

Silence as a Message Conveying Process: A Hausa-Yorùbá Paradigm

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Abstract

Usually, the picture that comes to the human mind at the mention of the word, silence, is absence of sound. This could be linguistically explained as a situation where nothing is uttered. In a way, it may be counted as something out of place when it comes to achieving a communication purpose in discourse as it is believed that speech is central in this regard. Meanwhile, during discourse, apart from speech, several discursive strategies including silence are usually exploited by interlocutors to maximise their communicative competence regardless the language(s) they use. It is not surprising then to identify certain instances in which speakers of Hausa and Yorùbá languages exploit this process to convey messages during linguistic interaction. Precisely, the reality of this is culture specific and thus hopeful to be meaningful enough for evaluation in actualising discourse analysis objectives especially from a Hausa – Yorùbá perspective using Clair's (2003) provision as a theoretical framework.

Keywords: *Discourse Analysis, Silence, Discursive Silence and Culture.*

Introduction

Several views have been given about the concept of discourse analysis and what has been observed in a good number of its descriptions is that emphasis is placed on speech or units of speech. For example, Stubbs (1993) says that Discourse Analysis “. . . attempts to study larger linguistic units, such as conversational exchanges or written text.” The ‘linguistic units’ referred to in the definition suggests something expressive and possible to present orthographically. It is physical. This is in line with the view of Matthews (2007) that it is effective of any analysis of discourse to attempt analysing units larger than words or sentence.

Similarly, Smith and Bill (2007) state that “Discourse analysis involves a close examination of text, including visual imagery and sound as well as spoken or written language.” For a meaning examination, however, they add that the analysis has to invariably concern with both the form of the text and its use in social context, its construction, distribution and reception. This will enable the outcome of the evaluation to be one in which aims of understanding and elucidating the meanings and social significance of text will be achieved. In essence, the purpose of discourse analyses is to analyse discourse which, from the definitions given above, is reduced to an expressive token or a written text – a linguistic unit above sentence level.

However, it seems there is more to what discourse that Discourse Analysis analyses than a spoken or written text. To justify this position, one can consider an adage which says “speech is silver; silence is golden.” This can be interpreted to mean that silence, which is omitted in the definitions given earlier, can do, if not more, what speech does in discursive interactions. It has been observed that during construction, distribution and reception of text in a social interaction context, there are several instances silence plays important and meaningful roles. This is believed to occur in many languages of the world including Hausa and Yorùbá languages. In the use of these languages, there have been situations in which silence serves as a message carrier among interlocutors. These are actually of much interest to discourse analysts and therefore of great importance to find out such instances (McCarthy, Matthiessen and Slade 2010:54 & Halliday 1985:77).

The Concept of Discourse

According to Jorgensen and Phillips (2002), the word discourse “. . . is the general idea that language is structured according to different patterns that people's utterances follow when they take part in different domains of social life.” To this effect, when two or more people are involved in a conversation, the nature of their conversation could be unique in such that it might be categorised as either “‘medical discourse’ and ‘political discourse’” (ibid.) or any other forms of discourse like law, education, business, and so on.

Apart from the fact that discourse could be based on any of the domains of human life, specifically in linguistics, it has to do with “Any coherent succession of sentences spoken or . . . written” (Matthews 2007). Thus, discourse could be regarded as a combination of several sentences used as a complete unit within a context. It could be verbal or in written form. Subsequently, discourse is not an individual thing; it is a social practice. Wodak (1996) states that “discourse as a social practice implies a dialectal relationship

between a particular discursive event and the situation(s), institution(s) and social structure(s) which frame it: the discursive event is shaped by them, but it also shapes them.”

Discourse Analysis

To Trapes – Lomax (2004), Discourse Analysis can be seen from both broad and narrow perspectives. From a broad standpoint, it is “the study of language viewed communicatively and/or of communication viewed linguistically.” However, quoting Jaworski and Coupland (1999), he itemises four definitions that reveal specific angles of what Discourse Analysis studies as: the linguistic, cognitive and social process whereby meanings are expressed and intentions are interpreted in human interaction; the historically and culturally embedded sets of conventions which constitute and regulate such processes; a particular event in which such processes are instantiated; the product of such an event, especially in the form of visible text, whether originally spoken and subsequently transcribed or originally written.

It can be deduced from the first three of the definitions above that in certain instances discourse could go beyond a visible text – spoken or written; it could be abstract and constitute some nonverbal communicative features especially in expressing meaning and intention. Similarly, silence, as pointed out by Medubi (2009), “. . . is the total absence of speech in a given conversational situation,” it is among some other nonverbal communication forms that are historically and culturally part of discourse especially among users of Hausa and Yorùbá languages.

Forms of Silence

Two forms of silence have been identified. According to Brehnam and Nostratzadegan (2014), these include communicative silence and non-communicative silence. Communicative silence is that form of silence that is relevant to discourse while the latter has little or no relevance to discourse. Significantly, communicative silence contributes to the success of discourse in which it is applied and accordingly, can be referred to as Eloquent Silence or Rhetorical Silence which is an active means chosen by the speaker to convey his or her message during a conversational process (Ephratt 2008 in Brehnam and Nostratzadegan 2014).

On the other hand, they affirm that when silence experienced in discourse occurs in form of pause, or stillness, such are assumed to be non-communicative. It could be said that such form of silence comes as a result of some physical or psychological limitations on the part of the speaker during a social interaction. That is why Ephratt (2007) states: Stillness is the absence of sound. It is the exterior to communicative interaction . . . Speakers’ pauses inserted (when it is their time to speak) to breathe or to plan their next utterance, or for other psycholinguistic and cultural motives are non-communicative. As such, these pauses are differentiated from eloquent silence.

Silence as a Discursive Tool

Describing silence from a discursive point of view is somewhat complex. The reason for this is not far-fetched. First, the word, ‘silence’ is a complex concept and as pointed out by Benham and Nasratzadegan (2014), because its realisation is practically not speaking, it consequently portrays the very opposite of language use. However, they add that “Silence is an active meaningful means of communication demonstrated to have different functions.” Therefore, it is “. . . a meaningful absence, which leaves its traces back in signifying empty space in a text” (Saville Troike 1985 and 1994 cited in Benham and Nasratzadegan 2014).

If silence during communication is believed to have different functions as mentioned above, it means its occurrence has a great deal influence on interactants in a discourse. In such a situation, the absence of speech is expected to be informative and meaningful. As such, silence as the total absence of speech, which is glaring when a situation demands speech and none occurs (Medubi 2009) in discourse does not always mean that a message has not been passed. During discourse, silence could mean “absence of speech through which communication occurs” (Agyekun 2002 in Sadeghi 2015). Brehnam and Nostratzadegan (2014) explain that discursive silence entails: the silences, which deliberately have been chosen by the speaker and actually an internal one. This absence of speech in language is interpreted contextually using the present elements in the text or benefitting readers’ or listeners’ presuppositions. It can be an absence of signifier or representation of a meaning by anon-verbal signifier. The conversational silence occurs when talk is absent while it could have been absent.

Concisely, silence as a discursive tool is expected to carry some messages which could be understood by discussants through their ability to infer from contextual provisions of discourse. It is very

useful in discourse as it serves as “the extreme manifestations of indirectness, which is a matter of saying nothing and meaning something, as indirectness means saying one thing and meaning another” (Tannen 1995 cited in Sadeghi 2015). Therefore, when nothing is said in a conversation, a lot has been sometimes communicated and if speakers involved in the social interaction are aware of this reality, no communication gap will be created and the flow of exchange will eventually be sustained.

Characteristics of Discursive Silence

When silence is used to pass a message in discourse the following are usually noticed: It draws attention to several facts; it happens often and it is not usually chosen arbitrarily; it tends to ‘say’ a lot more than the ‘speaker’ means; it has a great effect on the audience or whoever is involved in the discourse in which it is used; it usually depicts meanings that can often not be ‘captured’ by words (Medubi 2009).

Types of Discursive Silence

Meaningful efforts have been made by scholars over discursive silence typology. Sadeghi (2015) elaborates on this when he gives a list of contributors and their views in this regard. He says “the typology of silence has been and continues to be discussed in different contexts, such as social, textual, pragmatic, or fiction contexts.” Among the authors, he mentions Bruneau (1973), who categorises discursive silence into: Psycholinguistic (which has to do with a pause applied by participants to gain more time while conversing by slowing their speech, or to give listeners more time to process what they hear so that they would understand better), interactive (which has to do with a pause that is mutually shared by participants of dyadic or a small group until someone takes the floor) and socio-cultural (which is related to religious practices in some religions (Kalman 2008).

Huckin (2002) in Dressen (2002), examines six types of textual silence to include: speech act silences (which the speaker observes to have a communicative import), presuppositional silences (used to achieve greater communicative efficiency by not stating what is assumed to be common knowledge easily recoverable from context), discreet silences (applied to avoid mentioning sensitive subjects conditioned by issues of confidentiality, truthfulness or taboo topics), conventional silences (governed by general conventions), manipulative silences (used deliberately by a speaker to conceal relevant information from the listener) and incidental silences (which occur accidentally and appear to have no particular purpose).

Meanwhile, Kurzon (2007) divides discursive silence into the following four categories.

Conversational Silence: This is specifically common to discourse in a spoken form and covers situations in which silence is used when “not participating in a conversation even when one is physically present.” This is particular to a two-participant discourse. What makes this discursive is that the “silence may be considered equivalent to a speech act. But we do not know what S (that is, Speaker) would have said if s/he had spoken; in such a silence the text is unknown” (ibid.). He adds that in a dyadic discourse, the silence that is maintained could be intentional or unintentional. “When it is intentional silence is internal to the silent person, that is to say, the decision not to speak originates with the S him- or herself.” On the contrary, it is unintentional when it “seems to imply an external source that forces the person not to speak.”

For example,

A student who is caught in the act of stealing from his teacher’s purse may intentionally decide not to talk as a means of begging for forgiveness.

A young boy whose mother has instructed not to disclose to anyone who asks after her that she is inside, because she is with a concubine in the room; may be unintentionally silent if any of the visitors tries to inquire her whereabouts.

Thematic Silence: Silence in a discourse can be thematic when the person involved in the discourse avoids saying anything on a particular topic or issue. The speaker while interacting with other participants in a discourse may deliberately choose “to ignore a topic—s/he chooses silence instead of talking about that topic.” In essence, the type of silence used in such a situation “is thematic – it relates to a theme, topic or subject.” This is corroborated in a Yorùbá adage, “Òpòlò ni bi a ba de ibi iru ki a fo o” which is directly translated as, “The toad says when we get to issues on tail let us jump it.” People usually like to keep silent when issues that have to do with their limitations or failure are mentioned during discourse. This is exemplified in the conversation below:

Speaker A: Friend, were you at the cultural dance festival last night?

Speaker B: Yes. I was. It’s quite interesting.

Speaker A: I will always remember the songs. They were wonderfully composed. Weren’t they?

Speaker B: Silent

Speaker A: It seems you were not there.

Speaker B: Hmm . . . I was. Only that . . . Anyway, let's discuss something more important.

Speaker B is not comfortable with the trend of the discourse since one of the songs sang at the event was primarily composed to mock his mother who is known to have had four children for four men.

Textual Silence: This type of silence occurs when a group of speakers involved in a discourse reads or recites a particular text in silence. The term “text” in the context is a specific prearranged written or spoken text, and not one created by an assumed speaker. The length of the silence in such a case is approximately equivalent to the time it takes the individual to read or recite the text. An example of this could be found as part of Islamic prayers especially when Zuhr (the prayer at 1pm) is observed. The chapters of the Qu’ran recited this time are usually recited silently irrespective of the number of people involved. The point is that the silent person(s) has faith that he is communicating with God even though He is not physically present.

Situational Silence: This is close to textual silence. However, the difference is that while speakers are silent when reading or reciting a specific text during discourse in textual silence, they are not reading or reciting any specific text or “anything at all” when situational silence is observed. Even when they have anything to recite, that is unknown to whosoever might be observing them. Although it “may be maintained by an individual on his or her own, it is normal that situational silence takes place in the presence of a large group of people.” Burneau (1973) sees situational silence as socio-cultural silence. He is of the view that this type of silence takes place in “churches, courtrooms, schools, libraries, hospitals, funeral homes, battle sites, insane asylums, and prisons.” In a Yorùbá setting, this can occur at shrines especially during rituals or when some divination is practised. Similarly, in Hausa language, there is an adage, “shiru ma magana ce” which is translated loosely as “in silence a lot is being said.”

Discursive Silence as a Property of Culture

Silence in discourse is culture specific. This is in line with Hudson’s (1980) position that “many properties of language . . . (among which is silence) are also property of culture in general and . . . meaning is best studied in relation to culture” He is of the opinion that culture is “something that everybody has . . . some ‘property’ of a community, especially those which might distinguish it from other communities.” Based on this, it could be said that the use of silence among speakers of Hausa or Yorùbá language is culturally unique and to study such silence usage efficiently, it is necessary to take into consideration the culture of the people involved. Uniquely, through verbal communication, culture influences non-verbal behaviours like silence a great deal (Matsumoto 2006).

Behnam and Nosratzadegan (2014) citing Hall (1981) explain that the cultural frame peculiar to any group of people is largely hidden to that group of people and would remain thus unless such peculiar cultural frame is compared with other cultures. According to them,

Silence is an excellent example of ‘hidden’ culture: it is such context-dependent as communication that the holistic processes of interpreting and responding to silence are difficult to access in linear, slow, constrained language. In reference to that, the meaning attached to each silence instance, especially in Yorùbá or Hausa, is believed not only to be dependent on the context of use but also on the cultural view of the people about silence usage at a particular context. This is because it is a culturally influenced context that provides the listener which the chances of comprehending specific intentions and motives, or deriving expected intentions, from silence.

For example Oliver (1971) in Wong (2015) relates that in the ancient Orient silence was valued rather than feared but in Asia, it has commonly been entirely acceptable whereas in the West silence has generally been considered socially disagreeable. He mentions Lebra’s (1987) submission that in Japanese society, talking is seen as an excuse for procrastinating while a decisive action is characterised by silence. This implies that a man of few words is trusted more than a man of many words. He therefore concludes that “multitude of meanings and functions . . . are served by interactive silence” and this is prevalent and predominant “in different cultural contexts and all of life’s interpersonal communicative situations.” In the case of discourse in Yorùbá and Hausa languages, silence carries a great deal of meanings and performs many functions in different contexts.

As a result of that, it could be said that Hausa and Yorùbá speakers do not use discursive silence in social interaction for the sake of using it. Rather, the silence is meant to transfer some meaningful messages.

Therefore to achieve a successful interaction through silence, it is necessary for every participant in a Hausa or Yorùbá based discourse to acquire some degree of knowledge about Hausa or Yorùbá culture.

Meanwhile, situations in which silence is used could be formal and informal in any cultures. Either formal or otherwise, Clair (2003) gives a general list of the instances in which silence serves as a message in discourse as: when strangers meet each other, when couples initiate courtships, to show respect, to express bereavement of a lost one, during the observation of a sacred event, a sign of interest or wonder, to express resistance or dissatisfaction, when someone is caught off guard and unable to participate in a direct confrontation, to express disagreement, or to express defiance. Some of these are exemplified in Hausa or Yorùbá based discourses.

Examples of Instances of Discursive Silence as Message Carriers in Yorùbá Culture

As stated earlier, silence in discourse is culture specific. Therefore, its use among speakers of Yorùbá language is unique. Owing to this uniqueness, the instances silence serves as a message carrier in Yorùbá culture are slightly different from what is obtainable in other world languages/cultures. Nevertheless, certain of the instances stated above are still found in Yorùbá discourse. Examples of these instances are given below.

Instance A1: During a ritual procession in bringing home the corpse of someone who died in the farm. The leader of the procession usually carries a live cock (*adiye irana*) which feathers he would be pulling and throwing along as they go. Whosoever meets them is expected to find his way without saying anything.

Instance A2: During a divination process, e.g.

Speaker A (a diviner): *Daàniyàn rẹ sinu awọn eyin owo yií.* (Say your prayers into these cowries.)

Speaker B: (Holds the cowries close to his mouth and remains silent for a few seconds.)

Instance A3: During a very important sacrifice: This may involve one person or a group of persons, e.g.

For a person: A man walks to a crossroad, puts down the container of a sacrifice, stands mute in front of the sacrifice for a while, turns his back to it and finally takes his leave. This might be intentionally done or based on the instruction from the herbalist who asks the individual to make the sacrifice.

As a collective sacrifice: In this case, it is only one of the people involved who is expected to shout something like “*Aiwò ó, ẹni wò ó yòò bá a lọ*” meaning “Anyone who ventures to see what is going on would go with the sacrifice,” while others come after him silently and every non-member around must hide and keep quiet in their individual homes.

One of the unique things about the Yorùbá culture is that it reflects a high degree of ritual activities and silence places an important role in carrying out many of these activities as demonstrated in Instances A1 to A3.

Instance A4: When couples initiate courtships. In Yorùbá culture, courtship is expected to be initiated by an intermediary who continues this duty till when the marriage ceremony is near. Therefore the first direct discursive interaction between the couple is usually characterised with silence (possibly originating from shyness), e.g.

Fiancé: *Kááààrò.* (Good morning.)

Fiancée: (Silence).

Fiancé: *Şebí iwọ ni mò nkí. Mo ní ‘Kááààrò..’* (I’m greeting you now. I say ‘Good morning.’)

Fiancée: (Smiling) *Ẹ Kááààrò* (Good morning.)

Fiancé: *Mo n dúró dè ọ nihin in lánáán. Kíló şẹlẹ tí n kò fí ríọ?* (I was waiting for you here yesterday. Why did I not see you?)

Fiancée: (Silence).

Fiancé: (Holding her in her right hand) *N kò ríọ. Kíni ó şẹlẹ? Jòwọ dá mi lóhùn.* (I didn’t see you. Why? Please, answer now.)

Fiancée: *O dákẹsíbẹ . . .* (Still silent . . .)

Instance A5: As a form of respect: One of the unique aspects of Yorùbá culture is respect. Much respect is always given to the elderly and people in positions of authority. Every act of disrespect is detested in a strong term. In several ways this is observed in discourse is through the use of silence.

For example, a discussion between *BaşọrunGáà* (a First-Class chief in *Ọyọ* Kingdom) and some other Chiefs in the Kingdom on selection of a new *Ọyọ* monarch.

Başọrun Gáà: Ẹ má jẹ kílúó dofò. Tílúò bà dùn kò sọmọ tálákà tí yòò ròde ẹmu. Ẹyítíyòò bá sí múlúduń ohun náàni kíá jọ wòò. (But we should take care not to create a vacuum in the administration of the city. Let’s now think quick remedies to make the city tick.)

Ọyọ Chiefs: (Silence)

Başòrun Gáà: Èèşe? È dákéni? TóòỌyọ dé o. È ti t'Ọyọ bọ. Èèşe tẹ e dáké. Ọyọò mészini? (Why? Are we all dumb? Is that a sign of Ọyọ intrigue? Has Ọyọ got no answer to the situations?)

Ọyọ Chiefs: Silence

Samu (One of the Chiefs): Kára ó le Baba . . . Ọyómészí. Amọ, wọn ní erin ò gbọdọ fun kí ọmọ rẹ ó fun. (Surely, Ọyọ has answers to situations. But when an elephant trumpets, her young one not also trumpets.)

Excerpt from Başòrun Gáà

The chiefs keep quiet as a sign of respect to the eldest and most powerful chief in the kingdom. They make him feel that his opinion is respected over any suggestions anyone among them may make but indirectly detest the opinion through silence.

Instance A6: When someone is guilty of an offence: A silence message can occur in a situation where someone is caught while committing an offence. In such a situation, users of Yorùbá language would say, “Jẹnbẹtẹ gbé ọmọ lée lówọ” which means that “he finds it difficult to make any comment.” In the same vein, they may say that, “Tí ọwọ bá tẹ ọdaràn, tí kò bá wolẹ a máa fowọ yún ori” which means that “a caught criminal will either fix his gaze on the ground or scratch his head.”

Speaker A (A night guard): Báwo ni o se rí kọkọrọ fi wolẹ?(How did you get the key to the room?)

Speaker B (The caught thief): (Silence).

Speaker A(Gives speaker B a slap): Dá mi lóhùn! Báwoni o se rí kọkọrọ fi wolẹ? (Answer me! How did you get the key to the room?)

SpeakerB: (Silence) . . .

Instance A7: When a truthful answer can be hurtful: At times, people decide to use silence in discourse when a given truthful utterance can lead them into trouble or cause them to offend a fellow interlocutor, e.g.

Speaker A: Mo ra aşọ tuntun kan niáná. (I bought a new dress last week.)

Speaker B:Mo lérò pé kişe èyítí o wọ lánáán? (I hope it's not the one you put on yesterday.)

Speaker A: Háá! O rii. Ọun ni.Şéó dára? (Oh! You saw it? That's it. Is it fine?)

Speaker B: (Silence).

Instance A8: To avoid getting involved in talking on an issue: This is common in a discourse that involves a disciplined person and someone who is a gossip (or a busybody – a habit common among some Yorùbá women), e.g.

Speaker A: Mo lọ şişọọbu Mámá a Bíọla lówùúrọ yí. Ó wù mípé kíşe ọjú. Bì o se n lo omoòdọ rẹkò dára tó. Şékò tí nán lójúe rini? (I was in Mama Biola's shop this morning. I wished you had been there. The way she's treating her housemaid is not good enough. Has she not beaten her in your presence before?)

Speaker B: (Silence).

Speaker A:Èyí tí ó şelẹ lóní ga rékojá. Wá wo bí ọmọ nàá tí n sun ekún. À fi kí Ọlórún gbà á lówọ Jészéééli yen o. (That of this morning was worse. You need to see how the poor girl was crying. May God deliver her from that Jezebel.)

Speaker B: (Silence)

Speaker A: Àántí, ẹ ò tí ẹ fészí rará. (Aunty, you did not even say anything.)

Speaker B: Háá! Kíni kí n sọ . . . ? Ha! What will I say . . . ?

Instance A9: To express resistance: In discourse among speakers of Yorùbá language, there can be an instance in which a speaker may decide to use silence to show resistance. This may occur between a young lady and her mother as shown below.

Daughter: Mummy, Şolá béèrè yín lánáán. (Mummy, Şolá asked of you yesterday.)

Mother: Fún kíni? Mo ti sọ fun ẹ pé èmi ò fowọ sí igbéyàwò lááárin iwọ àti ọmọ rádaráda yen. (For what? I've told you that I don't support the idea of you marrying that rat of a thing.)

Daughter: Mo ní kí ẹ má pé é ní ọmọ rádaráda mó. Kò sí ení tí ó lè yí báyí ní mò fẹşe n nkan mi padà. (I've been telling you to stop calling him rat. Besides; no one can change my mind.)

Mother: Lójú ayé mi kó. N kò ní gbà. Ọmọ ọrẹ mi yen nkọ? (Over my dead body. I will never allow that. What about my friend's son?)

Daughter: N kómọ (I don't know.)

Mother: O ò mọ kíni? (You don't know what?)

Daughter: (Silence).

Mother: Igba wo ní kí n şeto mómí-n-mò-ẹ? (When should I invite his parents?)

Daughter: (Silence)

Mother: Şe etiẹ di ni?(Are you deaf?)

Daughter: (Silence) . . .Mo ti sọ ohun tí mo fẹ.(I've told you my mind) (She walks away).

Instance A10: As a sign of interest or amazement: At times silence serves as a means of expressing interest or wonder in discourse among speakers of Yorùbá. For example,

Speaker A: Arábirin, a še àkiyèsí gbogbo işẹ rere yín ninú ilé Olórún yí. Láti fì imoore wa hàn, kòkòrò ọkò yín rée. È kú orí ire! (Madam, we have noticed your good work in this vineyard of God. In appreciation, this car key belongs to you. Congratulations!)

Speaker B: Opens her mouth without saying anything and tears are rolling down her cheeks.

Examples of Instances of Discursive Silence as Message Carriers in Hausa Culture

Every culture has a way of using silence to pass messages across. The Hausa culture is not an exception. As a discursive tool among users of the language, there are instances in which the use of silence in discourse has been observed among Hausas. For example:

Instance B1: When a lady's hand is asked in marriage by her suitor. In this case, silence plays the role of acceptance.

For instance,

Father: Wanne (Ibrahim) ya zo neman auren ki. Kina so? (Ibrahim has asked for your hands in marriage. Do you accept?)

Daughter: (Silent but smiles)

Father: Kina son sa? (Do you love him)

Daughter : (Silence)

Father: Kin amince? (Do you accept?)

Daughter : (Silence)

Instance B2: In a typical Hausa culture, the name of the first child is not called by his mother and whenever there is anything to do with the child is being discussed the mother keeps mute. For instance:

Speaker A: Ya sunan yaron ki? (What is the name of your son?)

Mother: (Silence)

Speaker A: Ya sunan yaron ne? (What is the name of your son?)

Mother: (Silence)

Instance B3: To show disapproval by one of the speakers in a discussion. For instance:

Speaker A: Mallam Musa dan Allah ka bani ranchen dubu goma. Na san kana dashi. (Mallam Musa please can you lend me ten thousand naira. I know you have it.)

Speaker B (Mallam Musa): (Silence).

Speaker A: Haba! Abokina ka bani rance mana. (Haba! My friend lend me some money)

Speaker B (Mallam Musa): (Silence).

Instance B4: An Emir does not speak in the palace especially when he is being greeted by his subjects instead the guards answer on his behalf. For instance:

Speaker A: Barka da asuba (Good morning Sir).

Emir: (Silence). At this juncture the Emir is silent but the palace guards answer to show that he has responded to the greetings.

Instance B5: When there is a disagreement between husband and wife and elders are there to settle the case. It is a sign of respect for the wife to keep quiet when the case is being settled. For instance:

Parents: Naji kun sami matsala da mijinki. (I heard you had a misunderstanding with your husband).

Wife: (Silence)

Parents: Ki bi mijin ki sau da kafa (follow your husband respectively).

Wife: (Silence)

Parents: Ki yi hakuri ki zauna lafiya a gidan ki (Have patience and stay peacefully in your house).

Wife: (Silence).

Instance B6: There is a saying in Hausa that “shiru ma Magana ce” (Silence is a message conveyer). For instance, when a speaker is a habitual liar his listener may decide to relate with him using silence during conversation to avoid hurting the speaker's feelings. For Example:

Speaker A: Na siya wannan takalmin dubu dari. (I bought this shoe for one hundred thousand naira).

Speaker B: (Silence).

Speaker B: Ama na ga takalmin a kasuwa naira dubu buyu (But I saw this same shoe in the market for two thousand naira.

Speaker A: (Silence).

Discussion

Specifically, application of discursive silence in communicative interactions is culture based. Consequently, employing silence for conveyance of meaning is not usually done in a vacuum but applied to foreground

realities of certain cultural properties of a linguistic group. This is evident in the discursive silence instances identified in both Hausa and Yorùbá cultures above. This reestablishes the point raised earlier that silence, though total absence of speech, can do, if not more, what speech does in discursive interactions. Part of what speech does is transfer of cultural properties of a given linguistic community and the exploitation of discursive silence genuinely covers that in the instances identified. Some of the exemplified properties of cultures represent to a certain degree the religious, social, ideological and political realities about Hausa and Yorùbá peoples.

For example, both Hausa and Yorùbá cultures give much reverence to religion regardless of the form an individual is identified with— Christianity, Islam or traditional religion — and this usually reflects in the linguistic interactions of individuals who share the same faith. In Instances A1 and A3, discursive silence serves as an important factor during rituals in a traditional Yorùbá religion. It is therefore exploited to maintain the atmosphere that surrounds ongoing ritual activities without necessarily creating linguistic gaps among interlocutors during the processes. In the case of Instance A2, discursive silence is adopted to underline the fact about the omniscient Supernatural Being Who can discern every human intention whether such is uttered or not.

As a class marker in a communicative interaction, silence can be employed either by the subordinate or superior. In Instance B4, the position of the Emir is linguistically communicated without speech though. In the same vein, Instance A5 brings to bear element of power resistance through exploitation of power. Despite the position of the Chiefs, according to culture, they respect hierarchical order by employing discursive silence to reverently resist the view of Basorun Gaa, the most senior chief in the cabinet.

Ideologically, every linguistic community is established and run based on certain ideas and beliefs held in high esteem by its people. This invariably reflects in the people's discursive interactions. To some, diplomacy or politeness is considered a virtue necessary to be upheld in communicative situations. This, however, might be considered a cowardly act by some other linguistic group. Regardless of the position any people adopts, maintaining good relationship during conversation is believed to hinge on tact using discursive silence as in Instances A4, A8, B1, B2, B3 and B5.

Conclusion

Examination of text in form of spoken or written speech has been the central interest of Discourse Analysis. However, some other aspects of discourse are also not left out when carrying out the analysis. This therefore brings about the inclusion of some nonverbal communication features like silence in the study of discourse. Although silence is the direct opposite of speech, its importance in social interaction is of great benefits to interlocutors in achieving functional and meaningful communication. It is not surprising then to find a great number of instances in which silence can be used to carry messages in discourse especially among users of Hausa and Yorùbá languages. Because discursive silence is culture specific, understanding instances of silence as a means of expression among speakers of the languages requires that individuals involved in the type of discourse acquire good knowledge of Hausa/Yorùbá culture which can also be used to add flavor to the entire communication process.

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