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BEYOND WORDS: PRAGMATICS OF SILENT NEGATION

Стаття прагне переосмислити поширену думку стосовно того, що мовчання здебільшого означає згоду. Навпаки, воно може бути навмисним актом заперечення. *Метою* дослідження є визначення типології мовчазного заперечення як прагматичного явища та встановлення засобів його вираження у письмовому дискурсі. У статті аналізується, як мовчання функціонує як стратегія незгоди або відмови, особливо у випадках, коли пряме заперечення є недоречним.

Методологія охоплює контекстуальний аналіз (для вивчення ситуаційної залежності значення), когнітивний аналіз (для з'ясування сприйняття мовчазного заперечення читачем), типологічний метод (для побудови класифікації), а також герменевтичний (для тлумачення літературних текстів). Теоретичною базою стали праці А. Яворського та А. Ж. Дінуара, які описували функції та стратегії мовчання в комунікації.

Дослідження пропонує чотири основні категорії мовчазного заперечення: описове мовчазне заперечення (DSN), де автори розповідають про навмисне мовчання та відмову персонажа; еліптичне мовчазне заперечення (ESN), при якому розділові знаки та незакінчені речення передбачають заперечення; мовчазну незгоду через дію (SDA), передану жестами та поведінкою, описаними наративно. і мовчазний міжособистісний монолог заперечення (SINM), в якому внутрішні думки персонажів відкидають ідеї, не висловлюючи їх словами. Кожен з цих типів підкріплюється прикладами з художніх текстів. Результати дослідження підкреслюють, що мовчазне заперечення є не тільки частою, але і прагматично важливою особливістю дискурсу. Це особливо актуально в культурних або ієрархічних контекстах, де відкрита незгода може розглядатися як недоречно. Мовчазне заперечення відіграє важливу роль у динаміці розповіді, розвитку характеру та міжособистісній напруженості. Таким чином, проведене дослідження дозволяє заповнити лакуну в лінгвістичній прагматичній систематизуючи способи, за допомогою яких мовчання може зводити нанівець зусилля учасників комунікативного акту, демонструючи, що відсутність мови може виражати різні наміри комунікантів.

Ключові слова: мовчазне заперечення, літературне мовчання, прагматика, заперечення, мовчання в дискурсі, невербальна комунікація.

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Introduction

In many cultures, silence is often interpreted as a sign of consent. However, when the author of the article was asked to comment on a controversial topic the answer was: "Well... You know... (silence)". Does this sentence constitute a consent? Not at all. Then silence should be treated not only as an example of agreement, but rather negation. How many employees remained silent when employers asked them whether they were satisfied with their salary? Silence speaks more than words, and it does not always signify agreement with the interlocutor.

As a communicative approach, silence entails the absence of words or any verbal speech, yet it serves a specific purpose and hence carries the communicative meaning. Silence could be interpreted differently based on numerous factors, such as culture, context or even tone of the communication. In this article, silence is examined as a means of conveying negation or disagreement – a deliberate strategy to convey refusal, denial or disagreement without stating anything and using the language itself. Silence in this case is context-dependent and can take on different meaning across conversational situations.

The most significant contribution to the interpretation of silence was made by Adam Jaworski in several of his works, but the most influential is *The Power of Silence* [Jaworski, 1993], silence is examined as a social and cultural phenomenon. Jaworski investigates how silence functions in pragmatics and how it can lead to miscommunication. He delves into the politics of silence and gives examples of how silence was preferred by women who experienced sexual violence; their silence conveyed more than words. However, he does not extensively focus on the classification of silent negation in written discourse, that is rendered through linguistic means.

Another influential scholar in this field is Abbé Joseph Dinouart, who, in the 18th century, attempted to classify silence based on strategic and spiritual dimensions. In his work *L'Art de se taire* [Dinouart, 1996; Perniola, 2010] he singled out ten types of silence based on social context. He explored how silence can be employed in communication, examining its potential manipulative, spiritual, and protective qualities. Although his research focuses on broader definition of silence and lacks the classification.

The same topic is partially addressed by Florii Batsevykh in *Essays on Linguistic Pragmatics* [Batsevykh, 2010] and by Erving Goffman in *Forms of Talk* [Goffman, 1981]. However, in both works, the topic is briefly explained as it is not the focus of this research.

Topicality. Silent negation remains a relatively understudied phenomenon in linguistic research, despite its frequent occurrence in communication. While most studies focus on explicit verbal negation, silence as a means of expressing disagreement is often overlooked or misinterpreted as consent. The study of silent negation offers new perspectives for analyzing meaning in discourse, especially in written texts where silence must be conveyed through linguistic means.

The aim of the research is to define a comprehensive typology of silence as negation within communicative acts and to identify the linguistic means of its expression.

Methods. This study employs several complementary analytical approaches to examine the phenomenon of silent negation in written discourse.

Contextual analysis is used to determine how the meaning of silent negation depends on the communicative situation. It helps uncover how similar silence structures may be interpreted differently across various narrative contexts.

Cognitive analysis examines how silent negation is processed and interpreted by readers.

The typological method serves to classify different types of silent negation according to their form and function, forming the basis for the proposed typology.

The hermeneutic method enables in-depth reading of literary texts, where silent negation is present, taking into account cultural, emotional, and intertextual aspects.

Limitation: The work is primarily qualitative; therefore, the findings cannot be generalized across all forms of discourse. Future research could explore silent negation across a broader range of linguistic and cultural contexts.

Therefore, the present research addresses a gap in the current body of research by explicitly examining the pragmatics of silent negation within written discourse. Its originality and significance lie in providing an innovative classification of pragmatic silent negation forms — such as descriptive silent negation, elliptical silent negation, and silent interpersonal negation monologue — which are strategically employed by authors to enhance suspense, engage readers cognitively and emotionally, and subtly manipulate reader expectations.

History of research on silent negation

Silence, as previously mentioned, was traditionally perceived as the absence of speech or verbal expression; however, now it extends far beyond a mere pause in communication. It functions as a communicative strategy with distinct pragmatic implications. In pragmatics,

silence does not render mere inactivity; rather, it serves as a deliberate choice reflecting complex communicative intentions such as refusal, disagreement, uncertainty, or strategic withholding. Silent negation is a powerful pragmatic device used strategically to deny, refuse, or negate without explicitly verbalizing rejection.

Today, the communicative function of silence has become the subject of academic inquiry. Silence as a model of communicative behavior is analyzed by Radoslav Velimir Baltezarević and his co-authors, who interpret it as an attempt to avoid conflict during a communicative act [Baltezarević et al., 2022].

Silence as a full-fledged language with its own systems of encoding and decoding messages from a sender to a receiver in the immediate context of the situation is explored by E.N. Ugwu and S.O. Igene [Ugwu, Igene, 2012].

Kris Acheson [2008] conceptualizes silence as a language of gestures. The study of silence as a form of active listening is the focus of A. López Gutiérrez and A. Paniagua [2024]. Silence and speech as two constructions of interaction in communication are examined by D. Bao [2020]. Numerous dimensions, binary oppositions, and contradictions of silence are analyzed in the collective monograph *Giving Voice to Silence* [Hermanson, Mumford, 2016], whose authors interpret silence in both monologic and dialogic communication.

B. Wu et al. [2025], in their study of silence as a non-discursive practice, identify four fundamental types of silence: relationship support, relationship neglect, relationship challenge, and relationship destruction. The researchers point out that the interpretation of silence goes beyond a simplified and negative process of withholding meaning; rather, it represents a multifaceted method of meaning construction. As a non-discursive practice, silence can support harmonious relationships, avoid disputes, and even provoke conflicts [Wu et al., 2025, p. 1].

Despite growing scholarly attention to the communicative potential of silence, its linguistic potential as a form of negation and the means of its expression in written discourse remain on the periphery of academic focus — even though pragmatics plays a key role in studying this phenomenon.

The pragmatic approach to silence largely owes its development and recognition to the influential work of Adam Jaworski. In his books *The Power of Silence* [1993] and *Silence: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* [1997], Jaworski significantly reshaped our understanding of silence, moving beyond the traditional view of silence as merely a lack of words [Jaworski, 1993]. Instead, he viewed silence as an active and intentional communicative act, deliberately chosen to convey specific meanings in particular contexts.

According to Jaworski, silence should be regarded as a meaningful element of communication rather than merely the absence of speech. He argues that silence can express various intentions, such as disagreement, uncertainty, politeness, or refusal, depending on the situation and the speaker's goals. Jaworski's main contribution is his detailed analysis of silence as an intentional strategy rather than accidental quiet. For him, silence is always context-dependent, and its interpretation relies heavily on the social situation, cultural background, and the relationship between communicators [Jaworski, 1997].

Jaworski's pragmatic perspective highlights that silence is used strategically to achieve certain social and communicative outcomes. For instance, in conversations silence might serve as a polite way to avoid confrontation or as a subtle method of asserting power or dominance without explicitly stating it. From Jaworski's viewpoint, silence is not passive; rather, it is a calculated decision made to influence interactions and manage social relationships effectively [Jaworski, 1993].

Beyond its immediate communicative functions, Jaworski demonstrates the broader implications of silence. His work has influenced scholars by drawing attention to the nuanced roles of silence in maintaining or shifting power dynamics, managing interpersonal relationships, and even shaping cultural norms of communication. By emphasizing the strategic use of silence, Jaworski has opened up new avenues of inquiry into how meaning is constructed in interactions, significantly contributing to the study of pragmatics and discourse analysis.

Although Jaworski extensively analyzed silence in spoken contexts, there remains room for further exploration of its pragmatic implications in written texts, especially within literary narratives [Ibid.]. This specific area, particularly concerning classifications of silence, will be discussed in detail in the next section.

Scholarly exploration into typologies of silence has largely concentrated on spoken interactions, too. Dennis Kurzon's foundational work, particularly in his influential study *Towards a Typology of Silence* [2007], has predominantly addressed conversational and legal contexts, categorizing silence based on its communicative roles. However, his research provides a critical methodological foundation for developing corresponding classifications tailored explicitly to written texts.

Kurzon suggests four major types of silence: situational silence, social silence, textual silence, and psychological silence. Among these, textual silence is the most relevant for written contexts, thus for this study. Kurzon defines textual silence as the deliberate omission of words or phrases in a text, either by the speaker or the author. In literature, this type of silence may be realized through incomplete dialogue, missing narrative information, or the purposeful absence of expected responses. Textual silence often appears in the form of dashes, ellipses, or blank spaces that suggest something has been left unsaid [Kurzon, 2007].

Situational silence, though originally applied to spoken interactions, can be partially transferred to written narratives. It refers to silence bound to a specific context or setting. For instance, in a literary scene where a character refrains from speaking during a confrontation or a moment of emotional intensity, the author may describe the silence explicitly or imply it through absence of dialogue. Such moments are deeply embedded in the narrative situation, and their classification under situational silence helps distinguish them from more generalized types of non-verbal absence.

Kurzon also addresses social silence, which arises from social expectations, norms, or hierarchies. In fiction, this may correspond to characters remaining silent due to their social roles, fear, or status. Although this type is highly context-dependent, recognizing it in narrative texts may help categorize silences that are embedded within broader social structures inside the storyline [Ibid.].

Psychological silence is defined as silence resulting from internal emotional or cognitive states, such as shock, trauma, or confusion. In literary texts, psychological silence may be reflected through internal monologues in which characters are unable or unwilling to articulate their thoughts verbally.

Although primarily developed for spoken interaction, Kurzon's typology offers categories sufficiently abstract to be applied to written texts. Each type — whether textual, situational, social, or psychological — carries distinct implications for how silence is presented in the narrative and interpreted by the reader.

Michal Ephratt [2008] has also provided a detailed analysis of silence as a linguistic and communicative phenomenon. Although focused primarily on spoken interaction, Ephratt's conceptualization of silence as an intentional linguistic act offers a valuable theoretical background for developing a typology of silence specific to literary contexts. Her categorization emphasizes silence as an active element of language, used intentionally to convey implicit meanings and create narrative effects. This conceptual approach supports the notion of categorizing silence in literary narratives according to its specific narrative and stylistic purposes.

Ephratt categorizes silence into distinct types based on their communicative roles and linguistic manifestations. Her typology identifies three primary forms: silence as a pause, silence as an ellipsis, and silence as a symbolic act. First, silence as a pause involves intentional breaks in verbal exchange, marking linguistic boundaries or indicating reflection. Although originally applied to oral speech, this category can also be useful for the analysis of deliberate textual pauses, such as strategically placed punctuation or breaks that shape narrative rhythm and reader comprehension [Ephratt, 2008].

Second, Ephratt defines silence as ellipsis, referring to the intentional omission of linguistic elements that speakers or writers assume recipients can infer from context. In written narratives, such elliptical silence is realized through narrative gaps, omissions of dialogue, or incomplete sentences that rely on the reader's interpretative engagement to reconstruct the missing details. This category is particularly relevant for analyzing literary techniques that authors foster to enhance interpretive ambiguity and reader interaction.

Lastly, Ephratt introduces silence as a symbolic act, whereby silence functions as a culturally or contextually loaded communicative gesture, conveying meanings that extend beyond mere

linguistic absence. In written narratives, symbolic silence manifests through characters' non-verbal behaviors explicitly described by authors — such as gestures, facial expressions, or significant non-actions — that carry communicative significance without relying on verbalization [Ibid.].

Building upon these scholarly foundations, the current study introduces a novel classification explicitly tailored to written contexts. The proposed typology includes categories such as descriptive silent negation, elliptical silent negation, and silent interpersonal negation monologue. Each category reflects distinct narrative techniques authors strategically employ to articulate silence within texts.

The classification of silent negation

Although silence negation is well-spread in communication, there is there is a notable lack of scholarly literature on the classification of silence in linguistics. This article aims to suggest a comprehensive approach to classification of silence negation. Based on the analysis of communicative strategies in various contexts, the article offers a new insight to how silence can be used for negation in communication. It examines both the most common motivations for its use and less frequent, nuanced instances.

Before trying to classify silent negation, it is advisable to consider existing typologies of silent negation, that are suggested by other scholars in the field.

In 1771, Abbé Joseph Dinouart published *L'Art de se taire* [Dinouart, 1996], in which he argued that the art of being silent is as important as the art of eloquent speaking. A clergyman by vocation, Dinouart examined the way silence works in social and spiritual contexts. It must be noted that this classification reflects its historical context and may not fully align with contemporary communicative practices as it partially lacks the current context. He distinguishes 10 types of silence, and he excludes the possibility of it having infinite meanings, they are the following:

- a) Prudent Silence: employed by those seeking to protect themselves from potential harm.
- b) Artificial silence: may be a type of manipulation, when people deliberately choose not to speak to benefit from other's talking and not revealing anything themselves.
- c) Courteous silence: this type of silence appears when the listener does not want to interrupt anybody, so they simply use their facial expressions or body language to show their approval.
- d) Teasing silence: it appears when the listener secretly disagrees and even mocks the speaker, but they do not want the speaker to know it, so they deceive them into believing that they agree.
- e) Spiritual silence: employed by those that take pleasure in having spiritual connection, rather than simply talking.
- f) Stupid silence: is usually when neither speaker nor listener possesses the capacity to sustain a conversation, it may also happen due to intellectual limitations or the exhaustion of the topic.
- g) Applauding silence: this is a type of silence when the listener uses their body language to show sincere agreement, they usually employ nodding for that.
- h) Contempt silence: used by listeners that show disregard to speakers usually by ignoring them or their words.
- i) Capricious silence: is dependent on the mood of the listener, their answers are based on their personal disposition, usually making jokes which commit them to nothing.
- j) Political silence: valued by Dinouart, this is a type when people choose the words carefully, they do not always tell the whole truth based on what benefits them and what harms them, but at the same time without betraying it.

Another influential scholar is Adam Jaworski, he also suggested his way of categorizing silence in his book *The Power of Silence* [Jaworski 1993]. He analyzed silence according to its functions in different social contexts. It must be noted that these classifications involve silence in spoken communication, rather than the written text. These types are:

- a) Interactive silence: this type is used to smoothen the conversation, it is used strategically, usually as a break or turn-taking in a conversation.

b) Politeness silence: this type is highly dependent on cultural aspect, and it is used to show respect and politeness.

c) Affective silence: this type usually refers to silence that reflects grief or contemplation. This one gives the speaker the chance to cope with emotions and is a non-verbal way of rendering them.

d) Referential silence: it appears during the taboo topics or the ones that the speaker prefers not to discuss. The speaker usually tries not to comment on controversial topics.

e) Performative silence: this is a type of silence that appears in spiritual or religious contexts.

These studies strongly support the view that silence can be intentional, and it renders as much information as verbal communication. Dinouart focuses more on strategic use of silence in terms of its ethical and religious abilities, while Jaworski focuses more on its pragmatic and social aspect [Dinouart, 1996; Jaworski 1993]. Nonetheless, both scholars added greatly to the studies of silence and its functions.

Silent negation in fiction is not as easy to convey. Authors need to find ways of conveying silence with the help of words or punctuation, which poses a considerable challenge. The authors are confronted with the lack of an explicit means of silent negation. In spoken language, people just stop talking, in written text it is impossible. Instead, the language itself should be used to render its literal absence – to use the words to express their absence.

Most of the few existing studies on silent negation tend to focus on the communicational and social aspect of it [Jaworski 1993; Tannen, 1995], some other scholars research the cultural aspect like Jaworski did, but the author was unable to find much relevant research on silent negation in written texts. However, that aspect is no less fascinating as authors must use all their skills to convey it. Silence speaks more than words in most cases, so it is crucial to understand how it may influence the interaction between the characters in fiction.

Means of expressing silent negation

Silent negation is a communicative strategy where the absence of explicit verbal denial acts as a means of conveying a refusal. If all the means are considered, then the classifications listed above are not exhausted.

The expression of silent negation in prose takes multiple forms, those are:

a) Descriptive language. In this oxymoronic way authors “verbalize” silence, they describe the character’s desire to remain silent and explain their motivation through words.

b) Elliptical techniques. Punctuations like commas and dashes help authors achieve a “silent” effect through visual means. They give the sense of incompleteness and unfinished utterances.

c) Non-verbal cues. Body language, facial expressions, gestures, and movements inform the reader of the intent to disagree or reject.

d) Internal conflict. When an author chooses to explain the inner thoughts of the person, who didn’t interact with the other character in any way but silence, readers get an opportunity to delve into the character’s motivation of choosing silence. Authors simply refuse the other character through explanation of thoughts revealed only to readers.

e) Communication through symbols. These are cultural and contextual symbols that help others understand the refusal without using the language itself.

If these means are taken into account, then the other classification may be suggested.

Descriptive silent negation (DSN)

The most common method of rendering silent negation is the descriptive one. Descriptive silent negation is the negation expressed by a descriptive narrative language to convey a character’s desire not to answer verbally. This type of negation is oxymoronic in nature, but it is a logical and primary way of expressing silence. For instance, when an author must include a dialogue where the interlocutor does not answer, they use narration and write “*He decided to remain silent, but he didn’t agree*” or “*She preferred not to answer, but it seemed she disagreed*”, etc. In spoken dialogue that would not have been a problem, because the interlocutor may just not speak, but in the written text that is impossible, so the 3rd person narrator simply describes the situation to the reader. This approach allows readers to delve into the thoughts and motivations of the characters and describes what in a spoken situation would have simply not been told.

Examples of descriptive silent negation are in literature. The following example illustrates it: "We'll talk more later," he says, heading for the door. His words are hollow. Talking is something we really don't do. We don't talk about us and we don't talk about that. *He pauses and looks back, and I think he's going to say something more, but he doesn't*" [Pinborough, 2017, p. 24]. In this sentence it is clearly seen that the person is trying to tell the interlocutor that he lied, and he wants to say that he will not talk to the other one because they never do that, however, because they were never really close, he decided not to be sincere this time as well.

In the example below, the author uses no vivid silence description but still showed that the person chose to remain silent and not repeat the same story, so he dismisses the topic. "He lets go of my hand, stands up, and walks away. *'I need to go to the toilet'*, he says, and leaves me sitting there, confused. *I can tell he doesn't believe me, but he doesn't argue*. He just walks away" [Hawkins, 2015, p. 168]. Now in strict understanding of negation in linguistics it may not be categorized as negation, however, in pragmatics the dismissal of the topic is a broader communicative act, it signifies the speaker's desire to stop the conversation, hence negating the previous statement and treating it as irrelevant. It is a pragmatic act of rejecting a proposition. The person does not want to argue for some reason, instead he decided to go to the toilet and "escape" the possible conflict. It gives him time to think how to manage the situation and calm everyone down.

In *Pride and Prejudice* by Jane Austen there are numerous instances of descriptive silent negation. The author effectively uses silence to show love as a tormenting force, she is particularly fond of DSN. The following passage is a great example of silence as negation:

"Do not you feel a great inclination, Miss Bennet, to seize such an opportunity of dancing a reel?" *She smiled, but made no answer*. He repeated the question, with some surprise at her silence.

"Oh!" said she, "I heard you before, but I could not immediately determine what to say in reply. You wanted me, I know, to say 'Yes,' that you might have the pleasure of despising my taste; but I always delight in overthrowing those kinds of schemes and cheating a person of their premeditated contempt. I have, therefore, made up my mind to tell you, that I do not want to dance a reel at all — and now despise me if you dare" [Austen, 1817, p. 35]

In this passage it is evident that Elizabeth deliberately uses silence and hopes that Mr. Darcy will figure out the refusal — "*She smiled, but made no answer*" does not look as if she was actually startled and didn't know what to say, clearly, she hoped that he would stop pursuing the matter, but the inclination behind silence in this case failed. Silence here acts as a way of refusal, but at the same time it adds to the overall atmosphere of flirtation between the characters. At the same time, it is not as straightforward as the word "no" would be. During the conference, this topic was presented as strategic use of "No", refusal with the answer "no" is perceived by most of the listeners as an act of aggression and creates conflict between the speakers, so using silence as in the example above is a great tool of softening the tension.

Another example is "*She said no more, and they went down the other dance and parted in silence; and on each side dissatisfied*, though not to an equal degree, for in Darcy's breast there was a tolerable powerful feeling towards her, which soon procured her pardon, and directed all his anger against another" [Austen, 1817, p. 66]. Here DSN is in the first part of the sentence and Jane Austen once again demonstrates her mastery of expressing silence through the benefits of a third-person person narration. This passage also shows that silence may convey conflict, discontent and disagreement, rather than a positive meaning.

There are many instances in this story when silence is not purely a sign of negation and disagreement. In some instances, the characters prefer to remain silent as a form of politeness. There is some discontent between Charlotte and Elizabeth so in the story they prefer not to express it verbally. "*Between Elizabeth and Charlotte there was a restraint which kept them mutually silent on the subject; and Elizabeth felt persuaded that no real confidence could ever subsist between them again*" [Austen, 1817, p. 91]. Both know that there is a chance of potential argument if they have a conversation, so they prefer not to have it at all, thus avoiding any conflict. Silence here is more like withdrawn negation.

In this book, the role of silence is crucial, as it contributes to the overall atmosphere of romance and mystery. Although silence in the story does not always act as negation, sometimes

it is a sign of consent, avoidance of conflict, inability to find proper words, etc., it still expresses refusal and withdrawn disagreement in a lot of cases, which proves that silence may act as a non-traditional way of negation.

"I've decided more than once to ignore his obvious displeasure, and I've chosen to wear something he doesn't like. But it's not worth it. I can tell he disapproves, and he becomes so distant with me that I instantly regret it. He doesn't shout, and he doesn't say a single unpleasant word. He just speaks to me as little as possible, without appearing overtly rude, and it ruins my evening. ... I almost wish he would tell me what he's thinking. Then at least I would have an opportunity to put across my point of view. But you can't really fight silence" [Abbott, 2011, p. 25]

This example shows that silence may be a type of fight. The character begins to behave differently because of the desire to make her partner angry, however, yet he does not express his disapproval and or start an argument. Silence in this case may either be the way of avoiding conflict or psychological abuse. The author does not clearly state the motivation of the man, but it is visible that the woman does not like this way — *"It ruins my evening"*.

Descriptive silent response is one of the most controversial types of either agreement or disagreement. In this part the attempt was made to show that it does not necessarily act as a positive response. The speakers may opt for it for several reasons, some people do not want to be straightforward with their negative response, some just believe it will not change anything, some give the interlocutor the chance of changing their mind, etc. For whatever reason the speaker chooses to remain silent, it is still hard to deny, that sometimes people choose silence because they disagree.

Elliptical silent negation (ESN)

Another popular method is to use ellipses or punctuational marks. An elliptical silent response may indicate either agreement or disagreement, with the focus of this research on the latter.

Elliptical silent negation is a strategic use of ellipses or omission in the text to imply the narrator's disagreement, negation or refusal without any usage of verbal means for that. Unlike descriptive silent negation, which discussed in the previous part, ESN does not use the language at all, not even to express the absence of the response, it instead uses punctuation for that purpose. This technique is used by writers to leave some information unsaid and unheard, so the listener is left with simply their own guesses. It is done for several purposes, such as maintaining mystery, the need to avoid the direct answer, to avoid possible confrontation, etc.

Silent negation with the help of punctuation, such as "...," is quite popular in informal messaging, it may not be as popular in English as it is in Ukrainian [both in literature and in informal messaging], however, it is still a way how to express a disapproval.

The following examples of informal texting show how to use it: *"How long have you known?" I ask her. 'About the affair.' 'I didn't,' she says. 'Until today. I mean I don't know what was going on. I just know. . . ' Thankfully she falls silent, because I'm not sure I can stand hearing her talk about my husband's infidelity"* [Hawkins, 2015, p. 163]

The character does not want to admit that she knew, she starts making excuses for herself and later she gives up and tells that she did know something, but because the shame is too overwhelming, she stops in the middle of the sentence and instead of the explanation the author uses "...," to show that the truth is too much for her to say. *"I just know..."* acts as a negation to all her previous statements, previously she was saying that she did not have any idea about the infidelity.

Sometimes it can be used to show that the speaker has lost track of their thoughts or was distracted. Consider this example: *"That is not true!" I said. "I didn't take ... It didn't happen like that, that's wrong. I didn't ... I didn't take her"* [Hawkins, 2015, p. 48]

The ESN here is purely accidental; the character is trying to cope with their emotions, but it is too much for them, so they start repeating the same phrase. The reader needs the whole context to understand what the character means, because in most cases the negation is implied and not finished. The other reasons for ESN may include a distracting phone call, or the person just losing attention, being interrupted by someone, etc.

Sometimes ESN could be used by a speaker to avoid answering directly and possibly smoothen the edges as there was no direct negation. *"You know, well... he's just not the type to do something like that. I can't see it happening"* [Abbott, 2011, p. 66]. This quote implies that the character is reluctant to negate the previous statement. The person does not want to disagree that her partner could be married to another woman. However, because her mother proceeds with the topic, she feels she needs to defend him. She is convinced that he is not the type and that is why she uses ESN in the beginning — *"You know, well..."*

People may resort to such an answer if they want to leave space for themselves to later disagree and say that the response *"well ... You know"* was simply misunderstood. For example, in a business setting if the employer asks something the employee may answer in such an ambiguous manner, so the manager is not offended by the direct refusal. It is a way to politely hint that they disagree. *"Cecilia frowns. 'Well... no'. She looks at me hesitantly. 'But Mark said he heard someone, and —' 'Did you hear him?' 'No, but —' Cecilia begins. Lombardi cuts her short"* [Stevens, 2022, p. 95].

This passage is full of ESN, the author gives us the examples of unfinished, implied negation starting with *"well..."* and finishing with *"but —"*. There is something more to that story, and these *"buts"* mean that the person knows more [No, but I have something else to say], but she is interrupted by the investigation and hence unable to finish it.

Quite popular are filler words or interjections in ESN, for instance, words like *"well"*, *"um"*, *"you know"*, *"er"*, *"so"*, *"you see"*, etc., are commonly used to soften the disappointment of the response, combined with ESN, which is already indirect, it serves the reader as a polite refusal, one that does not sound as impolite or arrogant as a direct *"no"*. They help to create the feeling of hesitation, as if the speaker decided to refuse after serious consideration, not point blank.

ESL negation is a popular way of avoiding direct negation in both written and colloquial discourse. The reason is that it is not straightforward, hence not impolite. People may use it to subtly indicate their disagreement without direct confrontation. It is useful if the speaker wants to soften the edges.

Silent disagreement through action (SDA)

Silent disagreement through actions uses the means of behaviors or actions rather than words to render disagreement, refusal or negation. It is easier expressed in oral conversations as then the interlocutor simply uses facial expressions, body language or some actions; in written texts the writer must use the language to show that the character used the extralinguistic means for negation. The examples of actions that express disagreement or negation include frowning, sarcastically laughing, walking away in fury, raising eyebrows, using the hands to show the *"stop"* sign, shaking the head in disapproval, etc. Such negation is deeply contextual as it requires the interlocutor to be observant and be able to interpret these signs correctly. Cultural differences may also affect the understanding and interpretation of signs.

Classic examples of such negation include leaving the room at the conference in disagreement or protest or to sit during the applause in the theatre. This absence of words can be treated as an extralinguistic negation, which conveys the meaning and is the type of communication, but no verbal response is given. Though many forms of SDA are culturally restricted, some of the behaviors are common across all cultures, they are usually treated as clichés. Most of them usually involve silently walking away from the interlocutor, it is an agreed way of showing opposition worldwide.

Another example could be a situation at home, such as when a mother of a teenager turns the computer off and asks them to study, they may simply push their books away, expressing their dissatisfaction and refusing to follow the mother's order. Such situations are quite common, and, in most cases, they are mutually understandable.

There are many examples in literature and the following clearly illustrate that. *"I watch them for a second. Ed, whose face I can see clearly, shakes his head incredulously, perhaps dismissive of what Clyde is saying. Clyde gesticulates towards him, animated now, forcing his belly into the table. Ed shrugs, unconvinced"* [Stevens, 2022, p. 50].

Clyde is having a conversation without any verbal interaction; he uses only SDA, but this does not prevent his interlocutor from grasping the meaning of his answers. Shaking his head in

dismissal and shrugging the shoulders in this context clearly illustrate that the person is against what is said, without even articulating it. *"Okay, how about someone who has been having trouble with the locals?" "Maybe someone who has been targeted or said something in passing threats to their lives... safety"; "He laughed. It was a bitter sound and he shook his head looking down at his feet"* [Dalglish, 2021, p. 228].

The person in this passage is laughing in disbelief that such a question could be asked. It is a sign of sarcasm; however, the second body response is the negation — *"he shook his head"* — it is a clear no. At the same time, he is looking down at his feet, in the book it is because of hopelessness, he does not really know what to do. The character did not pronounce any word, but in this quote, there are sarcasm, disbelief, negation.

"You're not concerned? She shook her head. 'She's a smart girl. I taught her well... at least I taught her some things'" [Dalglish, 2021, p. 311]. This passage contains body language that denotes negation – shaking the head. When the lady from the book shook her head, it was a sign that she was not concerned. Later, she proves it with the sentence that she pronounces, she believes that the lady is smart enough not to make any mistakes. However, this passage contains no linguistic manifestation of negation, it only has the extralinguistic one and it is silent disagreement through action.

"At breakfast, Scott asks me to cancel my therapy session. I don't say anything. I pretend I haven't heard him" [Dalglish, 2021, p. 17]. In this example, the character decides to silently ignore the other one to show disagreement. It is also a popular behavior during SDA. The character believes that it will work better than words, because the verbal conversation may be the beginning of an argument, but the silent one communicates everything to the other speaker without starting the actual interaction.

There are examples in graphic novels as well. Consider this picture:



Fig. 1. Picture taken from Berry [2008, p. 8].

The person makes no reply in this novel, but when his colleague suggested turning to God in times of depression, Fernandez simply close the door. It clearly signifies his unwillingness to continue the conversation which he considers to be stupid.

Quite a lot of British people would prefer to express disapproval by simply tutting – the sound that you make with your tongue touching the top of your mouth – such behavior is traceable in other cultures as well. This way if somehow verbal and can fall into the category of

negation through exclamations, however, tutting is just barely audible, inarticulate and indistinct so that's why it may fit the description of non-verbal communication, too.

In other cultures, it is traceable as well, for example, Japanese prefer to silently smile and otherwise not react if they disagree, they may also slightly bow, however, although the bow might seem unnatural or strained in such contexts. Ukrainians typically employ the facial expressions like frowning or having a confused face, they may also frown with their teeth clenched or clench the teeth in disgust. The Italian "chin flick" — a gesture made by brushing the back of the fingers under the chin — can also mean a lot of things, one of them negation.

The other examples are crossed arms, downward movements of the lips, staring, using index finger and thumb to support your head, looking away or avoiding eye contact, etc. It should be mentioned that such movements may mean other things as well, it is not necessarily a rule, but rather a possible implication which, as it has been said before, is deeply context dependent.

Silent interpersonal negation monologue (SINM)

Silent Interpersonal Negation Monologue has been studied primarily by psychologists and sociologists; however, the notion is relevant even in linguistics. SINM relates to the concept that occurs on the level of character-character interactions, when readers are given the information that was not enclosed to the other character, but rather in the speaker's mind.

Silent Interpersonal Negation Monologue (SINM) is the negation when the person disagrees internally or refuses to support certain idea, however, does not express it verbally or through any other means of communication, but a thought. The refusal or disagreement happens within a person's thoughts and emotions, though it is not constituted for people around.

For instance, if the character is asked for forgiveness and thinks "No way", but does not express it verbally, then this type of negation occurs only on a level accessible to a reader, but not to the interlocutor.

A good example of it is in the book by Ruth Ware. *"I keep my earbuds shoved into my ears on the minibus from Geneva Airport. I ignore Topher's hopeful looks and Eva, glancing over her shoulder at me. It helps, somehow. It helps to shut out the voices in my head, their voices, pulling me this way and that, pummeling me with their loyalties and their arguments to and fro. Instead, I let James Blunt drown them out, telling me I'm beautiful, over and over again. The irony of the statement makes me want to laugh, but I don't. There's something comforting in the lie"* [Ware, 2020, p. 16]. This passage contains different types of silent negation. When the character decides to use the earbuds, and she ignores the other character these are examples of silent negation through actions. However, the whole story is another type of silent negation, that is Silent Interpersonal Negation Monologue, as the narrator in this passage is the woman herself and a reader is given more information from her, the type of information the other characters are not given. The linguistic cues — *"I ignore..."*, *"... shut out the voices in my head..."* — indicate her refusal to engage with the couple. Silent negation through action is used as an additional external cue for them as a signal of her refusal of any communication. Later in her monologue, she uses the words like "shut out" and "drown" internally so the reader can decode that she denies any unwanted external noise, which is both literal and metaphorical. The reader in this case is given more information than the characters, who must rely on their attentiveness and ability to recognize body language, which corresponds to the concept of silent interpersonal communication. What finally concludes the state of negation is that she calls the confession of her interlocutor a lie. For her it is ironic and even laughable, which clearly indicates that she disagrees with the statement, even if she chooses not to react verbally.

This passage is a good example because it shows a multilayered silent negation rendered in several ways — through action and internal monologue. Here refusal is not merely absence of sound, it is a deliberate choice not to verbalize a refusal and disagreement.

In the following passage the narrator switches between verbal and silent communication. *"I've got it under control", I say, "you just focus on New York. Get that account". And my silent thoughts say: don't come back and tell me it's happened again, that after everything you're in the wrong place here with us"* [Croft, 2016, p. 14]. What is foregrounded in the novel is that the part with inner monologue is in italics to help the reader understand where she verbalizes her thoughts and where she does not. The silent thoughts of the character reflect her internal

conflict, she wishes him good luck and sounds motivating, but in her mind, she wishes him not to come back in this way negating her verbal reassurance. The whole passage indicates deliberate withholding of the information, hence creating a gap between what was said and what was meant. This passage illustrates SINM through juxtaposition of verbal lie and internal negation.

In summary, SINM can be a useful tool for fiction writing as it is useful for twists, suspense, climax, etc. However, after careful analysis of texts, it must be admitted that this type of silent negation is quite scarce, compared to the previous types. It could be since such a type was not researched enough or a reason may lie in its complexity and possible confusion, too. Nonetheless, its potential is immeasurable.

Pragmatics reasons of silent negation

In pragmatics, silence carries strong communicative meaning and the reasons why people choose silence over speech are interesting. People choose silent negation for several reasons, which will be discussed later in this unit, but the most popular is **conflict avoidance**.

Some people may interpret silent negation as a sign of consent; however, some people use it as a powerful tool to silently disagree. Because it is so controversial people do not get offended as they are unable to clearly interpret the signs. Silence or pauses usually affect the interlocutor, which is why many politicians pause before the speech.

Many speakers prefer to respond with a silent smile and not express negation verbally because it helps them to leave some space and potentially prevent conflict that will happen if people straightforwardly say “no”. Silence shows the interlocutor that the speaker is considerate of their feelings and that is the reason for them to not answer instead of answering in a hurtful way, especially if it is followed with a gentle smile. Such an act is viewed as avoidance instead of straightforwardness; hence, people view it as more polite, as it leaves some room for interpretation, and they are busy trying to figure out the meaning instead of being defensive because of “no” answer.

Silence often serves as a protective shield for the speaker, which another reason for its frequent use. It is a unique way out for the speaker, because they can express their disagreement without the threat of being openly criticized for that.

The problem with such an approach is that quite a lot of people may confuse the intended meaning and interpret it in a way that suits them. So eventually the speaker may be forced to express their opinion on the matter in a more understandable way.

The previous point is confirmed by other studies. It appears that a lot of Facebook and Twitter (now X) users resorted to censorship to avoid conflicts online [Neubaum, Krämer, 2017]. When users saw that controversial topic, that they commented on, got too much negative feedback and quite a lot of them simply stopped answering. Around 40% of users refrained from commenting because of fear of aggression [ibid., p. 464]. This may be treated as a new form of institutionalized silent negation, because the algorithms of Facebook and X do not tolerate such posts it could be called algorithmic silent negation.

Another reason is there could be a strict **hierarchy** like employer and employee relationships or manager vs the managed, etc. In such settings the speaker, who is in inferior position may feel the need to be more careful with the words they use, they may feel that because of their position they should not be using the vocabulary that potentially may lead to the confrontation with their superiors. Even in companies where a healthy attitude towards their employees is valued, an employee may feel that they need to express respect and politeness. In business-like environments, it is better to smooth the edges, so silence is more than helpful.

Such an approach has its flaws. The employees may remain silent on the subjects that are crucial for the company, which potentially may lead to a decrease of efficiency, that is why now companies are trying to avoid strict censorship.

Silent negation may as well be **culturally** determined. In some Asian cultures, such as Japan, it may sometimes be expected to generally avoid negation and vocabulary like “no,” “I don’t think so,” or “I disagree” is a sign of audacity and rudeness. They try to remain silent and simply smile, in this way they show their opinion on the subject. On the Internet, numerous

memes circulate about the types of Japanese silent smiles and how to interpret them. For the people of Asia, of course, that is only usual behavior. However, such traditions may not be understandable for the foreigners, and they may interpret a smile and silence as agreement rather than disagreement. According to Maynard [Maynard, 2015], Japanese communication values indirectness and subtlety, this nationality prefers to silently disagree without the direct confrontation. On the other hand, Tannen's study [Tannen, 1995] proves that people from the West prefer verbalized communication, so they usually view silence as a lack of interest and disrespect.

In Africa silence is a sign of composure and respect to the elders. The Akan people in Ghana cannot verbally disagree with people who are older, it is a sign of great respect if they simply keep silent whenever they are against [Salm, Falola, 2002].

One more reason is that some speakers want to **leave some time for themselves to have time to think about the polite way of refusal**. Many of our initial responses tend to be emotional or impulsive, and silence allows individuals to pause and respond more thoughtfully. Silent negation provides time for a speaker to contemplate. Speakers get additional time to think how to express a refusal or if they want to refuse in the first place.

Pragmatic reasons for silent negation are context-dependent, however, in this chapter there was an attempt to show the most popular ones. The reasons are, of course, not exhausted.

Conclusion

Silence as a communicative phenomenon has been studied by many, however, most of the scholars view it as a mere sign of consent. This article attempts to explore silence from a different perspective – as an extralinguistic means of conveying negation, disagreement or refusal. Through the linguistic analysis of various examples of silence in both oral and written communication, it was shown how silence can be strategically employed by a speaker to avoid confrontation, politely refuse, give space for further decision, etc.

Based on the classification of silence in general by Adam Jaworski and Abbé Joseph Dinouart, the new alternative classification of particularly silence negation has been introduced. The new classification focuses on how the authors manage to “verbalize” the silence negation in written texts and gives examples of oral manifestation as well. It is particularly difficult to render silence with the help of linguistic means as it itself falls into the category of extralinguistic phenomenon.

Descriptive silent negation functions precisely in this way, so the author uses linguistic means to describe something that is not verbal. DSN is oxymoronic in its nature, but that is what makes it unique. Elliptical silent negation is culturally dependent, as it is not very common in the English language, however, this way should be given more credit as the graphic signs are best to convey silence. Silent disagreement through actions may manifest itself in both spoken and written discourse, however, in written discourse it requires to be verbalized. Finally, Silent interpersonal negation monologue is about interacting with a reader more than with the other character.

The pragmatic reasons for a speaker to resort to silent negation include conflict avoidance, showing respect, avoiding straightforward refusal, politeness, leaving some time for contemplation and obeying hierarchical expectations. This type of silence is more complex than silence that conveys consent, because negation may be potentially viewed as too straightforward or aggressive, hence it has more pragmatic meaning. While silence can be viewed as disrespect, sometimes it is a way of keeping face and showing consideration to an interlocutor.

Silence should not be reduced to just absence of words, there are many cases when it speaks more than words. It is as powerful as verbal communication and often is used intentionally. It has rich pragmatic meaning and challenges the traditional view of what communication is. It is a good example of why pragmatics is so important as it is the only branch of linguistics that may explain such a complex phenomenon. This study gives new insights into the role of negation with the help of silence in communication and human interaction.

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BEYOND WORDS: PRAGMATICS OF SILENT NEGATION

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Key words: *silent negation, literary silence, pragmatics, negation, silence in discourse, non-verbal communication.*

This article seeks to challenge the commonly held belief that silence primarily signifies consent. In contrast to traditional assumptions, it argues that silence can function as a powerful and intentional act of negation in communication. The research focuses on the phenomenon of silent negation — a form of disagreement or refusal conveyed not through direct verbal means, but rather through silence itself or linguistic representations of silence in written discourse. *The aims* of this study are: first, to define a typology of silent negation that reflects the pragmatic functions of silence within communicative acts; and second, to identify the strategies by which silent negation is expressed linguistically, particularly in literary texts.

To achieve this, the article applies a combination of contextual analysis, cognitive analysis, typological classification, and hermeneutic interpretation. These *methods* are used to trace how silence operates pragmatically in literature, where authors cannot rely on non-verbal cues and must instead “verbalize” silence through various linguistic devices. The theoretical foundation of the article is based on the works of Adam Jaworski, who views silence as a strategic and context-dependent communicative act, and Abbé Joseph Dinouart, who introduced an early typology of silence in the 18th century. Their contributions are revisited and extended through the development of a new classification system more suitable for written discourse.

The study suggests four main categories of silent negation: Descriptive Silent Negation (DSN), where authors narrate a character’s deliberate silence and refusal; Elliptical Silent Negation (ESN), in which punctuation and unfinished sentences imply negation; Silent Disagreement through Action (SDA), conveyed via gestures and behaviors described narratively; and Silent Interpersonal Negation Monologue (SINM), where internal thoughts of characters reject ideas without verbalizing them. Each of these types is supported with examples from literary texts.

The findings emphasize that silent negation is not only a frequent but also a pragmatically rich feature of discourse. It is especially relevant in cultural or hierarchical contexts where open disagreement may be regarded as inappropriate. Silent negation plays a vital role in narrative dynamics, character development, and interpersonal tension. This study thus addresses a gap in linguistic pragmatics by systematizing the ways in which silence can negate and by demonstrating that the absence of speech can convey complex meaning.

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