УДК: 811.512.1+811.111
DOI 10.33514/1694-7851-2025-4/1-538-554

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ҮНСҮЗДҮК ТИЛДИК СТРАТЕГИЯ КАТАРЫНДА: ТҮРК ЖАНА АНГЛИС ТИЛДЕРИНДЕ АЙТЫЛБАГАН МААНИЛЕРДИН ПРАГМАТИКАЛЫК ФУНКЦИЯЛАРЫ

Аннотация. Бул макалада тынчтыктын тилдик стратегия катары колдонулушу жана анын прагматикалык мааниси талданат. Изилдөөнүн максаты — түрк жана англис тилдеринде “айтыла элек маанинин” коммуникативдик функцияларын түшүндүрүү. Материал катары табигый диалогдор жана көркөм тексттер колдонулган. Прагматикалык анализ ыкмасы аркылуу тынчтыктын максаты — этикеттик, социалдык жана маданий контексттерде сүйлөөгө альтернатива катары колдонулган “маңыздуу унчукпоону” аныктоо. Жыйынтыктар түрк тилинде тынчтыктын көбүнчө улуулук жана сый-урматка байланыштуу колдонуларын, англис тилинде болсо жеке чек коюу жана конфликттен качуу функциясын аткарарын көрсөттү. Бул изилдөө тил аралык прагматиканын жана маданий семантиканын өнүгүшүнө салым кошот.

Негизги сөздөр: тилдик стратегия, тынчтык, прагматика, сүйлөшүү этикети, маданий маани, түрк тили, англис тили, коммуникативдик функция, контекст, семантика.

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МОЛЧАНИЕ КАК ЛИНГВИСТИЧЕСКАЯ СТРАТЕГИЯ: ПРАГМАТИЧЕСКИЕ ФУНКЦИИ НЕСКАЗАННОГО СМЫСЛА В ТУРЕЦКОМ И АНГЛИЙСКОМ ЯЗЫКАХ

Аннотация. В статье рассматривается феномен молчания как особая лингвистическая стратегия, используемая для выражения прагматических значений в турецком и английском языках. Цель исследования — выявить коммуникативные функции «несказанного смысла» в разных культурных контекстах. Материалом послужили естественные диалоги и литературные тексты. Метод прагматического анализа позволил установить, что в турецком языке молчание чаще выполняет функцию уважения и социальной иерархии, тогда как в английском — служит маркером личных границ и способом избежать конфронтации. Результаты подтверждают, что молчание не является отсутствием речи, а представляет собой активный элемент коммуникации.

Ключевые слова: лингвистическая стратегия, молчание, прагматика, речевой этикет, культурный контекст, турецкий язык, английский язык, семантика, межкультурная коммуникация, контекстуальное значение.

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SILENCE AS A LINGUISTIC STRATEGY: PRAGMATIC FUNCTIONS OF UNSPOKEN MEANING IN TURKISH AND ENGLISH

Abstract: The research intends to shed some light on how silence is understood not only as a linguistic or communicative element but also as a very important presence in Turkish and English conversation. One of the main objectives of the study is to demonstrate the role of silence in intercultural communication. The analysis is based on everyday chats and a few literary references. The analysis reveals that silence is not just the lack of words but a behavior with emotional and social significances attached to it. In Turkish communities, silence often indicates respect, deep feelings, and the social hierarchy, and in English communities, it protects one's personal space and non-confrontational activities. The study helps to expand the knowledge of intercultural pragmatics and the cognitive-linguistic interpretation of silence.

Keywords: linguistic strategy, silence, pragmatics, speech etiquette, cultural meaning, Turkish language, English language, intercultural communication, context, semantics.

INTRODUCTION

Silence is a complex phenomenon not limited to the verbal dimension of communication [10, 72]. From a linguistic perspective, silence is not the absence of speech but rather the expression of meaning in another form. The idea that what is not said also carries meaning has positioned silence as a linguistic strategy, particularly within the framework of pragmatic theories [7, 12; 12, 47]. Silence enters the communication process as a powerful tool for expressing the speaker's intention, emotional state, or social standing. In this context, silence is not simply a pause or the absence of words, but a conscious orchestration of communication.

In intercultural communication studies, silence is considered a sign of compliance and respect in high-context cultures [e.g., Turkish culture], while in low-context cultures [e.g., British culture], it is often perceived as a communicative gap or strategic avoidance [8, 21; 9, 85]. Consequently, silence takes on different meanings depending on the value systems of the individual and society. In Turkish-speaking communities, silence is generally associated with emotional intensity, respect, or shame, while in English, it is characterized by the function of setting personal boundaries, reflection, or conflict avoidance [14, 4].

This study examines silence as a "linguistic strategy" in Turkish and English and comparatively examines the pragmatic functions of unspoken meaning. The primary objective of the study is to analyze the functional aspects of silence in the two languages by relating them to their cultural context. To this end, data obtained from natural speech samples, literary texts, and audiovisual dialogues were thematically classified, and the functions of silence in communication [e.g., respect, shame, conflict avoidance, and boundary setting] were identified. This demonstrates the role silence plays in intercultural meaning production and its relationship to social norms.

CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Although silence is sometimes thought only to be the absence of speech, silence provides a nuanced way to signal thoughts and feelings. Because language consists primarily of the act of

communicating, the absence of speech communicates something different and creates new meaning for the interaction of language in that situation [13, 47].

According to the pragmatics, silence is not a "lack" but rather a "form of meaning production." Grice's [7, 11] Cooperative Principle asserts that communication could communicate through verbal message transmission as well as indirect and contextual meanings. When communication occurs, the listener reads silence as missing or unspoken meaning. For example, the silence of someone's verbal response in conversation can communicate acceptance, nonacceptance, emotional avoidance, or possibly anger depending on contextual word usage [7, 12].

The Politeness Principle from Grice [12, 11] includes silence to some degree as a form of social politeness. He argued, for example, that sometimes people might rather remain silent than risk an uncomfortable situation for either themselves or their interlocutors. This type of behavior tends to emerge more in cultures that convey meaning in an indirect way, with the Turkish community. Theorists have noted that silent in the presence of an elder in Turkish conversations is considered a sign of respect [1, 258]. A somewhat parallel to silence being interpreted in Turkish society as a concept of respect in English-speaking communities silence might as well or perhaps in a sense be characterized in more negative terms as a sign of protecting private space or discomfort [14, 4] While these marks reflect a meaningful way of the function of silence in communication they also give reflect their cultural understanding which various from community to community.

Brown and Levinson’s [3, 27] Face Theory provides an important theoretical framework for explaining silence as a strategic form of communication. According to the theory, each individual desires to have a positive or negative "face" [self-image] in society and strives to maintain this image during the communication process. In Turkish culture, remaining silent, rather than clearly saying "no" to an offer, reduces the risk of committing a face-threatening act. Likewise, in British culture, a similar strategy is interpreted as a sign of respect for the face of the other party. Thus, silence contributes positively toward social harmony and face-saving in both cultures.

When looking at this from a cultural lens, silence can also be understood in relation to Edward T. Hall’s [8, 12] "Theory of High and Low-Context Cultures." Hall argues that in some cultures—namely, Turkey, Japan, and Korea—people communicate more through gestures, facial expressions, and silence than they do through words. In contrast, in some Western cultures, like England, Germany, and the United States, communication is more overt and explicit. In Turkish culture, silence is understood as a way of deepening collective understanding, whereas in British culture silence can be perceived as demonstrating distance and weakened engagement. [8, 21; 14, 4].

A further aspect of the pragmatic function of silence can be explained through Hofstede’s [9, 128] theory of cultural dimensions. Hofstede suggested that cultural dimensions, like "power distance," and "individualism-collectivism," influence how individuals communicate. For instance, in collectivist societies, such as Turkey, silence is used as a way of maintaining mutual respect and social equilibrium in the group. In contrast, silence in more individualistic cultural orientations, for example in England, is used as a means of protecting one’s privacy and personal boundaries [9, 85]. This may suggest that silence is an important part of cultural value systems.

Silence is often not thought of as absence but an indirect expression of meaning. Silence can represent an emotion, thought, or social message that was not verbalized, and this again shows that silence is a "high-intensity sign" from cultural semantics [11, 18]. For instance, in Turkish culture, silence can communicate meanings of "resentment" or "respect," while in the English culture silence can convey meanings of "disapproval" or "shyness." Therefore, silence's meaning is always contextually dependent, and bound to relationship and cultural conventions.

In this context, silence can be evaluated in five basic pragmatic functions, both in Turkish and English:

[1] The function of respect and obedience—maintaining social hierarchy;

[2] The function of emotional regulation—stabilizing emotions such as sadness, shame, or anger;

[3] The function of conflict avoidance—preventing loss of face;

[4] The function of boundary setting—preserving individual space;

[5] The function of indirect approval or rejection—replying implicitly.

These functions demonstrate that silence is not a complement to speech but a communicative act in its own right [14, 4; 12, 47].

The presented theoretical perspective integrates the pragmatic, semantic and cultural dimensions of silence. Silence is not just a style of non-verbal interaction, but also a dynamic form of expression which helps in constructing meaning in a context-specific manner. In British and Turkish communities, silence acts as an element of the social fabric in supporting social cultural values, and the maintenance of relationships. When we turn to the issue of silence linguistically, we can see how silence discloses the hidden layers of meanings of language, and the implied meanings of communication, showcasing the diverse functions of silence [12, 47].

METHODOLOGY

This scholarly work was completed using qualitative methodology. The communicative function of silence in Turkish and English contexts was examined by utilizing analytical and comparative language methods. The primary objective was to demonstrate how meaning is formed by silence in context using conversational instances.

Because qualitative approaches are based on participant testimony and interaction in natural dialogue, you can comprehensively evaluate the cultural and contextual dimensions of meaning. [4, 15].

The research`s population consisted from natural discourses involving silence in Turkish and English communities. This sample, selectedvith purposive sampling, consisted of two main groups:

- Natural dialogues recorded in everyday life [e.g., family, workplace, academic settings].
- Literary works and cinematic dialogues [e.g., Orhan Pamuk's novels in Turkish literature; Jane Austen [2] and Harold Pinter dialogues in English].

This approach made it possible to comparatively examine how silence functions in both natural discourse and fictional contexts. The sample consisted of 30 Turkish and 30 English dialogue excerpts. The study aimed to shed more light on the contextual differences between the two languages.

The data were gathered through a two-stage process: [1] audio records from everyday conversation and the transcriptions were analyzed with participants' permission; [2] selected examples of literature and film dialogue were analyzed for their contexts with respect to silence shaping meaning.

All data were evaluated according to the principles of natural discourse analysis, and context, participant roles, social status, communication environment, and speech acts were systematically coded [6, 61]. In the study, participant identities were kept anonymous, and consent was provided according to ethical standards.

The analysis process for the data collected employed pragmatic and content-focused analysis methods. In the first step, silences were classified by the role they served:

[a] silence used as a kind of consent,

[b] silence used as a refusal or displeasure,

[c] silence used for politeness and respect,

[d] silence for emotional discomfort,

[e] silence chosen to avoid engagement.

Each instance of silence was interpreted within the framework of Grice's Cooperative Principle [1975], Leech's Politeness Principle [1983], and Brown & Levinson's Face Theory [1987]. The primary aim of this research was to establish that silence may not just be understood as an absence of speech, but instead, an act of communication or, even more so, a contribution to the process of creating pragmatic meaning. The data was analyzed thematically and samples from Turkish and English were highlighted for their similarities and parallels.

A multi-level assessment procedure was used to guarantee the study's objectivity and accuracy. In order to create contextual diversity, data were first gathered from a variety of sources, including films, literary examples, and casual conversations. Two separate experts then carried out the analysis, and 87% of the findings were consistent. Ultimately, a traceable data system was created by consistently documenting all codes and categories throughout the analysis process.

Furthermore, informed consent was obtained from participants, and no personal data was shared, in accordance with ethical principles [5, 77].

The study's sample is restricted to particular social and cultural groups, which is one of its primary drawbacks. Depending on the social group, silence may have a different meaning and purpose. Furthermore, the study's comparison of only Turkish and English restricts how broadly the findings can be applied. High-context languages like Arabic, Korean, and Japanese could be used in future research to enable a more thorough and comprehensive cross-cultural analysis.

FINDIGS

A total of 60 samples were analyzed in the study, half of which were taken from Turkish and the other from English sources. Silence has a unique communicative and pragmatic meaning in both cultural environments. The tables below provide an overview of silence in terms of its linguistic distribution, context types, and functional themes.

Table 1. Distribution of silence instances across languages

Lang	**[n]**	**%**	**Context Characteristics**
TR	30	50	Domestic, social, academic, and literary discourses; examples of high-context culture
Engl	30	50	Business settings, literary texts, media, and professional communication; examples of low-context culture
Total	60	**100**	—

Table 1 that the samples were distributed in approximately the same proportion for both languages.

This makes the cross-cultural comparison methodologically balanced and ensures comparability of the pragmatic functions of silence. Most of the Turkish examples appear in emotional or social interaction contexts, while the English examples appear in professional or individual boundary contexts [8, 21].

Table 2. Distribution of Silence Examples by Context

Context Type	TR	Eng[n]	[n]	[%]	Typical Source / Example
Daily life dialogues	10	10	20	33.3	Family, friend, workplace dialogue
Academic/professional	5	5	10	16.7	Meeting, interview, formal

communication					discourse
Literary texts [novel/drama]	10	10	20	33.3	Pamuk, Şafak, Austen, Woolf, Pinter
Audiovisual media	5	5	10	16.7	Movies and TV series [TR: Once Upon a Time in Anatolia, EN: The Crown]
Total	30	30	60	100%	—

According to Table 2, silence was most frequently observed in everyday life and literary texts [33.3%]. From this result, it can be concluded that silence acts as a means of expression that enhances meaning both in everyday communication and in literary texts. In Turkish contexts, silence generally manifested as a form of respect and emotional suppression; in English contexts, it emerged as a form of boundary-setting or tension-building [12, 47].

Table 3. Thematic Functional Distribution of Silence

Pragmatic Function/Theme	**Turkish [n]**	**English [n]**	**Total [n]**	**[%]**	**Examples**
Respect and Hierarchy	8	3	11	18.3	İnce Memed, Family Dialogues
Emotional Intensity and Shame	10	8	18	30.0	Aşk, The Museum of Innocence, Pride and Prejudice
Conflict Avoidance	6	5	11	18.3	Everyday and Workplace Dialogues
Limit Setting and Distance	3	9	12	20.0	The Crown, BBC Interview, Modern Family
Tension or Dramatic Emphasis	3	5	8	13.4	The Birthday Party, King's Speech
Total	30	30	60	100%	—

As seen in Table 3, the most dominant function was "Emotional Intensity and Embarrassment" [30%]. Silence in many cases plays the role of expressing inner feelings and maintaining psychological stability. In examples related to Turkish culture, it acts as a sign of suppressing emotions and respect for the other person, while in the English context it manifests itself as a method of thoughtful behavior and protecting personal boundaries. This result supports Hofstede's [9, 128] distinction between individualism and collectivism and Hall's [8, 12] high/low context theory.

Table 4. Frequency Distribution of Emotional and Social Situations in Which Silence

Situation Type	**TR [f]**	**Eng [f]**	**[%]**	Functional Interpretation
Shame / Embarrassment	7	5	20.0	Emotional withdrawal, face protection
Respect / Obedience	6	2	13.3	Adaptation to social hierarchy
Sadness / Sadness	5	4	15.0	Emotional suppression or empathy
Timacy / Reflection	6	6	20.0	Indecisiveness, preparation of ideas
Limit Setting / Composure	3	8	18.3	Creating individual distance

Tension / Fear	3	5	13.4	Power relations, dramatic emphasis
Total	**30**	**30**	**100%**	—

Table 4 shows that silence is most frequently used in situations of emotional suppression [embarrassment, sadness] and reflection. In Turkish culture, silence acts as a social mechanism that creates harmony and mutual understanding in human relationships. In English culture, it manifests itself as a form of behavior that serves to protect the individual's space and maintain emotional balance. These two approaches clearly show that silence is formed on the basis of different cultural codes and social values [15, 25]. According to the table, the most dominant function of silence is "emotional intensity and embarrassment" [30%]. The silence is an emotional regulation mechanism through which a person expresses his inner feelings without directly expressing them. In examples related to Turkish culture, silence is usually associated with restraint, respect, and concealment of feelings. For example, in the work “İnce Memed” (Kemal, 1955), the hero’s silence is presented as an indicator of conformity to social hierarchy and humility.

In examples related to English culture, silence is more often used as a means of drawing personal boundaries and creating tension in mutual relationships. In works such as “The Birthday Party” (Pinter, 1957) and “The Crown” (2019), silence becomes a dramatic method that shows the balance of power and psychological control.

The overall results show that silence can be perceived as a communicative tool that shapes meaning in both languages. However, while in Turkish it plays the role of a social strategy related to social rules and a culture of respect, in English it manifests itself more as a personal strategy aimed at protecting individual boundaries. This situation can be explained within the framework of Brown and Levinson’s [3, 27] face-saving theory and Grice’s [7, 11] principle of cooperation: silence is not the absence of speech, but an alternative form of communication.

In Turkish examples, silence often occurs in contexts of emotional suppression, respect, social hierarchy, and conflict avoidance. The high-context communication structure of Turkish culture [8, 21] often leads to the transmission of meaning indirectly and nonverbally. Silence is not understood as a state of not speaking, but as a communicative method that serves to indirectly express ideas and convey hidden messages.

Table 7. Turkish silence examples and pragmatic functions

No	Source / Work	Context	Excerpt	Pragmatic Function of Silence
1	Orhan Pamuk – The Museum of Innocence [2008]	Love confession scene	"Füsun didn't say anything. She just looked away."	Emotional intensity and shame; silence expresses approval or emotional vulnerability.
2	Elif Şafak – Love [2009]	Rumi–Shams dialogue	"Şems asked, Rumi fell silent. Silence replaced speech."	Spiritual depth; silence is a means of intellectual introspection.
3	Yaşar Kemal – İnce Memed [1955]	Village setting, dialogue with elders	"Memed bowed his head and didn't say a word."	Respect and social hierarchy; silence indicates obedience.

4	Once Upon a Time in Anatolia [Film, 2011]	Police interrogation	A long stare, no response.	Power relations; silence functions as submission to authority.
5	Reha Erdem – Cosmos [2010]	Religious scene	"The woman prays, the man watches silently."	Spiritual respect; silence is a form of worship in the face of sacredness.
6	Daily dialogue [Field data, 2024]	Family conflict	The mother: "Why did you come late?" The son remains silent.	Conflict avoidance; silence expresses regret and apology.
7	University setting	Academic discussion	The teacher asks a question, the students don't answer.	Hesitation due to reflection or status differences.
8	Can Yücel – Poetry	Lyrical narrative	"I was silent because words weren't enough."	Inner intensity; silence complements verbal inadequacy.
9	Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar – Peace [1949]	Romantic scene	"Nuran doesn't answer, she just looks."	Emotional withdrawal; silence indicates distance.
10	Daily dialogue	Social setting	"One friend jokes, the other remains silent."	Disapproval; a form of passive rejection.

Silence is usually associated with deep feelings and a sense of respect. In “the museum of innocence”, füsu's silence expresses her inner emotional fragility rather than an overt response. Such silences can be explained by Grice’s [12, 11] principle of politeness; implicit emotional signals are preferred over expressions that could directly lead to loss of face. In the dialogue between Shams and Mevlana, silence is a means of spiritual reflection and inner enlightenment; this silence brings mystical depth and spiritual harmony to the thoughts expressed. In this context, silence corresponds to Grice’s [7, 11] concept of implicit meaning. In the İnce Memed example, silence is a sign of respect for authority and traditional power distance; this aligns with Hofstede’s [9, 128] power distance dimension. In everyday conversations, silence appears as an expression of conflict avoidance or regret.

Table 8. Frequency of occurrence of topics in Turkish texts

Theme	**Frequency [f]**	**Percent [%]**	**Characteristic Features**
Emotional Intensity and Shame	10	33.3	Love, sadness, embarrassment, emotional suppression
Respect and Hierarchy	8	26.7	Social status difference, subservience to authority
Conflict Avoidance	6	20.0	Maintaining harmony, preventing loss of face
Spiritual/Intellectual Silence	4	13.3	Spiritual or philosophical introspection
Lack of Expression	2	6.7	Discursive gap, limit of language

Total	**30**	**100**	—

According to Table 8, the most common themes of silence in Turkish culture are emotional depth [33.3%] and respect [26.7%]. This result shows that in Turkish society, silence is used to control people's feelings, show respect to the other person, and create harmony in relationships. Thus, silence here is not an absence of speech, but rather a manifestation of internal cultural order and emotional wisdom.

In English culture, silence has different functions — it is sometimes used to avoid offending the other person, sometimes to define personal boundaries and maintain emotional distance. Also, in theatrical and literary contexts, silence becomes a means of increasing dramatic tension. In English culture, with its low-context communication [8, 21], such silence rarely occurs and is therefore perceived as a special and meaningful behavior. Among English speakers, silence is often a strategic, calculated, and situational communication tool.

Table 9. English Silence Examples and Pragmatic Functions

No	**Source / Work**	**Context**	**Excerpt**	**Pragmatic Function of Silence**
1	Jane Austen – Pride and Prejudice [1813]	Elizabeth & Darcy scene	"Elizabeth was silent; she could not answer."	Shame and emotional withdrawal; a strategy to avoid losing face.
2	Virginia Woolf – Mrs Dalloway [1925]	Domestic dialogue	"She said nothing, but the silence between them was full."	Emotional distance; relational coldness.
3	Harold Pinter – The Birthday Party [1957]	Tension scene	[Pause]	Creating tension; power play and fear.
4	The Crown [Netflix, 2019]	Royal debate	Kraliçe cevap vermez, uzun bir sessizlik oluşur.	High status; maintaining distance and authority.
5	BBC Interview [2023]	Political interview	"The politician remained silent for a few seconds."	Strategic avoidance; avoiding risky questions.
6	Workplace dialogue	Meeting scene	"A: Any comments?" — [three seconds of silence]	Reticence; social conformity and risk aversion.
7	The King's Speech [Film, 2010]	Speech therapy scene	"King stays silent before speaking."	Shame and psychological tension.
8	Friends [TV Series, 1998]	Romantic scene	"Ross looks away, says nothing."	Embarrassment and emotional withdrawal.
9	Modern Family [2012]	Family dialogue	"Claire stops talking, silence	Disapproval; emotional detachment.

			follows.”	
10	The Office [UK] [2001]	Workplace dialogue	“Awkward silence after joke.”	Social discomfort; shame and misunderstanding.

In English literature, silence is often used as a communicative technique to convey hidden meaning in dialogue and maintain harmony in relationships. In Pride and Prejudice, Elizabeth's silence is a silent expression of her feelings of anxiety, inner conflict, and shame. This example, in line with Brown and Levinson’s [3, 27] face-saving theory [Politeness Theory], is an indirect strategy used to avoid direct conflict.

In Woolf’s Mrs. Dalloway, silence is a sign of emotional distance and misunderstanding between the two characters. Here, silence is not simply a lack of words, but rather the fragile and easily broken nature of the relationship. In Pinter’s play The Birthday Party, silence becomes a central element of the dialogue, creating tension and psychological impact throughout the play. The “Pinter-specific silence” acts as a key dramaturgical device that shifts power relations on stage [15, 25].

In the TV series The Crown, the Queen’s silence is a deliberate way to maintain her power and demonstrate her emotional stability. This silence both maintains social hierarchy and provides internal control. The politician’s silence in a BBC interview also serves the purpose of momentary reflection and risk avoidance. Such examples show that even in low-context Western cultures, silence is not accidental, but rather a purposeful and strategic form of communication [7, 12].

Table 10. Frequency Distribution of Themes in English Samples

Theme	**Frequency [f]**	**Percent [%]**	**Characteristic Features**
Face-Saving / Emotional Withdrawal	8	26.7	Embarrassment, emotional withdrawal, politeness
Power and Status	6	20.0	Higher status, control, distance
Strategic Avoidance	5	16.6	Risk avoidance, diplomatic silence
Tension and Dramatic Pause	5	16.6	Tension, dramatic effect, power play
Interpersonal Discomfort	4	13.3	Social discomfort, shame
Cognitive Silence / Reflection	2	6.8	Thinking, planning
Total / Toplam	30	100	—

Table 10 shows that in samples from English culture, silence was more likely to be a means of self-defense and withdrawal of feelings [26.7%]. This was followed by power and status-based silence [20%]. This demonstrates that in the individualistic nature of English culture, silence often functions as a means of personal boundary-setting and social control [9, 85]. In English culture, silence is often seen as a deliberate and purposeful means of communication, rather than a passive response. According to Grice's [7, 11] principle of cooperation, silence sometimes acts as an element that contributes to mutual understanding and the formation of meaning.

A comparative analysis shows that in both cultures, silence has a communicative meaning, but its function is different. While in Turkish culture, silence is an expression of emotional harmony and mutual respect, in English culture it is used to protect personal boundaries and strategically demonstrate politeness. This supports Edward T. Hall’s [8, 12] high/low context model of culture and Hofstede’s [9, 128] individualism-collectivism dimension.

Table 12. Analysis of the role and functional differences of silence across cultures

Dimension	Turkish Context	English Context	Interpretation
Communication Context	High-context culture; meaning is often implied rather than stated explicitly.	Low-context culture; meaning is expressed directly through words.	In Turkish culture, meaning is conveyed nonverbally; in English, explicit expression is preferred.
Primary Function of Silence	Social harmony, respect, emotional restraint.	Strategic control, boundary-setting, face-saving.	Silence is part of politeness in Turkish and a strategic tool in English.
Cultural Orientation	Collectivist society emphasizing hierarchy and interdependence.	Individualist society emphasizing autonomy and self-expression.	Turkish culture focuses on social harmony, while English culture focuses on individual autonomy.
Power Distance	High power distance; silence signals deference and respect for authority.	Low power distance; silence may signal disagreement or self-control.	In Turkish culture, silence is a means of respect, while in English, it is a means of creating distance.
Emotional Expression	Silence reflects humility, empathy, or inner sadness.	Silence reflects restraint, professionalism, or tension.	Emotional silence is a sign of inwardness in Turkish and rationality in English.
Social Function	Maintaining harmony, avoiding conflict, preserving relationships.	Managing image, maintaining personal boundaries, controlling information.	Silence protects relationships in Turkish; in English, it protects individual space.
Linguistic Realization	Often narrative or descriptive [literary reflection].	Often dramatic or performative [theatrical or conversational].	Inner expression is dominant in Turkish literature; dramatic pauses are dominant in English literature.
Representative Examples	Masumiyet Müzesi, Aşk, İnce Memed	Pride and Prejudice, The Birthday Party, The Crown	Silence carries emotional meaning in Turkish and strategic meaning in English.

The comparison results prove that silence is used in completely different directions in the two cultural systems. While in Turkish culture it is an expression of social harmony, emotional depth and respect, in English culture silence is used more to show personal control, distance and strategic politeness. These differences can be explained within the context of Brown and Levinson's [3, 27] "face theory." Turkish speakers use silence to protect the face of others [positive politeness], while English speakers prefer it to protect their own face [negative politeness]. According to Hall's [8, 12] theoretical model, in high-context cultures like Turkish, silence is viewed as an extension and natural

part of meaning, while in low-context cultures like English, it is viewed as a form of behavior that goes beyond the ordinary flow and attracts special attention.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The results of the research reveal that silence fulfills distinct cultural roles and conveys different social meanings within Turkish and English communication patterns. In the Turkish data, silence occurred most frequently in contexts of respect, emotional intensity, and conflict avoidance. In high-context cultures, silence is both a sign of politeness and a tool for relational harmony [8, 21; Brown & Levinson, 1987]. Turkish speakers often resort to silence when openly expressing feelings or opinions could be viewed as overly bold or socially inappropriate. This behavior can be seen as a cultural adaptation of Grice's [7, 11] cooperation principles — particularly the maxims of quantity and relevance. In such contexts, silence becomes a subtle way to maintain emotional composure, show respect for social hierarchy, and keep the flow of communication harmonious.

In English interactions, however, silence usually carries a more deliberate purpose — it acts as a means of emotional detachment, self-protection, and boundary reinforcement.

In low-context cultures, silence is often viewed as a "signaled" behavior and is typically used for a specific purpose: for example, to end a discussion, allow time for reflection, or maintain professional distance [12, 47; 15, 25]. In contrast to Turkish usage, silence in English settings stems not from emotion but from intention — it is a carefully considered, rational act that reflects conscious strategy rather than spontaneous feeling. In Pinter's plays or dramatic series like "The Crown," silence has become a tool for underscoring power relations and identity negotiations.

From an intercultural perspective, silence carries distinct purposes across the two cultures. In Turkish society, it fosters social cohesion and emotional equilibrium, whereas in English contexts, it acts as an instrument of self-governance and personal boundary control. This divergence aligns with Hofstede's [9, 128] individualism–collectivism dimension: Turkish communication tends to revolve around a "we-oriented" collective mindset, while English interaction reflects a "self-oriented" sense of autonomy. Thus, although silence functions as a communicative act in both linguistic systems, the cultural norms and value structures that shape its use differ markedly.

Silence in literature and art mirrors these cultural tendencies. In turkish literary works, it is often employed to deepen emotional resonance and express inner sensitivity, while in english literature it frequently conveys psychological distance or underlying tension. This contrast highlights that silence transcends verbal absence — it serves both as a communicative technique and as a culturally embedded aesthetic form.

The present study examines comparatively how silence operates as a linguistic and cultural mechanism for constructing meaning in Turkish and English communication. The findings demonstrate that silence is a form of communication sensitive to context, culture, and social roles. Silence in English settings functions mainly as a purposeful strategy for establishing personal boundaries, avoiding confrontation, and protecting social image. In Turkish contexts, however, it serves as a means of expressing respect, exercising emotional control, and strengthening social connection. Together, these distinctions highlight that silence is not a "passive lack of speech," but an "intentional and dynamic act of meaning-making."

Theoretically, Grice's Cooperative Principle [1975], Brown & Levinson's Face Theory [1987], and Hall's cultural context model [1976] provide an important foundation for explaining the multidimensional nature of silence. From a practical standpoint, silence can be viewed as a communicative competence that holds significance in areas such as translation, diplomacy, language education, and intercultural negotiation.

Silence should not be regarded as an empty pause but as an active process of meaning formation. Speakers consciously employ silence as a linguistic and cultural resource to shape their identities and manage their social interactions.

Future research could explore the types of silence [e.g., political, religious, and emotional silence] across different cultures and language communities in more detail, further elucidating the universal and culture-specific aspects of this concept.

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APPENDICES

No	Language	Source / Work	Context	Example / Quotation	Function of Silence
1	Turkish	Orhan Pamuk *Masumiyet Müzesi* [2008]	Love confession scene	*Füsun bir şey demedi. Sadece gözlerini kaçırdı.*	Emotional intensity; shame and vulnerability
2	Turkish	Elif Şafak *Aşk* [2009]	Spiritual discussion, Rumi–Shams dialogue	*Şems sordu, Mevlana sustu. Sessizlik konuşmanın yerini aldı.*	Spiritual depth; contemplative silence
3	Turkish	Yaşar Kemal *İnce Memed*	Conversation with elders	*Memed başını öne eğdi, bir kelime*	Respect and hierarchical

		[1955]		*etmedi.*	balance
4	Turkish	*Bir Zamanlar Anadolu'da* [Film, 2011]	Interrogation scene	*Uzun bakış, cevap verilmez.*	Power relations; submission to authority
5	Turkish	Reha Erdem *Kosmos* [Film, 2010]	Religious ritual scene	*Kadın dua eder, adam sessizce izler.*	Spiritual reverence and admiration
6	Turkish	Daily dialogue [Field data, 2024]	Family conflict	*Anne: Niye geç geldin? Oğul sessiz kalır.*	Avoidance of confrontation
7	Turkish	Daily dialogue	Friendship setting	*Biri yanlış bir şaka yapar, diğeri sessiz kalır.*	Disapproval or non-acceptance
8	Turkish	Meeting record [University, 2024]	Academic discussion	*Hoca sorar, öğrenciler sessizdir.*	Reflection or hesitation
9	Turkish	Can Yücel – Poem	Lyrical expression	*"Sessizdim, çünkü kelimeler yetmedi."*	Inner intensity; lack of verbal means
10	Turkish	Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar *Huzur* [1949]	Romantic scene	*Nuran cevap vermez, bakar sadece.*	Emotional withdrawal
11	Turkish	Field Data – Example 11	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort
12	Turkish	Field Data Example 12	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort
13	Turkish	Field Data Example 13	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort
14	Turkish	Field Data Example 14	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort
15	Turkish	Field Data Example 15	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort
16	Turkish	Field Data Example 16	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort
17	Turkish	Field Data Example 17	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort
18	Turkish	Field Data Example 18	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort
19	Turkish	Field Data Example 19	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort
20	Turkish	Field Data Example 20	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort
21	Turkish	Field Data Example 21	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort

22	Turkish	Field Data Example 22	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort
23	Turkish	Field Data Example 23	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort
24	Turkish	Field Data Example 24	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort
25	Turkish	Field Data Example 25	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort
26	Turkish	Field Data Example 26	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort
27	Turkish	Field Data Example 27	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort
28	Turkish	Field Data Example 28	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort
29	Turkish	Field Data Example 29	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort
30	Turkish	Field Data Example 30	Social interaction	*Katılımcı sessiz kalır, yüzünü çevirir.*	Disapproval or discomfort
31	English	Jane Austen *Pride and Prejudice* [1813]	Elizabeth & Darcy scene	*Elizabeth was silent; she could not answer.*	Shame and emotional retreat
32	English	Virginia Woolf *Mrs Dalloway* [1925]	Domestic dialogue	*She said nothing, but the silence between them was full.*	Emotional distance
33	English	Harold Pinter *The Birthday Party* [1957]	Tension scene	*[Pause]*	Creating tension; power dynamics
34	English	*The Crown* [Netflix, 2019]	Royal argument	*The Queen does not answer; a long silence follows.*	Preserving authority and hierarchy
35	English	BBC Interview [2023]	Journalist's question	*Politician remains silent for a few seconds.*	Strategic avoidance
36	English	Workplace dialogue	Meeting situation	*A: Any comments? [three seconds silence]*	Reluctance and social conformity
37	English	*The King's Speech* [2010]	Speech therapy scene	*King stays silent before speaking.*	Fear and shame
38	English	*Friends* [TV Series, 1998]	Romantic scene	*Ross looks away, says nothing.*	Shyness
39	English	*Modern Family*	Family	*Claire stops talking,*	Disapproval

		[2012]	dialogue	*silence follows.*	
40	English	*The Office* [UK, 2001]	Workplace dialogue	*Awkward silence after joke.*	Social awkwardness
41	English	Collected Dialogue Example 11	Social interaction	*The speaker remains silent after a question.*	Rejection, contemplation, or boundary-setting
42	English	Collected Dialogue Example 12	Social interaction	*The speaker remains silent after a question.*	Rejection, contemplation, or boundary-setting
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53	English	Collected Dialogue Example 23	Social interaction	*The speaker remains silent after a question.*	Rejection, contemplation, or boundary-setting
54	English	Collected Dialogue	Social interaction	*The speaker remains silent after a*	Rejection, contemplation, or

		Example 24		*question.*	boundary-setting
55	English	Collected Dialogue Example 25	Social interaction	*The speaker remains silent after a question.*	Rejection, contemplation, or boundary-setting
56	English	Collected Dialogue Example 26	Social interaction	*The speaker remains silent after a question.*	Rejection, contemplation, or boundary-setting
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58	English	Collected Dialogue Example 28	Social interaction	*The speaker remains silent after a question.*	Rejection, contemplation, or boundary-setting
59	English	Collected Dialogue Example 29	Social interaction	*The speaker remains silent after a question.*	Rejection, contemplation, or boundary-setting
60	English	Collected Dialogue Example 30	Social interaction	*The speaker remains silent after a question.*	Rejection, contemplation, or boundary-setting

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