acoustic silence vs. communicative"; Poyatos (2002) has "interactive silence".

Linguistics first became interested in silence² by two different routes. The first, influenced by philosophy and literature, was an introductory and programmatic look at eloquent silence from a functional viewpoint (Jensen, 1973; Bruneau, 1973), but this approach exerted no direct impact on the discipline. The second was acoustics, and only by this route was silence introduced as a subject of study. In the acoustic paradigm silence, as a topic, developed along two paths. One was the chronometrical analysis of speech, where quantitative chronometrical data on speech rates were collected to show the ratios of speech to non-speech, etc., in isolation or in relation to personality variables (as early as Chapple, 1939; Goldman-Ersler, 1958; Hawkings, 1971; Crown and Feldstein, 1985; Adell et al., 2007). Something (speech) and nothing (the spaces, or the silences, between words) were counted. Such studies produced quantitative predictions, such as the constant ratio between vocalization and silence in spontaneous speech (Crown and Feldstein, 1985, 1991) and “standard maximum” silence in conversation (Jefferson, 1989). The second path, which began to be trodden about the same time, was discourse analysis (then a new branch in linguistic pragmatics). Sacks et al.’s (1974) paper, “The simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation”, perceived silence as the interactive locus of turn-taking – ‘allocating the floor’ – during discourse (see section 2.3.1). Throughout linguistics literature (speech-rate and turn-taking) silence and pause are used interchangeably (sometimes within the same sentence: e.g., Goffman, 1981:25, fn. 17; Crown and Feldstein, 1985:33; but see section 1.1).

The notion of silence that crept into speech studies and linguistics in the 1970s was closely associated with negativity, passiveness, impotence and death. It was treated as absence: absence of speech, and absence of meaning and intention (see e.g., Bruneau, 1973:18; Dauenhauer, 1980:5; Saville-Troike, 1994; Poyatos, 2002:II, 197–299; Zerubavel, 2006:13). Saville-Troike asserts that this was because these projects were carried out by scholars, specifically Western linguists, focusing on lexicography and grammar (in fact, these were the majority). According to Bruneau (1973:19), “Much of the manner in which we have studied language function has denied the functioning of silence” (see also Dauenhauer, 1980:vii).

Lyons’ monumental two-volume book on semantics does not include silence. It is not mentioned in his chapter on “Verbal and non-verbal signaling” (1977:57–66) or when he deals with types of lexical gaps (301–305). Lyons is in no way an exception. Yet these, as well as forbidden-words and ellipses as a semantic shift, are all cases of lexical silence (see Sebeok, 1976:118). Moreover, metaphor as a semantic shift incorporates eloquent silence as its subject as well as its vehicle (see e.g., Jaworski, 1997b; Buffini, 1999).

In the next decade (to the mid-1980s) linguists conducted projects and published writings on specific sub-topics of eloquent silence. They tackled it top-down—not as a linguistic object in its own right but only as an instance of another object (their major topic of interest). Eloquent silence was approached from outside. A typical example is Pinker’s chapter “The sounds of silence” Pinker (1994:158–191), where he suggests that people hear language but not sounds. Concerned with language-dependent phonology, Pinker primarily took silence as a metaphor of absence rather than a phonetic, phonemic or even prosodic or semiotic entity.

Only in the 1990s, with the ongoing interest in pragmatics, did the linguistic study of eloquent silence undergo a slight shift, from ground to figure. (See e.g., Bilmes, 1994, in relation to relevance theory; Zitzen, 2004, on taking turns during computer-chat; and see also

² For convenience the word “silence” with no attributes is used in this paper to cover both pauses and eloquent silences.

Tannen, 1985; Cortini, 2001; Zuo, 2002; Kurzon, 1998.³ On translating eloquent silence see Salih and Athamneh, 1995.⁴

To sum up, this is what Poyatos⁵ wrote recently: “Linguistics has wasted many research opportunities offered by silence . . . rarely have linguists referred to silence as a component of interaction” (2002:II, 299).

1.1. Characterizing eloquent silence

Scholars coming from the same discipline or in different disciplines offer a variety of definitions for eloquent silence yielding divergent notions (silence as absence; silence as part of communication). Justice Potter’s comment on pornography seems most applicable to silence too: “I shall not today attempt to define the kinds of material I understand to be embraced within that shorthand description [pornography]; and perhaps I could never succeed in intelligibly doing so. But I know it when I see it . . .” (Jacobellis vs. Ohio, 378 U.S. 184, 1946; see similarly Courtenay, 1916:399 on the definition of humor). Nor is there any agreement on the categories and functions of eloquent silence.

To characterize eloquent silence, its relation with speech and language must first be established. Scholars have indicated eloquent silence and speech as two equally meaningful devices (Sontag, 1969:11; Saville-Troike, 1985, 1994; Schmitz, 1990). Some see them as complementary, for example, Wittgenstein in his last proposition in the *Tractatus*: “Whereof one cannot speak thereof one must be silent”. Compare also Lacan’s take on silence: the absence of the signifier, punctuation of the discourse (which for Lacan is the unconscious) and ‘name of the father’ (introducing language in the Symbolic); likewise his differentiation of ‘*parole vide*’ and ‘*parole pleine*’ (Lacan, 1956/1966a, 1956/1966b; see Kristeva, 1985). Some go farther, placing eloquent silence as the core, sometimes filled or wrapped up by speech (see section 2.4). Clair (1998), citing Picard, says, “speech comes out of silence”; according to van Manen, “speech rises out of silence and returns to silence” (1990:112 also 13, 49).

Bilmes (1994) adheres to his view that “where the rule is ‘Speak’, not speaking is communicative” (78), writing that “conversational silence is the absence of talk (or of particular kinds of talk) where talk might relevantly occur” (79). In Saville-Troike’s view (1985:14), “Each component that can call for a different component of speech can also permit or prescribe silence” (and see Kurzon, 1998:7–8). This notion of silence as part of communication, as the speaker choosing, when it is his or her turn, to express himself or herself by silence, should be clearly distinguished from other notions such as stillness and pauses (see Fig. 1). The antonym of stillness is not speech but noise (see Kurzon, 1998:15).

Stillness is that absence of sound. It is exterior to the communicative interaction. Pauses (unfilled as well as filled) are defined not by their content or referents but by their sequential nature: (temporary) arrests between specific actions. Speakers’ pauses inserted (when it is their turn to speak) to breathe or to plan their next utterance, or for other psycholinguistic and cultural motives (see e.g., Bruneau, 1973), are non-communicative. As such, these pauses are

³ On methods in conversation analysis for transcribing speech and prosody, including cases of silence, see e.g. Jefferson, 1989; Roberts and Robinson, 2004; see also Sacks et al., 1974:732.

⁴ See Appendix A for a short overview of the study of eloquent silence (mostly) in non-linguistic research fields.

⁵ The relation between Poyatos’ definition of silence (alongside stillness) as “non activities resulting from the absence of sound” (2002:II, 281) and silence functions (some of which are indeed activities (303)), as well as the status of silence in his triple structure: verbal, paralinguistic and kinesics model, call for a detailed discussion which is beyond the limits set here.

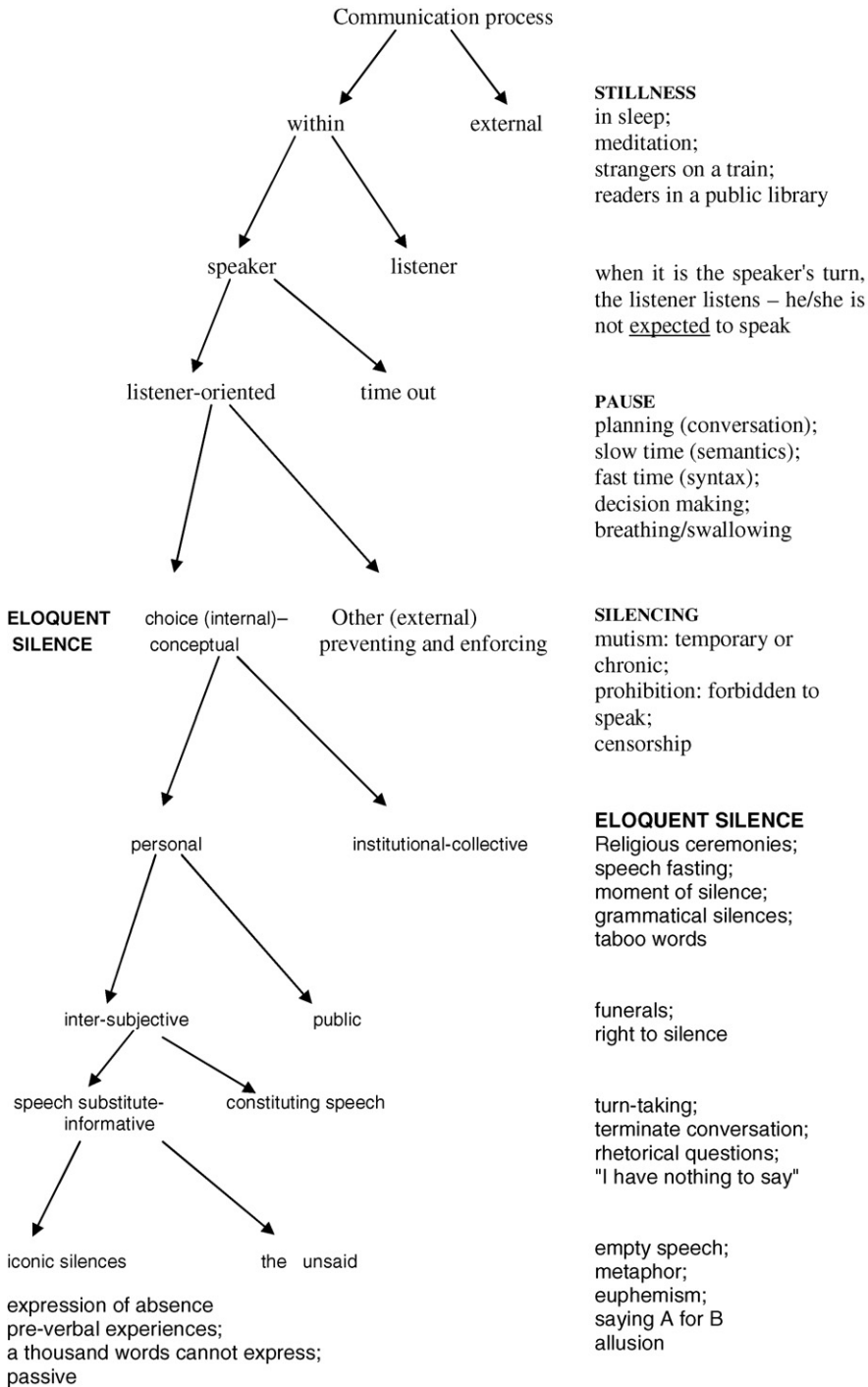


Fig. 1. Stillness, pause, silencing, and eloquent silence (Ephratt, 2007a:14).

differentiated from eloquent silence. As for the communicative interaction from the speaker's viewpoint,⁶ silencing as exercising power over another should be distinguished from eloquent silence (see the last two sections in Fig. 1). Silencing, unlike eloquent silence, is not a way chosen by the speaker to express himself or herself; on the contrary, it is an act depriving a person (or a group of persons) of expression. Much literature and research are presently concerned with the mechanism and object of silencing (see e.g., Zerubavel, 2006; on silencing concerning women and feminist matters see Clair, 1998; Glenn, 2004⁷; concerning child abuse see Miller, 1991; concerning homelessness see Huckin, 2002; concerning academic reports see Dressen, 2002).

Eloquent silence alone (not stillness, pauses, or silencing) is an active means chosen by the speaker to communicate his or her message (on the active constituent in eloquent silence see e.g., Dauenhauer, 1980:3–6, 55; Saville-Troike, 1985; Kurzon, 1998:9–19; on Poyatos (2002) see fn. 5 above).

2. Eloquent silence as a means of achieving Jakobson's communicative functions

Concentrating now on eloquent silence, we investigate the role of silence in Jakobson's classic model of the communicative functions of language, which has become well established in linguistics as in many other domains (see e.g., Krampen, 1996). Jakobson developed this model from one proposed by Bühler (see Bühler, 1934; see also Lyons, 1977:51–52). Bühler's model consisted of three constituents of the process of verbal communication: referent (in the outside world; third person); speaker (first person) and listener (second person). Jakobson added three more: means of communication belonging to both the outside world and to language and two constituents from the realm of language: the message and how it is organized, and the code as the object of communication.

Each of the six constituents participates in the communicative process, but in each communicative event only one is salient. This salience determines the communicative function of the given event.

2.1. The referential function

A major part of intersubjective communication, both direct (face-to-face) and mediated (through the channel of communication), formal and informal, has a single objective: to convey information. Language serves the speaker by delivering propositions about the world to his or her interlocutor. The first of Bühler's (1934) constituents, then, is the outside world as the third person (external in reference to the speaker and to the listener); this is the core of the referential function. Declarative utterances are the unmarked means of this function, for example:

“All triangles are isosceles” (analytic: false);

“Some triangles are isosceles” (analytic: true);

“This triangle is isosceles” (synthetic: true or false according to outside circumstances).

The referential constituent “it” (third person) is objective: independent of the speaker (“I”) and the listener (“Thou”).

⁶ In a conversation, listeners awaiting their turn to join in are not meant to speak so their silence is not eloquent.

⁷ The section in “Guidelines for non sexist use of language” (American Psychologists 1975, 30: 638) on the misrepresentation of women in text citation is an explicit attempt to overcome such silencing.

In respect of the referential function, can eloquent silence make claims (propositions) about the outside world? Sobkowiak (1997:46) stated that the referential or illocutionary significance of silence is nil (although it might carry contextual meaning), adducing literature from pragmatics. But apparently no one can argue that the zero sign has no referential meaning. Jakobson (1937:152), following Bally, defines the zero sign as “a sign invested with a particular value⁸ but without any material support in sound”.⁹ This citation hinges on these authors’ structural method and theory regarding paradigmatic relations. Jakobson (1937:151), referring to de Saussure, states, “According to the fundamental formula of F. de Saussure, language can tolerate the opposition between something and nothing and it is precisely this ‘nothing’ that is in opposition to ‘something’—or in other words, the zero sign”.

The zero sign (\emptyset) is a fundamental notion in morphology,¹⁰ for example, the opposition between “dog \emptyset ” (singular) and “dogS” (plural); “bake \emptyset ” or “look \emptyset ” (gerund) and “bakeD” and “lookED” (past).

Jakobson and Bally do not mention the famous 4th-century Indian linguist Panini (see Bloomfield, 1933:209). Yet Panini’s ordered formal grammar is clearly the source of the notion of the zero sign (see Scharf, 1996:173–174, for a description of Panini’s ‘Lopa’ and rules).

The different truth values attributed to the two propositions “Zeiss manufactures glassES” (True) and “Zeiss manufactures glass \emptyset ” (False) depend (linguistically) solely on the plural morpheme vs. the zero sign.

Morphology is customarily seen as the first level of merging of form (sequence of phonemes) and content (see de Saussure’s classic work, 1986; see also table in Ephratt, 1996:258). We talk of the zero sign as morphologically meaningful eloquent silence only when it is an outcome of choice, where, by omitting morphological material, the speaker conveys referential meaning. This is obtained from the material’s redundancy and its paradigmatic contrast (structural test of opposition).

The Talmud states: “Greater than ‘Rav’ – ‘Rabbi’; greater than ‘Rabbi’ – ‘Raban’; greater than ‘Raban’ – his name [i.e., no title]” (free translation, *Tosefta* ‘Testimonies’ Ch. 3:4). The paradigm here is constructed as a hierarchy from the least honored to the most. So the most honorable title is a zero sign, that is, the absence of any title, for example, “Rabbi Akiva / Raban Gamliel / \emptyset Hillel”.¹¹

Another example is the request to write one’s date of immigration on official forms or questionnaires. Clearly, if place of birth is identical to the present country of residence, omitting the year of immigration is equivalent to stating, “I never immigrated” (on blank answers in official forms and questionnaires and the right to silence, see Tiersma, 1995:45).

Not all referential silences are zero signs. If in a conversation one is asked a question, providing the omitted detail only may be sufficient: if “Only Heather” is the reply to the question “How many boys and girls have you got?” referentially the full answer, “One girl and no boys”, derives from that ellipsis. We shall elaborate more on the relation between question and answer as a speech act (in the conative function; see section 2.3).

⁸ On the use of ‘valeur’ see de Saussure (1986).

⁹ The opposite also exists where a sign is ordered on the signifier level but is devoid of a signifier (see Sebeok, 1976:118; Jakobson, 1937:fn. 6; Kurzon, 1998:6–7; see also ‘empty speech’, section 2.4).

¹⁰ See e.g. Poyatos, 2002:305; Cortini, 2001; Tsirlin, 2005. Kurzon (1998:6) termed the zero-sign the “forerunner of silence”.

¹¹ The title “Mister” (rather than “Doctor”) for respected surgeons of London such as in Harley Street is close to the Talmudic case in that the more specific or professional title “Doctor” is omitted, but is not identical to it: “Mister” is not a zero sign but the traditional means of addressing a gentleman, alongside “Madam” for a lady.

In a Christian marriage ceremony the minister addresses the participants thus: “If anyone here can show just cause why this man and woman should not be joined together in matrimony let him speak now or forever hold your peace”. If no one stands up and speaks, this individual and collective silence is taken to express a negative answer, as if each participant has said—referentially, “No, I have no just cause to say that” (see also Tiersma, 1995:15, 13). The chairperson at a meeting will likewise ask participants if they have further information; if no one speaks, this individual and collective silence is taken as a negative answer, as if each participant has said—referentially, “No, I have nothing to add and no comment to make”. Such events occur daily in classrooms, at family meals, etc., when a general question is posed; the silence of each individual is an efficient way of indicating the unmarked answer.

The two passive forms: (a) “[Patient] passive-verb-form” and (b) “[Patient] passive-verb-form BY [Agent]”, come from two linguistic origins. The former, which originates from the ancient Semitic forms, is not a free variation of an active form but one used when the agent – the ‘doer’ – is unknown: *majhul* (see Keenan, 1985:247; Abd-Alkareem, 2005). The latter is an Indo-European variant generated as a transformation of the active form: “[Agent] active-verb-form [Patient]”.

Today the choice between these forms (the two passive and the active) seems motivated by the function they serve. The Semitic passive form (a) is used not only when the agent is unknown but when it is in fact commonly known, so its explicit mention is redundant. This use of the passive form conveys a referential meaning—the unsaid and unmentioned, but nonetheless the mutually known. Phrasing an active utterance:

“HM Inland Revenue & Customs Authorities reduces the allowances of taxpayers with income above £17,000 by £1 for every £2 of income”

as

“Taxpayers with income above £17,000 will have their allowances reduced by £1 for every £2 of income”

does not – referentially – leave out the doer. Similarly, it is quite clear who the active agent is of the following reported deed:

“Three more civilians have been killed in their homes”.

With the passive, silence is rarely alluded to (Finnish is an exception: Pylkkö, 1999).

Extreme cases of referential silences are blank pages or black pages in novels. Laurence Sterne, in *The Life and Opinions of Tristram Shandy* (Sterne, 1759/1964), incorporates many iconic graphic means consisting of silence and conveying eloquent silence. The following paragraph ends page 24 of the novel’s Book I, chapter 12:

Eugenius was convinced from this, that the heart of his friend was broke: he squeezed his hand,— and then walked softly out of the room, weeping as he walked. *Yorick* followed *Eugenius* with his eyes to the door,—he then closed them,— and never opened them more.

Page 25 is completely black: only the running head with the name of author and the page number appear at the top—all the rest is black. This silence echoes death, absence and disappearance. This black page informs us of *Yorick*’s death; it is referential.¹²

¹² Many sorts of silences are found in *Tristram Shandy*, represented graphically by blank pages and spaces (e.g., p. 458), skipping chapters (ch. 18–19 p. 458–459), dashes and hyphens, as well as asterisks.

Likewise, chapter 18 of Jean Echenoz's novel *Au piano* (2003) consists of the number of the chapter (18), its title "Nuit d'amour avec Doris Day", and the page number (144). A new chapter (19) begins on the next page. The author finds the title sufficient; pragmatically, the content of the chapter is expressed by silence.¹³

All these examples of referential eloquent silences seem to refute Sobkowiak's view (1997:46) that "... silence is functionally deficient. It is by now commonplace in pragmatic literature that the referential or locutionary force of CS [communicative silence] is nil". They demonstrate that silence might indeed take on a referential role: one can make claims and proclaim propositions using eloquent silence. This is also expressed by Hubbard: "If you do not understand my silence you will not understand my words" (see also Tannen, 1985:95).

2.2. *The emotive function*

At the center of the emotive function stands the speaker; according to Jakobson, "I", the first person, "aims a direct expression of the speaker's attitude toward what he is speaking about. It tends to produce an impression of a certain emotion whether true or feigned" (1960:354). Any use of a pronoun other than the first person singular can be ambiguous. Even though "I" ("me") changes from one speaker to another, pragmatically speaking, it is always unequivocal, referring to the "I" who speaks (except in cases of fictive speech, such as quoting in general and actors on the stage in particular: see Rimmon-Kenan, 2003:78–117).

The expression of emotion as the shortest disposition (opposed to mood or temper) can only refer to the self, "I": "I now feel" (see also Weisman, 1955:242). Hence, "I feel happy"; "I (am) Ø happy". Hebrew has two more possibilities: "Happy me" (*jameah li*) and "Happy" (*jameah*). Likewise "I feel sad"; "I (am) Ø sad". Here too, Hebrew has two more possibilities: "Sad me" (*acuv li*) and "Sad" (*acuv*; "Poor me!" might be close). "You feel happy", and similarly "I felt sad yesterday", are not emotive expressions but assertions belonging to the referential function (thus true or false).

All scholars of eloquent silence – linguists, psychologists, discourse researchers, etc. – seem to agree about the emotive force of silence. Within the emotive function, where the speaker (not the outside world or the Other) is at the center, this speaker through his or her words or silences expresses his or her emotions, internal experiences. That the emotive power of silence is frequently expressed in words seems slightly absurd. Examples are the classic "Silence" poems by Edgar Allan Poe and by E.E. Cummings (see Webster, 1999) and Goethe's "Wanderers Nachtlied". More popular examples are Simon and Garfunkel's "Sounds of Silence" and two modern Israeli songs. One of these (by Aviv Gefen) opens with the line "My silence is my scream"; the refrain of the other (by Amos Levitan) is "The need for a word and the need for silence / The need for silence overrides". This communicates the speaker's desire for silence, but the longing is expressed in words. This verbosity is opaque, timber-like, flinty, monotonous and laconic. In this Hebrew song a whole discourse is silenced: we enter the essence of "the need" (a definite form, where the indefinite form – initial instance – is also silenced). A sequence of premises is laid down: the need for a word; the need for silence. The route of these premises to the reasoning, to the conclusions, is blocked in the verbal sphere, but they stand out and become even more salient specifically through the choice of silence, the unsaid. We – probably like the singer – are led right to the decisive conclusion: "The need for silence overrides".

¹³ I thank Dr. Ruth Amar of the Department of French at the University of Haifa for pointing out this example (see Amar, 2006).

But silence is not restricted to the expression of pain. Shakespeare said, “Silence is the perfect herald of joy” (*Much Ado About Nothing*). Similarly, Heinrich Heine called silence a precondition for happiness. Marcel Marceau, the world’s greatest mime, asks, “Do not the most moving moments of our lives find us all without words?” and Martin Luther King Jr. holds that “We will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends”.

Kahlil Gibran opens his poem “Talking” thus: “You talk when you cease to be at peace with your thoughts, and when you can no longer dwell in the solitude of your heart” (see also Olinick, 1982:469; Winnicott, 1958).

The literature is abundantly preoccupied with the expected – unmarked – silence, such as silence during religious ceremonies (on the Quakers see Bauman, 1983; on the Sufis see Zelotsovsky-Levy, 2003; on Zen see Katagiri, 1988; on Judaism see e.g., Ettin, 1994; Neher, 1981, and also Weisman, 1955:244–246). Silence during specific social events such as funerals is acknowledged (see Agyekum, 2002:37; Basso, 1972). These events are mentioned in the literature to show that such silences, being a norm, are unmarked. In respect of the emotive function of eloquent silence these expected silences should be treated as enjoying clear emotive merit. Silence in such cases is the socially built-in means whereby one expresses one’s empathy as in cases of loss and sorrow, or one’s admiration, reverence or bewilderment in the presence of the mighty.¹⁴ Olinick (1982:463) reminds us that at the close of Lincoln’s famous Gettysburg Address the crowd responded with silence and refrained from applause.

A moving example is taken from the Hebrew novel *Someone to Run With* by David Grossman (see Ephratt, 2008). The narrator gives a detailed description of Tamar’s poignant singing at a Friday evening dinner in the artists’ hostel, accompanied by her brother on the guitar; no one in the hostel suspects any connection between the two. The narrator continues:

Silence gripped the room when she finished. Her voice hung in the air for another moment, fluttering like a creature. Pesach looked around – he wanted to scold the gang for not applauding, but even he understood that something had happened, and held his peace (265).

Ten silences appear in this paragraph (including stillness, pauses and silencing). (1) “Silence gripped”—the silence that prevailed after that (singer’s silence and the gang’s silence). (2) “Finished” explicitly referring to singing—termination of singing. (3) “Her voice hung in the air for another moment”—the voice image hanging in the air for another moment. (4) “Fluttering”—fading away to complete silence. (5) “Fluttering like a creature”—a metaphor or comparison: X is “like” Y in respect of Z, but the vehicle (=Z) is omitted (see e.g., Gammelgaard, 1998:161–165). (6) Pesach who “wanted to scold the gang” but did not—negating by a direct declarative verb. (7) “Not applauding” (see below). (8) “But even”—these two concessive words, contrasting an implication/story that is silenced here (e.g., this vulgar person, the one who suspects Tamar, etc.). (9) “Something”—an indefinite pronoun. (10) Pesach’s silence: he “held his peace”.

We shall focus now on “not applauding”. “Applauding” by handclapping is a non-verbal means by which the audience expresses appreciation, hence “not applauding” appears to be lack of appreciation. Yet clearly this is an example of a strong emotional experience; as in very special moments, when “no words can express”, so the sound of clapping seems to be superfluous, separating, interfering.

¹⁴ The Reverent Charles Courtenay (1916), who wrote the first extensive study of silence, was not content to present silence in its religious aspects but dealt in depth with many more aspects.

2.2.1. Eloquent silence as enactment

Certain eloquent silences in the emotive function represent acting out and ‘acting in’.¹⁵ They are non-verbal expression of emotions, performed behaviorally as actions in the real world. These deeds can vary widely, in their nature and in the relation of each with the given feeling or the experience recalled.

In most intersubjective interactions speech is preferred to enactment. Speech is deemed superior and subtler. As Jakobson (1960) has successfully demonstrated, speech – verbal communication – suits all functions of communication. Verbal communication, contrary to enactment, is usually unequivocal and often might be less harmful. Society and individuals will still be inclined to tolerate verbal expression of hatred for someone more than the expression of this emotion in the form of an action such as beating or killing.

Here we focus on eloquent silence as enactment in the emotive function. Speech being taken as the preferred means of communicating emotion, silence falls within the realm of enactment: doing when speaking is expected. As we attempt to show here, eloquent silence as part of verbal communication serves alongside speech to fulfill all communicative functions (Jakobson, 1960). Reik (1926/1968:183) writes, “There is meaningless speech and meaningful silence”. In cases of extreme emotional experience and in cases associated with preverbal experience, or in cases of nonverbal experience such as absence and loss (death), silence is to be seen as the preferred mode of expression, but in many such cases also as the most authentic and most adequate, hence the only possible way to communicate the emotional experience. Arlow’s view of enactment in psychoanalytic treatment (discourse) is this:

In the course of regression, derivatives of preverbal experiences may appear or highly complex emotional states or physical sensations may be experienced; situations which are not only confusing, but for which a ready reserve of verbal images is hardly available. (Arlow, 1961:48)

Psychoanalysis as the “talking cure” (see Ephratt, 2004) began by treating silence as enactment of resistance to treatment (Freud’s “(basic) analytic rule”: see Freud, 1913:134–135). Yet very early on it was realized that silence during treatment was not monolithic: positive, communicative and bonding silences also existed (see Reik, 1926/1968; Weisman, 1955; Psychoanalytic panel of vol. 9 of the *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association*, 1961; Khan, 1963/1974; etc.).

Due to space limitations, one single yet very impressive example must suffice: the case of Sara, reported in detail by Serani (2000). She describes Sara as a textbook ‘good patient’: “very likable person, and both she and I found ourselves very drawn into the work that we were doing. Over the next year a silence fell within each session” (508). Serani describes this recurrent, prolonged silence at length, detailing her observations of Sara and her own feelings evoked by her patient’s prolonged unexplained silences; they were distressful and annoying. But Sara seemed perfectly calm and content. Yet Serani describes this silence as undemanding, an “unusual silence”. She then relates how external circumstances made it possible to discover the cause of

¹⁵ “Enactment”, “acting out” and “acting in” are central terms in psychoanalytic theory and practice. Different periods and different schools of psychoanalysis, as well as different psychoanalysts, diverge regarding the differentiation between these terms and the specific character of the phenomena they represent (for an overview see Abt and Weissman, 1976; Roughton, 1995). Yet they all agree that the phenomenon they describe is not unique to the analytic situation. Following intersubjective schools it is assumed that enactment, like transference, becomes manifest in any interaction and in all discourses.

these silences.¹⁶ Sara disclosed to her therapist that her mother, who the therapist knew had died when Sara was a year old, had been deaf (she did not speak and did not sign). Sara's silence was a reenactment of her comfortable interaction with her mother, and a means of communicating (using the same mode of communication she had practiced as an infant with her mother) her memories and longings for her mother and for such a calm and bonding relationship. Serani writes, "The next several weeks were spent just having the silence. Remaining in the quietness was now not a curious or frustrating exchange, but one of a union of sorts" (517, and see also Weisman, 1955:252).

2.3. *The conative function*

According to Jakobson, "[o]rientation toward the ADDRESSEE, the CONATIVE function, finds its purest grammatical expression in the vocative and imperative" (1960:355). At the center of this function is the second person: the Other ("Thou"). Though all functions are initiated by the verbal behavior of the speaker (addresser, his/her words, silences and their referents), the conative function centers on speech acts: the use of words (and here eloquent silence) to activate the addressee (here too the speaker's silence, not the listener's, which is active, serves the purpose). Unlike the referential function, speech (or silence) here does not serve for (true or false) assertions (about the outside world—third person) but is in itself a speech act.

We can identify three types of silence that share the conative function.

2.3.1. *Procedural silence—silence as a discourse marker*

We have seen that psychologists (section 2.2.1) and anthropologists delve deeply into the cultural and intersubjective roles of eloquent silence, whereas the linguists' interest in silence was sparked by the classic paper of Sacks et al. (1974), "A simplest systematics for the organization of turn-taking for conversation". These authors looked at silence as the interactive locus in which turn-taking – allocating the floor – occurs during discourse. Assuming that speakers change, and that only one person talks at a time (1974:700), they provided ordered rules by which this transition occurs (current-speaker selects next; self-selection of next speaker; current speaker continues). Their rules reapply until transfer is effected, or until the discourse ends (Sacks et al., 1974:704). Five different terms for silence appear in their paper: pause; silence—seemingly considered a hyponym for pause; gap—silence after possible completion point; lapses—extended silences at a place of transition-relevance (Sacks et al., 1974:715 and fn. 26). The fifth term, "interval", occurs only in their transcription (Sacks et al., 1974:732). According to their model, depending on time-length and mode of transition one form can become another (e.g., gap transforms into pause). Sacks and colleagues' paper is considered classic because of its influential impact on discourse analysis (see also Cortini, 2001; Carlin, 2003). The speaker's silence, according to this model, is an invitation to a specific listener to take the floor, or an invitation to the listeners to choose the successive speaker.

This publication dates to 1974, long before the term (and notion) "discourse markers" was coined; these are defined as "devices that work on a discourse level: they do not depend on the smaller units of talk"; they "do not convey social and/or expressive meanings" (Schiffrin, 1987:37, 318; for an overview see Jucker and Ziv, 1998).

Note that Sacks et al. do list linguistic signs for turn-taking (1974:722) but silence is not one of them. When they do mention silence they make a point of stressing its linguistic insignificance: silence devoid of any semiotic or other meaning (1974:679, 714–715, see also Philips, 1985:208).

¹⁶ This report seems to demonstrate the unique clinical advantages of psychodynamic strategies.

Even later, when the notion of “discourse markers” and its use in discourse and conversation analysis had come to predominate, nowhere in any of the subsequent literature on discourse, discourse markers or silence, was this connection to eloquent silence made (see e.g., Schiffrin, 1987:327). It was not realized that these functional silences – opposed to accidental or externally driven pauses – are in fact discourse markers of turn-taking.

Contrary to other functions, such as the referential or the emotive, silence here is not part of the speaker’s wording. This speaker’s silence appears on the borders of speech and it belongs to the structure of discourse in the realm of turn-taking (see Saville-Troike, 1994:3946). Among the different conative roles of silence we should therefore acknowledge this procedural role in directing discourse. Eloquent silence is a discourse marker within the conative function; it activates the addressee to take the floor, namely to take responsibility in leading the discourse: its progression or its termination (compare Reik, 1926/1968:176 regarding psychoanalytic discourse).

Alongside its role as a discourse marker (procedural role) silence can serve conceptual roles in activating the listener.

2.3.2. *Conceptual conative silence*

Silencing the name of the Lord follows the second of the Ten Commandments stated on Mount Sinai: “Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord thy God in vain” (Exodus, 20: 7). Replacing the name with a pronoun is thus an expected silence in that specific social culture. A clear example of this is “the ineffable name” (the name one may not utter in words), which is the hyponym of the whole paradigm.

Conceptual silence serves the conative function as a means used by the speaker to avoid arousing mythic powers, which become activated by being named. Being a preventive action, it appears to be the opposite of the negative conative function, yet in terms of that function, all actions carried out solely through verbal means – preventive actions included – are speech acts serving a conative function.

Likewise, taboo in general, and taboo words in particular, as well as the ‘evil eye’, should be considered cases of preventive silence. Fear of the evil eye intentionally silences expressions of contentment (refraining from praise) so that Satan will not hear and put an end to the source of joy. In some cultures people do not praise the looks or the talents of children they encounter, lest Satan, hearing the compliment, may wish to take them for himself. In such societies this silence is part of the cultural code, so parents will be much more concerned by the utterance of the compliment (endangering the children) than by its being silenced.

In all such cases the listeners – the objects of the conative function – are the actual participants in the (intersubjective) communication event, but also the hidden ones.

2.3.3. *The speaker’s silence as a speech act*

Like speech, eloquent silence serves as the means whereby illocutionary (or speech) acts are performed. Eloquent silence can serve as a direct or an indirect speech act.

2.3.3.1. Eloquent silence as a direct speech act. A statement such as “As long as you do not pay off your debts I will not speak to you” constitutes a direct speech act of threatening. The silence following this is a realization of the threat, i.e., the punishment. Usually, only the threat is in the realm of language: “as long as you do not pay off your debts I will not socialize with you or provide you with supplies: food, comfort, advice”. Punishment is thus an act external to language (socializing, providing supplies, etc.). But here the speaker’s silence is a punishment in the realm

of language, as fulfillment of the threat (“silence treatment”, shunning) and of a promise (“If you pay off your debts I will not disclose your secret”).

2.3.3.1.1. *Silence as concession.* A special case of silence as a direct speech act is ‘silence as admission (of guilt)’ (see Talmud, Yevamot Chapter 7:2/87b). This is an act of admission: compare the Roman proverb “*qui tacet consentire videtur*”—he who keeps silent is assumed to consent. As a speech act of exposition (Austin, 1962:85) its verbal code consists of two parts: (1) “I (hereby/now)” + declarative verb (here “admit”); (2) a complement to that verb structured as a proposition P (e.g., “that I broke the window”) or as a Pro-P alluding to P: “the deed” / “this” / “what I said”. Because of this second part of the expositive code, its referential component is always apparent (see section 2.1). Still, as we have seen, in a speech act performing exposition this component (proposition P regarding the outside world) does not stand as the kernel clause but is embedded as the subordinate one.¹⁷

Silence in the “silence as admission of guilt” ruling is a means of performing an act of consent. It is rooted in judicial practices in which the burden of proof rests on the suspect/accused.¹⁸ Consent is a two-fold speech act: (1) admitting the set of propositions (P) of allegations, evidence, investigation and court-sessions protocols, and (2) an explicit statement of consent. Consent is a directive speech act oriented to the listener (Vanderveken, 1990:198). The happiness condition (Austin, 1962) for this speech act is that the (subordinate) proposition P refers to an unlawful activity. Such an act on the part of the speaker, in the forensic setting, proves him/her guilty and imparts to the listener – be it the judge or the jury – the power to release other suspects, convict the avowed perpetrator, etc.

From an economical-communicative point of view, silence as consent acts as an anaphoric pro-form for both parts of the speech act. It thus requires less energy than performing the act phonetically (“I admit P”). Moreover, regarding the referential part (proposition P or a set thereof), since eloquent silence behaves as an anaphoric pronoun, the need to compare the wording of the admission with the wording of the original propositions (first part of the speech act), and with the facts in the outside world, becomes redundant. This eloquent silence, as an anaphor, replaces all that was claimed on the paradigmatic axis (the outside world), be the scope of that anaphor a proposition, a charge-sheet, or a discourse—silence functioning for all as a very economical summary.

Accordingly, all arguments, examples and explanations having been set forth in an article, the need for an explicit repetitive summary may not exist. On reaching the end of the paper the reader is closely identified with the topic and rationale (see Baker, 1955 maximal identification; section 2.4) and can take over. The writer needs no more words, so an artificial summary recapitulating everything stated in the paper seems wholly superfluous (see section 3).

2.3.3.2. *Eloquent silence as an indirect speech act.* Searle (1975:60) defines indirect speech acts as “cases in which one illocutionary act is performed indirectly by way of performing another”. Blum-Kulka (1987:141) emphasizes that an indirect speech act can add to, or replace, the literal meaning. We then follow this observation and distinction and apply it to eloquent

¹⁷ A term such as ‘false confession’ indicates that a speech act can take place (and may even lead to conviction) irrespective of the (referential) truth value of the proposition (the subordinate) P (which in the case of a false confession turns out to be false). Also, the use of a logical test of negation, such as “I do NOT admit,” reveals that the scope of the logical negation operator is restricted to the main clause: the truth value of the subordinate P remains undetermined.

¹⁸ On judicial practice in cases where the burden of proof rests on prosecution, and for my interpretation of its relation with the right to silence, see section 2.6.4.

silence, discriminating between whatever the silence indicates (directly) and that which is added to the direct act by the indirect one, or replaces it. Clearly, silence as an indirect speech act is in fact a case of acting out (see section 2.2.1), in that silence is used to activate the other (rather than expressing a direct – verbal – speech act).

2.3.3.2.1. *Rhetorical questions.* A rhetorical question always constitutes an indirect speech act. Literally, it asks a direct question, seeking information (referential), but by convention it serves conative roles different from this. It is an indirect means of performing all acts—not characterized by the nature of its acts but by its formal attributes: a question whose unmarked answer is silence (see Sobkowiak, 1997:51). The current speaker’s direct, explicit question is an act handing the floor over to the interlocutor instead of the current speaker. Faced with these two speech acts (direct and indirect), the listener must rely on his/her pragmatic competence to determine which it is (Kurzon, 1998:26). The newly allocated speaker (the addressee of the rhetorical question) answers with eloquent silence.

Cain’s question to God, “Am I my brother’s keeper?” (Genesis 4: 9), is rhetorical. It does not seek a verbal answer since this is obviously known to both Cain and God. Cain utters it as an indirect means to deny his deed (killing his brother), aiming to free himself from responsibility.

Rhetorical questions are the most substantial means of rhetoric and demagoguery. Every experienced public speaker cherishes their unique quality of indirect persuasion. A rhetorical question, which leaves the unspoken answer to the audience, affords the addressee time for processing and assessing, and creates an impression of his or her importance and a sense of being in command. My analysis showed extensive use of rhetorical questions in the official campaigning in the run-up to the Israeli general elections in 2006 (Ephratt, 2007b). Yet I also noticed that the *bona fide* use of the rhetorical question posits unquestionable trust in the audience. The speaker can ask it only if s/he is certain that the silent answer will be the one s/he wants (in favor of the political party s/he is promoting).

The speaker in the broadcast of the center-right *Kadima* party asked: “If you are not a comrade of Comrade Peretz [head of the rival Labor party], why would you vote Labor?” Directed to the audience (potential voters) watching TV or listening to the radio at home, this question is obviously rhetorical. The listeners are now persuaded to mull over this question, and hopefully (from the standpoint of the given party’s propaganda) they will reach the right conclusion: to vote for it, and not for its competitors. This broadcast – eliciting an unspoken answer to the rhetorical question – takes the risk of listeners reaching a different conclusion (and voting otherwise).

The next example shows evasion of that risk. The series of rhetorical questions presented to the audience at home are answered immediately by the speaker himself. A Greens (pro-ecology) party candidate says:

The Prime Minister will guard our security.
But on the 28th of this month,^[19] when you open the window of your home,
are you sure you will not have a cellular antenna near your home? Are you
sure someone will take care of air pollution? What about this
kind of security? Who will take care of it? We – the Greens – will guard every
Prime Minister, and also protect you.

¹⁹ Election day (28 March 2006).

For many speakers and many parties the strategy of rhetorical questions – leaving the unspoken answer to the addressee – was apparently too risky. So they asked what sounded like a rhetorical question, but then made use of the short pause to interject their own answer (and the expected new speaker still remains silent).

2.3.3.2.2. *Request, silence and politeness.* An indirect speech act could be a gesture of the wrist combined with the word “Time?” Such (self-) silencing yields this apparent shortening as against the illocutionary pattern “Can you tell me what time it is, please?” (which as we have seen is also an indirect act resembling a rhetorical form: see section 2.3.3.2.1). Blum-Kulka (1987) proposes strategies for making a request sound gentler, more polite and more deserving of respect than the form “Time?”. One such strategy is to balance minimal expression of the demand with prolonging hints and other softening means, beyond what is necessary. Such means (belonging to an open set) facilitate a non-committal utterance: it is up to the listener to respond in such a way that would (retroactive) tag that utterance as a request (on the relation between silence and politeness see also Kurzon, 1998:26–28; Sifianou, 1997). In the case of “time?” the signifier of the addressee (conative second person) is hashed. In Blum-Kulka’s strategies the demand as well as the demander (addresser) are toned down (hushed), while the addressee is treated at length. Similarly, compare “salt, please” used with the illocutionary pattern: “Could you pass me the salt, please?”

2.4. *The phatic function*

Until now we have looked at three functions that depend on the outside world (inner and outer), postulated by Bühler (1934). The first of Jakobson’s (1960) three additional communicative functions is the phatic. He writes (1960:355): “There are messages serving primarily to establish, to prolong, or to discontinue communication, to check whether the channel works (‘Hello, do you hear me?’)”. Jakobson adds that this “phatic function of language is the only one [which animals] share with human beings. It is also the first verbal function acquired by infants” (compare Olinick, 1982; Winnicott, 1958, regarding silence).

In the realm of language the contact – the means of communication – lies at the center of the function. This is the carrier of the language in the world. Žegarac (1998) devotes his paper to the question “what is phatic communication?” One answer is “minimum of information vs. maximum of supportive chat” (Žegarac, 328). The most obvious example is “small talk”: commuters on the London Underground going on about the weather; similarly, see Olinick’s description of barber’s chatter (Olinick, 1982:463). This is empty speech, Lacan’s “*parole vide*”, “where the subject seems to be talking in vain about someone who, even if he were his spitting image, can never become one with the assumption of his desire” (Lacan, 1956/1966a:50, see also Reik, 1926/1968:176–177, 183; and see Bilmes, 1994:82: “some silences are obscured by words”). According to Lacan, empty speech deceives, but its unique contribution is that by speaking it situates the speaker in the locus of the Subject.

In contrast to the empty speech of the phatic function, eloquent silence plays a uniquely powerful role in carrying phatic meaning.

Regarding this function, the way linguists perceive words (even empty speech) may usefully be compared with the way psychotherapists treat silence. The former – such as Jakobson – regard utterances such as “Hello” or “Testing 1, 2, 3 check” (checking the loudspeaker) as examples of the phatic function. This stance is most apparent in the phatic maxim proposed by Leech (1983:142): “Go on talking” and negatively: “Avoid silence”. Similarly, many businesses connect their telephone systems to a radio channel only to confirm that the communication

channel – the telephone – is still operative (regardless of whether a real person is listening at the other end).

As for the psychotherapists and followers of the various psychoanalytic schools, this is how Olinick (1982) begins his paper: “It is hardly a novelty for the psychoanalyst to reflect on silence, whether his own or his patients’. Nor is it a revelation to hear that there are many varieties of silence”. Olinick refers to phatic silence as the silence usually outside the clinic. The classic example, according to Olinick (1982:469) and many others, is the silence of intimates. He also gives examples from literature. David Grossman’s Hebrew novel *Someone to Run With* (section 2.2) furnishes an example of our own. The novel ends with a meeting between Tamar and Assaf: “Tamar noticed that she had never met a person she felt so comfortable being silent with” (374). In all Olinick’s examples, such phatic silence serves the ultimate togetherness: intimacy between two separate selves/individuals (see also Winnicott, 1958; Reik, 1926/1968 on the analyst’s initial silence; see further below).

This is the complementary phase of the phatic function: keeping the channel of communication open through silence. Jensen (1973) regards the maintenance of contact (a phatic role) as the principal role of silence (followed by roles such as expression of sympathy and revelation).

Baker (1955) introduces an interpersonal theory on silence, which he builds on the role of psychic tension:

The underlying (unconscious and unpremeditated) aim of speech is not a continued flow of speech, but *silence*, for the state of complete equilibrium, marked by elimination of interpersonal psychic tension, is possible only when the position S+ in the speech field has been reached. (1955:161)

This silence brings subjects closer. Baker situates phatic eloquent silence, as a positive stimulus, at the culmination of the reciprocal identification, as opposed to speech, which in such situations might even be experienced as noise. Bilmes (1994:74) cites the Chinese saying, “One should speak only if the quality of what one has to say is greater than the quality of the silence that one interrupts”. Baker places speech in the locus of the partial reciprocal identification, namely between what he terms S– (negative silence/stimulus), that is, the absolute lack of reciprocal identification (blocked type: see also Basso, 1972:71), and S+ (positive silence/stimulus), that is, not disturbed; complete reciprocal identification.

Reik seems to start after Baker’s final stage (see Reik, 1926/1968 (182): calm-sympathy and intense-hostility) as a mirror image: the analyst’s silence at the initial sessions communicates calmness and sympathy and containment (these are not Reik’s words). Only later are the analyst’s silences taken as hostility. This silence alone must be that which Reik (1926/1968:179) calls a “characteristic sign of death”.

Baker’s theory predicts that eliminating tension results in silence. He speaks of S+ as the goal of speech, going forward; he by no means sees this as a return to the primary fetus-mother bond (see Piontelli, 1992:36–37) or the infant–mother bond (Winnicott, 1963:179–192; see also Winnicott, 1958:29–36, who presents this silence of unification as coming full circle to the pre-verbal primary bond). Olinick (1982) holds that “The *intrapsychic function or goal* of this verbal expression is to produce a partly regressive state of silence, not through plentiful understanding but through a soothing reassurance” (1982:469, emphasis in the original). He closely relates this phatic silence to a regressive (transitional) phenomenon (see also p. 468).

2.5. The poetic function

The two functions that Jakobson added to Bühler's model are centered on language, the signifier axis. Because they share language as their center, Jakobson (1960:358) states: "Poetry and metalanguage, however, are in diametrical opposition to each other: in metalanguage the sequence is used to build an equation, whereas in poetry the equation is used to build a sequence".

At the center of the poetic function is the message in its own right. It is not the context, the external world (cf. the referential function, section 2.1) or the speaker's inner world (see emotive function, section 2.2) or the speaker activating the listener (cf. the conative function, section 2.3). It is the ordering of the signifiers as an aesthetic sequence. That is why this function is responsible for the aesthetic experience triggered by language.

Here, eloquent silence is not silence as the object (context) of poetry and literature. Many poems and stories use words to speak of silence: praise it or curse it (see e.g., Heinrich Böll, Poe, Goethe, etc., and compare the synopsis of the Hebrew song in section 2.2). In the poetic function, the issue is the poet's or the writer's decision to incorporate silence as part of the aesthetic sequence. A very trivial example is silence as part of an equation: the zero sign, caesuras, ellipses, and blank lines all serve to build up such an effect.

The above techniques all make the sequence (including its silences) salient as the outcome of the speech/silence equation. A special case is found in the Hebrew poem "Curriculum post mortem"²⁰ by the late poet David Avidan. Due to space limitations we cannot quote the complete poem here, only the final strophe:

"-----, I want (am willing) ----!"
 Caaaaalled the man (the entity, the possibility) in -----
 -----,
 But then (sometime, then-whence, oh-see) --- still toastill
 "wait (anticipate, move, remember) -----",
 Proposed (fixed) angel (angle) hahaha "-----
 ----- so much so (so much in order)
 in ----- thus so much so (in order so much)
 in (from, to, the) ---- so much so (so match)!"

"Curriculum post mortem" is the fourth poem of a quadruplet: "Curriculum vitae"; "Curriculum mortis"; "Curriculum vitae et mortis" and "Curriculum post mortem". The following is the closing strophe of the third poem of the quadruplet:

"Edge-of-my-years, I don't want to die!"
 Called the man at-the-edge-of-his-years to-the-edge
 of-his-years at-the-edge-of-his-years,

²⁰ David Avidan translated some of his poems into English. Since no such translation of the "Curriculum vitae" poems was found in his legacy, the one given here is my own humble attempt.

But then it was still too early.
 “flee from me through the hours”,
 Proposed the Angel of Death, “anglean
 not su contradictory factors
 in something lost so mu in a minute
 so fit”?

Silences indicated by dashes or in the form of truncated words (“anglean” for “and glean”; “mu” for “much” and “su” for “such”) create a sequence through their unique parallelism with corresponding words and clauses in the matching poems. Avidan seems to achieve here the characteristics of the poetic function specified by Jakobson. On top, he adds a layer of iconicity: expressing the shortcoming of life (“mortis”) through the dearth of words, and the bonding of life (“vitae”) through the clumping of words into a single grapheme (on iconicity see Ephratt, 2005).

2.6. The metalanguage function

Sixth and last is the metalinguistic function. Its central component is the code: pursuit of language not as a means but as the end—the objective of study. This holds for the linguistics discourse, as well as for the layman discussing language matters. If we ask, for example, “What is longer, a pig or a ladybird?” we will get two different answers depending on whether the answer is referential or metalinguistic (referring to the objects denoted or to their names, the words).

Sobkowiak (1997), dealing with the markedness status of silence, refers to functional criteria, among which he mentions Jakobson’s model. Sobkowiak is certain that silence is inferior to speech since it does not function referentially and metalinguistically. Silence “cannot function metalingually”: “It cannot be used to comment on, or express a query about the structure of language itself” (Sobkowiak, 1997:46, on the referential function: see section 2.1).

We have shown (section 2.3.1) that the role of eloquent silence as indicating turn-taking in conversation places silence as a discourse marker, which is by definition a metalinguistic role in the conduct of the conversation, and thus activates the interlocutor (conative function). This serves as a counter-example to Sobkowiak’s claim regarding the metalinguistic role of eloquent silence.

We now add more metalinguistic categories that demonstrate the role of eloquent silence in this function.

2.6.1. The code as object

If a person approaches you speaking a language foreign to you and asking “*Parlez vous français?*”, you hear the phonetic sequence and the prosody. Even though you do not speak French, you recognize this particular question as equivalent to “Do you speak French?” You can then respond by uttering “No” (pronounced either with a seemingly French accent, “*non*”, or as the English word). Referentially, this is exactly the same as what happens when we are asked if we know where X lives (which we don’t). However, we have no inkling of that language, so we can only conclude, using our intersubjective competence, that the person is trying to make some kind of contact with us. We may not even realize that s/he is asking a question. Our lips remain sealed. Referring to the code, this silence asserts: “I am not part of it, I do not share this code”. As such, this

is indeed an answer to the metalinguistic question; it spells out: “No, I cannot communicate with you”.

As the question asked is a yes/no question, the addresser will perceive this silence as meaning “No”. Similarly, regarding two persons sharing the same code, the spoken word “Silently” would constitute an appropriate (metalinguistic) answer to the question “How did he take the news?” So not only the actual word “silently” but the act (or enactment; see sections 2.3.3.2 and 2.2.1) of remaining silent itself is an instance of metalinguistic silence.

2.6.2. Syntactic silences

On a purely syntactic level, islands and ellipses are cases of eloquent silence (Pesetsky, 1995; Lappin, 1999; Merchant, 2001). We look here at such syntactic phenomena serving the metalinguistic function.

2.6.2.1. Silence as a syntactic marker. A pause to breathe and rest is a physiological need. The rhythm of breathing (inhaling, exhaling and resting) for a healthy person is one cycle every 3–7 s. Moreover, this cycle, or even its multiple, still allows the fluent production of a reasonable sentence. Weisman (1955:258) writes: “A distinction must be made between *pause* and *silence*. Pause is a natural rest in the melody of speech and requires no special concern”. Beyond this physiological need, which as we see is negligible, arises another demand: the syntactic-prosodic structuring of the utterance. Silence breaks up the syntactic constituents and mingles words within constituents. As we saw regarding the discourse marker (see section 2.3.1), silence as a marker comes at the borders between constituents. Silence serving as a marker is a formal sign—having a procedural (rather than conceptual) meaning: demarcating syntactic roles and pointing to their nature. This is most apparent when comparing syndetic and asyndetic subordination. Examples are “The chicken is ready to eat”: “The chicken \emptyset is ready to eat”/“The chicken is ready \emptyset to eat”; multiple possessive compounds, e.g., “Tibetan history teacher”: “Tibetan \emptyset history teacher”/“Tibetan history \emptyset teacher”; or other elliptical constructs, e.g., “To govern people use language”: “To govern \emptyset people use language”/“To govern people \emptyset use language”.

2.6.2.2. The agent silenced in the subject position. Regarding the referential function (section 2.1), we demonstrated that when the agent – the doer of an act – is known to the speaker and to the listener, the speaker’s decision to use the passive form – leaving out the doer – is a referential silence (see Keenan, 1985:247; Abd-Alkareem, 2005). Silencing on the metalinguistic level occurs when the agent is degraded from the subject position – the active form – to the object position by means of the passive “by” form:

“A child was killed by the soldiers”;
 “The solution was turned down by the Minister in charge”.

As explained (see section 2.1), this form is not the classic Semitic *majhul* (unknown). It is the Indo-European passive, a stylistic option with no referential meaning but serving metalinguistically for thematic implications (see Leech, 1974:23).

2.6.3. “No words to express”

The opening words of Pope John Paul II during his visit to Yad Vashem – Israel’s Holocaust Commemorative Institute – (23 March 2000), were:

In this place of memories, the mind and heart and soul feel an extreme need for silence. Silence in which to remember. Silence in which to try to make some sense of the memories which come flooding back. Silence because there are no words strong enough to deplore the terrible tragedy of the Shoah.²¹

In this moving text the Pope lists three roles of silence, the third of which is “there are no words strong enough to deplore”. Saying this, the Pope did not mean to say “I have nothing to say”, which would be a referential matter of pause (not silence, see section 1), but on the contrary, content-wise, he did have something to say: he felt obliged to deplore. Deploping is an act realized by words, so “deplore” is an archetypal speech act (see section 2.3; Austin, 1962:60–61). The Pope did not talk about the Shoah, or even about deploping it, but about the (language) code: he expressed the failure of words to do their job, to carry out an act: to deplore. Does the Pope deplore here? He deplores by silence. “There are no words (strong enough)” act then as a discourse marker on the metalinguistic level. A marker pointing to the code: commenting on the structure of language (see Sobkowiak, 1997:46) to indicate: Now comes silence—not because I have nothing to say (pause) but due to the inadequacy of the code to express.²² The idiomatic character of “there are no words” also attests to its being a marker (see Schiffrin, 1987).

2.6.4. *The right to silence*

A different category is the silence of ‘the right to silence’. This issue occupies many discussions and papers, both in legalistic communities worldwide and in non-professional discussions (for an overview, see Report, 1989; Kurzon, 1995, 1998:51 ff.; Easton, 1998; Cotterill, 2005).²³ Prima facie, ‘silence as concession’ (see section 2.3.3.1.1) and ‘the right to silence’ contradict each other. To resolve this, we resort here to two functions: the conative and the metalinguistic. Following Shuy’s just claim concerning the Miranda warning, that “Law and linguistics may well be looking at the same data, but they do so with quite different eyes” (Shuy, 1997:177),²⁴ we wish to contribute to this matter using our linguistic tools, combining here Jakobson’s metalinguistic function and our study of silence. Our claim about the metalinguistic orientation of the right to silence does not eliminate the possibility of manipulative or misleading use of this right by criminals (see the Bentham quote, below). Alongside the use of eloquent silence as a conative means for declaring admission (see section 2.3.3.1.1), in cases where the burden of proof rests with the prosecution, an admonition given using speech (not silence, see Constable, 2006) states the right to remain silent. In the USA, according to the Fifth Amendment:

²¹ <http://www.yadvashem.org.il>.

²² See also Neher, 1981, who joins silences in the Bible with the silence of Holocaust. See also Sibelman, 1995, looking into silences in the writings of Elie Wiesel.

²³ We cannot deal here in all detail with all aspects of the right to silence, such as the differences between these rights in different judicial systems, circumstances and times; if this privilege holds in investigations, arrests, and at court; if it holds for all suspects and people charged; whether the police or the courts are explicitly obliged to advise the detainee of this right (in US practice called the ‘Miranda warning’; see below), and when. Likewise the relation between the judicial system and the right and its interpretation: differences between judges and jury, etc. We restrict ourselves to matters crucial for making our claim regarding the right serving a metalinguistic function, and supporting it.

²⁴ Although Shuy devotes his 1997 paper to listing unanswered language questions about Miranda and presents many examples showing the (meta)linguistic (in)competence of uneducated illiterate suspects, he does not see the metalinguistic aspect of the right to silence. We should also point in passing that not all of the ten questions raised by Shuy are in fact linguistic questions (see e.g. “can interrogation be anything but coercive?”).

No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, . . . nor shall any person be subject for the same offense to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself, nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use, without just compensation.

The privilege must exist, and must also be stated explicitly, advising the suspect as a warning. In the *Miranda vs. Arizona* case, an objection was raised to a suspect's being interrogated for information without his being explicitly advised of his right to silence in advance (before the investigation); this yielded the following ruling:

The person in custody must, prior to interrogation, be clearly informed that he has the right to remain silent, and that anything he says will be used against him in court; he must be clearly informed that he has the right to consult with a lawyer and to have the lawyer with him during interrogation, and that, if he is indigent, a lawyer will be appointed to represent him. (*Miranda vs. Arizona* 1966)

The actual wording of the warning proposed by the court (the so-called “*Miranda* warning”) is

You have the right to remain silent. Anything you say can and will be used against you in a court of law. You have the right to speak to an attorney, and to have an attorney present during any questioning. If you cannot afford a lawyer, one will be provided for you at government expense.

The British privilege against self-incrimination originated in England's Star Chamber in the 16th century and has since undergone many changes (see [Report, 1989](#); [Kurzon, 1998:58–63](#); [Easton, 1998](#); [Cotterill, 2005](#)). The most recent major modification was the 1994 Criminal Justice and Public Order Act. The wording of the current warning in Britain differs from the *Miranda* statement:

You do not have to say anything unless you wish to do so, but I must warn you that if you fail to mention any fact which you rely on in your defence in court, your failure to take this opportunity to mention it may be treated in court as supporting any relevant evidence against you. If you do wish to say anything, what you say may be given in evidence. (See [Report, 1989:23](#), and [Cotterill, 2005:8](#))

Regarding the present phrasing, Jaworski said:

The old caution seems to recognize silence as a defence mechanism of the powerless party (the suspect), the new one presupposes a set of inferences to be drawn unilaterally from the suspect's silence by the powerful party (the police). (Cited in [Cotterill, 2005:9](#))

We point here to two issues: first, whereas the *Miranda* wording announces the right to (remain) silent, the British phrasing states that one does not have to say anything unless s/he wishes to do so. Second, it stresses that the police, court or jury may draw inferences from that silence.

The fixed wording of the texts in each warning notwithstanding, in practice police officers do not read out the official statement but paraphrase it, and with enormous variability (see [Berk-Seligson, 2002](#); [Shuy, 1997](#), and see also our discussion of the metalinguistic prerequisites for a full understanding of this warning).

Both these statements of caution [the American and the British] use words to perform an act of warning (see Constable, 2006:156), whose content comes under the metalinguistic (rather than the referential) function. Their content cautions the suspect, the accused, or a witness on the stand on two matters:

- (a) Speech in interrogation and the court works differently from other (everyday) exchanges, hence might have different consequences. Constable (2006:150) writes:

The Miranda warning lets its addressee know of the danger that, as of this moment of entry into the legal process, his or her utterances are liable, in the contexts of both interrogation and trial, to have different import than they would otherwise have (see also Conley and O’Barr, 1990:168–169).

- (b) Silence in interrogation and court may be interpreted in different ways. A controversial issue is the stance taken by the court and the jury concerning the right to silence. As in all other respects, here too different judicial systems (such as the American and the British differ in their rulings (see fn. 23 above)). Justice Douglas (in the Griffin case 1964) ruled: “What the jury may infer, given no help from the court, is one thing. What it may infer when the court solemnizes the silence of the accused into evidence against him is quite another”. According to him, the court must keep silent about the accused person’s utilization of the right to silence (leaving the jury free to interpret this silence).

Aspect (a) above concerns the possible effects of speech, but aspect (b) concerns possible interpretations of implementing the right to silence. Such interpretations can be categorized under three classes:

- (1) Silence as indicating guilt. This is common where the burden of proof rests on the accused. The suspect is charged with unlawful activity. If s/he is sure of his/her innocence, or wishes to appear innocent, s/he will presumably go out of his/her way to refute the accusations and be cleared of all allegations, or to present an alibi, respectively. Silence – that is, not making use of this option – is then interpreted as admitting (to the allegations). In procedures that can lead to incrimination (such as a police investigation or a court session) silence has an expositive value (see Austin, 1962:85 and see section 2.3.3.1.1). It is equivalent to a referential and conative affirmation of the accusation. That is why referentially and conatively remaining silent may be interpreted as concession. Jeremy Bentham (1925) (cited in Kurzon, 1998:62; Cotterill, 2005:13) said:

If all criminals of every class had assembled and framed a system after their own wishes, is not this the first rule which they would have established for their security? Innocence never takes advantage of it; innocence claims the right of speaking, as guilt invokes the privilege of silence.

Silence then is seen as the treasured possession of professional criminals. It is a means of withholding information or of taking advantage of *bona fide* legislations by guilty persons or rather, yielding cases of defense-ambush. Yet as Leng (1994) shows (backing his claim with research findings), guilt vs. innocence is not connected to exercising the privilege.

- (2) Silence as the appropriate way to display pragmatic competence. Kurzon (1998:55) quotes Justice Marshall: “a suspect...may have felt there is no need for reply”. Constable (2006:151) writes, “It may...be an appropriate response to a situation in which even the legal system acknowledges that the defendant’s truth cannot be stated within the conditions and constraints offered by the system”. Silence could be an appropriate response in terms of

content, for example, the addressee does not know the answer (see Kurzon, 1998), or metalinguistically, namely the code is inadequate: there are no words to express.

- (3) Claiming the right to silence as a privilege serving a metalinguistic need concerning language manner (form) rather than content. It may (a) safeguard against incriminating identification; (b) protection for uneducated and inarticulate persons.
- (a) Safeguarding against incriminating identification is within the realm of evidence in the real world (referential), as in an identification parade. But instead of identifying a suspect by his/her looks and appearance, or by fingerprints, his/her (idiosyncratic) manner of speech is used. According to Mirfield (1997:61):

Just as conduct may sometimes be equivalent to words, so may words be equivalent to conduct. In some cases the substantive content of speech or text may not matter, but rather the manner in which it is spoken, written or expressed.

He gives the Voisin “*Bladie Belgaim*” case as an example: a parcel was found containing part of the body of a woman just murdered. In the parcel was a note bearing the words “*Bladie Belgaim*”. The suspect for that murder – Voisin – was asked to write out the words “bloody Belgian” as (metalinguistic) circumstantial evidence linking him to the crime. Such a use of silence is a negative means of preventing self-incrimination out of fear that peculiarities, such as the suspect’s voice, will reveal his/her identity or will link him/her to the crime (see Mirfield, 1997:14, 61, 155–177).

- (b) Protecting the uneducated and inarticulate. Zuckerman, though an opponent of the right to silence, says:

... It is said that in practice there must be innocent accused who, through being inarticulate or having an unfortunate manner, are likely to make unconvincing witnesses and are therefore more likely to be convicted if they are exposed to cross-examination in the witness-box. (1989:317)

Easton (1998:152) maintains that concern here is not for professional criminals (see above) but for ordinary people:

There is no evidence that the reasons for maintaining silence are always trivial. For weaker, ill-educated, inarticulate and poorer defendants, there may well be genuine fears of making themselves understood during cross-examination, and they may prefer to take the risk and remain silent even under the new regime. A nervous and unprepossessing individual, ignorant of criminal procedure and lacking interpersonal skills, intimidated by the atmosphere of the court, is likely to make an unfavourable impression on the tribunal.

The right to silence is used, then (*bona fide*), as a metalinguistic function. This silence does not set out to express something regarding the world (referential function). Nor is its purpose to activate the listener (conative function, as protection against self-incrimination), but to say something about the linguistic code and its illocutionary force (see Constable, 2006:164–165). Specifically it refers to the idiolect. According to Israeli Supreme Court Judge Zilberg:

The reason, then, clearly, being that the psychological motivation for granting or not granting trust in the testimony of a witness, usually, originates in something which is not well-considered, not measured and not designated, but merely invisible, like crooked speech, speech flow, slight hesitation, succeed in intelligibly

doing so – all these as thin as a rake hence not checked by the higher court that did not hear nor saw the witness that attested. (CRA 377/62 Levi vs. The legal counsellor to the government, JDGT vol. 7)

As explained, the Miranda warning statement and its variants around the world are the outcome of the fact that the persons needing this protection most are suspects, who are ignorant of the forensic setting. Alas, the Miranda warning falls into the same pit it wishes to avoid. Empirical studies, as well as real life incidents, show time and again that many suspects who answer that they understand the warning base this affirmative response on passive knowledge of the individual words of the statement. Lacking the metalinguistic competence needed in the forensic setting (interrogation and court discourse: see [Constable, 2006](#), above), they do not actively understand the full linguistic, pragmatic meaning of the text, or the legal consequences of the warning, the privilege, its utilization, or its waiver (see [Briere, 1978](#); [Shuy, 1997](#); [Berk-Seligson, 2002](#)).

So lack of education (general or legal), a dull vocabulary, a stammer, difficulties in verbal expression, and lack of experience speaking in public (generally, and in such official settings particularly), in addition to circumstances that are threatening in themselves—all these might cause a perversion of justice against that individual (see [Svartvik, 1968](#); [Clapp, 1956:548](#)). That is why the legislator grants the suspect the right to abstain from incorrect usage of his/her linguistic code that might endanger his/her innocence: that is, the right to silence (see [Kurzon, 1998:55](#) and [Cotterill, 2005](#) regarding police and jury).

The following recurrent issues regarding the right to silence seem to support the interpretation just proposed of the right to silence as a right in terms of the metalinguistic function:

- (a) The court's ruling that the right to silence does not apply to presentation (before the court) of documents (see e.g., Release to Appeal in Supreme Court 8600/03, State of Israel vs. Gilead Sharon).
- (b) The decision taken by the Israeli Knesset's Constitution, Law and Legal Committee (3 February 2004) to limit the right to silence of public representatives. In respect of our present subject, the rationale is that the considerations listed above regarding the danger of lack of linguistic competence do not hold for public representatives, who are expected to be well educated and fluent in rhetorical use of the language code. Thus, the right to silence is not meant to hold for them.

3. Epilog—*qui tacet consentire videtur*²⁵

'He who keeps silent is presumed to consent'.

Appendix A

A variety of contributions have been made to the study of eloquent silence. Examples of monographs are [Courtenay \(1916\)](#) and [Dauenhauer \(1980\)](#). Examples of edited volumes are [Tannen and Saville-Troike \(1985\)](#); [Jaworski \(1997a\)](#); Media Development 1982 issue; Multimedia 2005 issue. An example of Conference Proceedings is [Cacoullous and Sifianou \(1998\)](#).

²⁵ See conclusion of section 2.3.3.1.1.

Contrary to its subordinate position in linguistic studies, eloquent silence has become central to research projects and investigations in various non-linguistic disciplines. Just one or two references will suffice for each such discipline. In keeping with Saville-Troike's (1994:3945) remark that "The amount of talk vs. silence that is prescribed is closely tied to social values and norms", societies may be categorized and analyzed according to the importance of silence vs. speech as social parameters. Many sociological and anthropological projects have studied speech and silence norms in specific communities: Basso (1972) on Western Apache American Indians; Saunders (1985) on the Italian community; Morsbach (1988) on silence and stillness in Japanese communication; Agyekum (2002) on the functions of silence in Akan; Liu (2002) on silences among people of Chinese origin living in the United States; Vainiomäki (2004) on Finns; and Tannen (1985) on silence in social interactions among New York Jews.

Psychotherapy (especially psychoanalysis) is also intensely preoccupied with the study of silence. This discipline has long realized the various types and functions of silence in the therapeutic discourse. Again, naming a few such contributions will suffice. Reik (1926/1968), Weisman (1955), and the panel on silence as psychotherapy published as an entire volume of 1961 *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* all show that silence is a way of acting-out (see section 2.2.1) but also a means of communicating and cooperating. Writers such as Winnicott (1958, 1963), Lacan (1956/1966a,b), Khan (1963/1974), Kristeva (1985), Gammelgaard (1998), and Lane et al. (2002) all touch on eloquent silence. In Developmental Psychology, note Umiker-Sebeok's (1980) study on the acquisition of eloquent silence. For Social Psychology, see Carlin (2003). The most fascinating clinical disorder that can be associated with eloquent silence is "elective mutism". DSM-IV, the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders 4th edition, defines it as "the persistent failure to speak in specific social situations where there is an expectation for speech, . . . despite speaking in other situations": see Krynski (2003) and McInnes and Manassis (2005). For a treatment case, see Furst (1989); for Psycholinguistics see e.g., Berger (2004).

Philosophers have always been concerned with eloquent silence—examples are Heidegger (see Bindeman, 1981), Wittgenstein (1922/1961), Steiner (1967:especially 55–74), Dauenhauer (1980) and Gooch (1996).

In literature theory, the rhetoric of silence is dealt with by Sontag (1969), Olsen (2003) and Block de Behar (2004). Concerning poetry see Peterkiewicz (1970) and Niebylski (1993). On eloquent silence in drama, see Kane (1984) and Rovine (1987), and in prose Sibelman (1995) and Olsen (2003). Silence is at the center of the classic literary works: Homer's *Odyssey*, Joyce's *Ulysses*, and Kafka's *Silence of the Sirens* (based on the Greek myth). Also Cage (1961/1967), many of Böll's novels and short stories (e.g., *Murke's Collected Silences*) and Buffini (1999). Silence is the primary issue in well-known movies, not only Bergman's *The Silence* (see Kurzon, 1998:113–115), but also more recent ones such as *The Silence of the Lambs*, *The Three Ravens* (Jim Henson) and just recently *Iron3* (Kim Ki-Duk).

Special cases of eloquent silence are the legal right to silence: see Kurzon (1995, 1998:51–72), Easton (1998), Bosmajian (1999) (see section 2.6.4 ff.). Noelle-Neumann's (1991) "spiral of silence" mass communication model has spread to models in many other domains.

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