

A Study of Pragmatic Functions of Silence in Colloquial Jordanian Arabic

AHMAD MOHAMMAD AHMAD AL-HARAHSEH
Yarmouk University (Irbid-Jordan)

ABSTRACT

The pragmatic study of silence has not got much concern in the Arab world in general and in Jordanian Arabic in particular. The purpose of the current study is to investigate the perception and practice of silence in casual conversation in Jordanian society from a pragmatic point of view. This study adapts Volosinov's notion of "multi-acculturality." Twelve dyadic conversations were conducted for 30 minutes each. The participants were 24 university students at Yarmouk University (Jordan-Irbid): twelve males and 12 females. They were categorised into two main groups: friends and strangers. Ninety seconds were analysed from the beginning, the middle, and the end of each conversation; these extracts were chosen systematically. The theoretical framework of this study draws on Conversation Analysis, Turn-Taking system, ethnography of communication, Politeness Theory, Speech Act Theory and some basic statistics. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that silence is functional and meaningful in Jordanian society. It also has different interpretations in different contexts depending on the relationship between the interlocutors, the context of situation and the topic. Silence has off-record politeness functions.

Keywords: Pragmatics, silence, ethnography of communication, turn-taking, Jordanian Arabic, politeness theory, conversation analysis.

1. INTRODUCTION

The willingness to understand the perception and practice of silence is currently receiving an increasing amount of attention in the literature on pragmatics. Silence is a multifaceted and complex linguistic phenomenon, because its interpretation is ambiguous and relies heavily on the socio-cultural norms of a certain society, and the context of situation. There are few studies on silence in cross-cultural