Chapter 6

Silence: Anything But

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The research I will be drawing on here is an extensive and ongoing analysis of conversational style, focusing in particular on the style of three New Yorkers of East European Jewish background as evidenced in conversation with three non-New Yorkers at a Thanksgiving dinner.¹ I will suggest that features of this style can be understood as growing out of an effort to avoid silence.

I became aware early on that silence, for speakers of this style, has a negative value in many communicative contexts. This became apparent as I analyzed the transcripts of the Thanksgiving conversation, and also in my observations of New Yorkers. New Yorkers, for example, are much more likely than Americans from most other places to talk to strangers when they find themselves within hearing range—for example, while waiting in lines or waiting rooms, or when overhearing conversations while passing in the street or sitting at a restaurant. With intimates, too, New Yorkers seem more inclined to expect talk to be continuous, as reflected in the complaints of partners of New Yorkers following, for example, a long car drive during which the New Yorker talked the whole time.

It was the work of Ron Scollon (Chapter 2) which prompted me to think about the place of this style on a cross-cultural continuum of values associated with noise and silence. As the chapters for this volume arrived, the existence of such a continuum became increasingly apparent, and with it the significance of New York Jewish style, which shares relatively positive valuation of noise and relatively negative valuation of si-

¹Analysis of conversation presented in this chapter is based on Tannen (1984), wherein may be found numerous extended examples of conversational transcripts demonstrating the features listed.
POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE VALUATION OF SILENCE

We have two conflicting yet simultaneous views of silence: one positive, and one negative. Allen (1978), in a literary analysis of the work of three contemporary women writers, notes that silence serves two functions in the literature she surveyed, one negative—a failure of language—and one positive—a chance for personal exploration. She notes that the poetry of Adrienne Rich emphasizes the former aspect of silence, as in, for example, the ‘husband who is frustratingly mute’. Cliff (1979), in an article in a ‘magazine of woman’s culture’, suggests that women have not been able to do creative work to their capacity because their fruitful silence is continually interrupted—a hypothesis akin to that of Virginia Woolf in A Room of One’s Own.

The positive and negative valuation of silence is a facet of the inherent ambiguity of silence as a symbol, which Saville-Troike highlights in Chapter 1. The ambiguous value of silence can be seen to arise either from what is assumed to be evidenced or from what is assumed to be omitted.

Silence is seen as positive when it is taken as evidence of the existence of something positive—unless it is assumed to represent the omission of something positive—‘If you can’t say something nice, don’t say anything’; or when Congressman Emanuel Celler is remembered for having said, ‘To what the gentleman from Ohio says, I give the thunder of my silence’ (Newsweek January 26, 1981:63).

Silence becomes a bad thing if it seems to represent the existence of something negative—the silence of seething anger, as described by Gilmore (Chapter 8). But it is also negatively valued if it is assumed to represent the omission of something positive—the silence of the telephone when you are anxiously awaiting a particular telephone call; the omission of a greeting which constitutes being snubbed; inaction because appropriate action is not being taken as reflected in Anita Bryant’s statement, ‘When the homosexuals burn the Holy Bible in public . . . how can I stand by silently?’ (New York Review of Books, September 25, 1980:27).

These positive and negative views of silence apply as well to silence in conversation. Washington Post columnist Dick Dabney takes silence to be a sign of especially good communication when he writes of his eight-year-old daughter sitting in her grandmother’s lap ‘engaged in leisurely conversation that had long satisfactory silences in it’, and observes that ‘these two were enjoying each other’s company . . .’. The same assumption surfaces in a novel by Colette (1971):

I suggested that he and I go for a voyage together, a pair of courteously egotistic companions, accommodating, fond of long silences . . .

We had the comfortable habit of leaving a sentence hanging midway as soon as one of us had grasped the point . . . She fell silent. No one can imagine the number of subjects, the amount of words that are left out of the conversation of two women who can talk to each other with absolute freedom.

Given the freedom to say anything, the women come to understand each other so well that they need to say less. In a similar vein, a pop poster showing the usual waterfall and green scene displays the line, ‘If you do not understand my silence you will not understand my words.’

In these examples, silence represents something positive which is evidenced—interpersonal rapport so great that people understand each other without putting their thoughts into words. This view, supported by informal research conducted in my classes, reflects the common notion that silence is positive among intimates.

Yet there is also a common view that silence among intimates evidences lack of rapport. In an early scene of the film Two For The Road, Audrey Hepburn and Richard Harris, as young, talkative lovers, regard an older couple sitting at a nearby table in a restaurant. ‘What kind of people eat without talking to each other? ’ Hepburn asks. ‘Married people’, Harris responds—with distaste and disdain.
Similarly, Labov and Fanshel (1977:313), in a study of a psychotherapeutic conversation, describe what they call ‘an eloquent silence of 13 seconds’ as ‘more negative than anything we have seen so far’.

Colette (1972) also gives us a ‘silent, menacing lover’, ‘obstinate silence’, someone ‘irritated by his silence’, someone ‘silent, discouraged’, ‘silence and dissimulation’, a silence that separates people, ‘an embarrassing silence’, and people who ‘sadly . . . remained mute’. All of these seem to reflect the common notion that there should be talk among intimates who are comfortable, honest, happy.

The assumption that silence in conversation is negative also underlies a comment by the actress Jane Fonda about her father: ‘I can remember long car rides where not a word would be spoken. I would be so nervous that my palms would be sweaty from riding in absolute silence with my own father’ (Newsweek, August 23, 1982:47). And the same assumption can be seen reflected in a column by Ellen Goodman (1979:19) portraying ‘The Company Man’ as unable to communicate with any of his children, but in particular with his daughter who ‘lives near her mother and they are close, but whenever she was alone with her father, in a car driving somewhere, they had nothing to say to each other’. Goodman contrasts ‘being close’ on the one hand with having ‘nothing to say to each other’ on the other.

Thus whether or not silence is uncomfortable in interaction hinges on whether or not participants feel something should be said, in which case silence is perceived as an omission. This underlies, as well, Goffman’s (1967:36) observation that ‘Undue lulls come to be potential signs of having nothing in common, or of being insufficiently self-possessed to create something to say, and hence must be avoided.’ (Note, however, that this leaves open the question of how much lull is undue, or, put another way, how much silence is a lull—a question that will be addressed later).

As Bateson has observed, in the framework of interaction, one cannot not communicate. The omission of expected behavior or words is as eloquent as the inclusion of the unexpected, as noted by Sapir (1949:533):

\[
\text{We often form a judgment of what [a person] is by what he does not say, and we may be very wise to refuse to limit the evidence for judgment to the overt content of speech.}
\]

Perhaps the clearest examples of silence as omission of the required is seen in the case of situational or politeness formulas. When a formulaic expression is expected—and some cultures, such as Arabic (Ferguson 1976) and Greek and Turkish (Tannen and Oztek 1981), use more of these than Americans do, while other, such as Athabaskan Indians (Scallon personal communication) and Eskimos (Sadock 1982) use far fewer\(^2\)—its omission is automatically perceived, as for example when a failure to utter a greeting might be reported as, ‘He snubbed me’, or the failure to utter a closure might be reported as, ‘He hung up on me’. The eloquence of silence as an omission is reflected in Colette’s (1972:23) depiction of the point of view of an adolescent boy: ‘It’s incredible what cheek girls have, putting on that act of saying nothing!’

\[\text{SILENCE AND NEGATIVE AND POSITIVE POLITENESS}\]

Silence is the extreme manifestation of indirectness. If indirectness is a matter of saying one thing and meaning another, silence can be a matter of saying nothing and meaning something. Like indirectness, silence has two big benefits in rapport and defensiveness. The rapport benefit comes from being understood without putting one’s meaning on record, so that understanding is seen not as the result of putting meaning into words—which presumably could be achieved with any two people who speak the same language—but rather as the greater understanding of shared perspective, experience and intimacy, the deeper sense of ‘speaking the same language’. This is the positive value of silence stemming from the existence of something positive underlying.

The defensive value of silence comes from omitting to say something negative—not confronting potentially divisive information (cf Saunders, Chapter 9), or being able later to deny having meant what may not be received well (‘Don’t look at me; I didn’t say anything!’).

Thus the meaning of silence in interaction, like other features of discourse, can be understood to grow out of the two overriding goals of human communication: to be connected to other people, and to be independent, which correspond to the rapport and defensive benefits of silence, respectively. The goals of connection and independence, in turn, correspond to what Goffman (1967) calls presentational rituals and avoidance rituals; what Lakoff (1979) refers to as the needs for deference or distance on the one hand and camaraderie on the other; and what Brown and Levinson (1978) refer to as positive face (the need to be approved of by others) and negative face (the need not to be imposed on by others). Ways of serving these needs, then, are positive and negative politeness.

\[\footnote{Both Sadock and Scallon claim that speakers in the cultures they have studied use no formulaic language.}\]
Negative and positive politeness result from the paradoxical nature of interpersonal rapport. Closeness is to be sought, because people need to be involved with others. But it is also to be avoided, as a threat to the integrity of the individual. Scollon (1982) points out that politeness is not a matter of serving one or the other of these needs but of finding the right linguistic concoction to serve both at the same time in each utterance.

Silence has a positive value as a way of serving negative politeness—not imposing on others. This can occur in any culture but seems to be the unmarked case in cultures which may be characterized as relatively 'silent'—among Finns (Lehtonen and Sajavaara, Chapter 11), Athabaskan and Warm Springs Indians (Scollon and Philips, Chapters 2 and 12). But silence can also have a negative value when it is seen as the failure of positive politeness—the need to be involved with others. This can occur in any culture but seems to be the unmarked case in cultures which may be characterized as relatively 'noisy' such as among Italians (Saunders, Chapter 9), American blacks (Gilmore, Chapter 8), the Igbo (Nwoye, Chapter 10), and New York Jews.

Nonetheless silence can be seen as positive or negative by members of any culture, as it is measured against what is expected in that context. Looking at Maltz's (Chapter 7) findings about silence in worship with the double vision of negative and positive politeness, Quakers see noise as an imposition—a violation of negative face—and Pentecostals see noise as an expression of worship—observance of positive face. On the other hand, Quakers see silence as allowing the individual space to receive the Holy Spirit—observance of negative face. Pentecostals see silence as insufficient praise and participation—failure to observe positive face.

Interestingly, it is the model of religious practice that formed the basis for Durkheim's (1915) original schematization of positive and negative religious rites, which Goffman's (1967) notion of deference broadened to apply to everyday life, in turn forming the basis for Brown and Levinson's (1978) schema of negative and positive politeness. The Quakers typify what Durkheim identified as the negative religious rite—the avoidance of the profane to prepare for reception of the sacred, silence as what Maltz terms 'expectant waiting'.

Although silence can be seen as negative politeness—being nice to others by not imposing, or, as Maltz suggests, disengagement—the conventionalization of silence as an expression of negative meaning can result in engagement. Thus some of the teachers in Gilmore's (Chapter 8) ethnographic study refer to children's silent sulks as 'temper tantrums'. In keeping with Saunders' account of the use of silence in cases of serious anger, an American observed that his Italian lover became disproportionately (to him) concerned when he became silent.

SILENCE AS REFLECTION OF COGNITIVE AND SOCIAL PROCESSES

The ambiguity of silence in interaction derives as well from another duality in the nature of all communicative signs. It can be seen from the perspective of the producer or the receiver. When Walker (Chapter 4) reports that witnesses are told to pause before speaking in order to plan their answers, it is the production function of speech that is in focus. But when lawyers distrust the testimony of hesitant witnesses, it is the effect on the hearer that is at issue.

This duality reflects an even deeper one underlying it. In addition to distinguishing between the function of the pause for speaker as opposed to hearer, Walker's 'two faces of silence' highlight its cognitive versus social uses, each of which has a potential dual function, for speaker and hearer. Thus the cognitive function of pausing to give the speaker time to think may be mirrored in giving the hearer more time to comprehend. (This may contribute to the fact that spoken language is easier to comprehend because it is less dense than written language read aloud, a situation in which the creator took more time to produce the discourse than the hearer has to comprehend it.)

The social consequences of pausing in terms of impressions made on the hearer may be mirrored in the speaker's adoption of a pausing (or, seen from a less deliberate point of view, hesitant) style for the purpose of appearing as one sort of person rather than another, a phenomenon that Robin Lakoff (1975) suggests accounts for the fact that women tend to hesitate more than men. That is, speakers may consciously or unconsciously wish to present themselves as 'hesitant' in order to be more likable, or to be conventionally polite, or to be feminine, or for other social reasons.

Thus, a greeting card exhibits on its face the words, printed in handwriting rather than typeset, 'I just want to tell you that . . . that . . . that . . . ' Inside, the writing concludes, '. . . I love you'. The representation of hesitation, like the representation of handwriting rather than typeset letters, is supposed to give the receiver of the card the sense of spontaneity and hence sincerity (which is at odds with the impression normally made by a mass-produced greeting card).

Chafe (Chapter 5) focuses on the cognitive function in discourse production: 'The speaker's chief goal is to get across what he has in mind, . . . the adequate verbalization of his thoughts.' But choices a speaker makes about how to verbalize thoughts also result in impressions made on others about the kind of person the speaker is, and what s/he thinks about the setting and the addressee—all that makes up what Bateson (1972) calls the metamessage. In other words, a speaker deciding how to
verbalize a thought will probably do so in different ways depending on
whether s/he is talking to a child, a parent, a boss, or an audience of a
thousand in a lecture hall, and depending on how s/he is disposed toward
that audience and toward the subject. Chafe is certainly correct to note
that most speakers in most situations would be far more distressed to be
told 'You didn't get across what you had in mind,' than 'You spoke un-
grammatically (or disinflantly),' but they would probably be equally or
more distressed to be told, 'You got across what you had in mind, but I
think you are a jerk.'

The cognitive/social duality underlies, in fact, Allen's (1978) positive
and negative aspects of silence cited at the outset: a chance for personal
exploration vs. failure of language. Personal exploration is the existence
of cognitive activity underlying silence; the failure of language refers to its
social function.

SILENCE AS A JOINT PRODUCTION

A last observation to be made about the nature, meaning, and function of
silence in interaction is that, again like other features of discourse, it is
always a joint production. Jack Kroll quoted Jane Fonda's remark about
her father to prove that Henry Fonda embodied the strong silent male
stereotype. Kroll assumed that it was Henry Fonda who owned that
silence; it was he who was not talking. Goodman, in the column cited, gave
joint ownership of the silence to the Company Man and his daughter. Yet
mother woman told me that when her husband returned from driving his
teenage daughter somewhere, he felt awful because they had driven in
silence. She cited the silence as evidence of the daughter's hostility toward
her father.

These varying interpretations of a similar phenomenon highlight the
act that when there are two or more participants in a conversation—in
other words, when there is conversation—anything that happens or
doens't happen, is said or unsaid, is the result of interaction among the
wo—what McDermott and Tylbor (1983) call collusion. At any point
hat one person is not talking and thereby produces a silence, no one else
s talking either—or there wouldn't be a silence.

This image itself has a positive and negative aspect. Thus the mirror image of the strong
lent man—something positive (strength) underlying—is the witholding man—some-
ting positive omitted (interpersonal rapport)—an aspect of the male stereotype which is
idely referred to and complained about by women.

SILENCE IN CONVERSATION

How, then, does the ambiguity of silence influence conversation? My
discussion of examples from New York Jewish conversational style rests
on a theory of meaning in conversation and method of conversational
analysis developed under the influence of John Gumperz, which I shall
sketch here only briefly. (For detailed discussion of theory and method
see Gumperz 1982, Tannen 1984.)

The Analysis of Conversational Style

Gumperz demonstrates that speakers use paralinguistic and prosodic fea-
tures to indicate how they mean what they say—that is, to 'frame'
(Bateson 1972) their message—and to establish cohesion, that is, to
indicate relationships among words in a sentence and sentences in a
discourse. The features of speech used in this way include intonation,
pitch, amplitude, pacing, rate of speech, pausing, rate of turntaking,
choice of words and phrases, topics preferred and avoided, genres (story-
telling, joking, lecturing), and ways of serving the constraints of these
genres.

Ways of using these features generally seem self-evident and obvious.
It seems, for example, self-evidently appropriate to some speakers to
raise their voices when angry, to use a certain voice quality when joking,
to tell stories about certain topics with certain points in mind. Ho
ever, in communicating with others, intentions must be deduced from these
cues; they are not known, as one's own intentions are (more or less)
known. Intentions of others can be deduced only by reference to norms,
and one uses one's own norms in interpreting others' speech. In other
words, I assume that you mean what I would have meant if I had said the
same thing in the same way at such a time. This principle of interpreta-
tion works fine in communication with others who share assumptions
and habits. It fails, however, in communication with others who have
different habits and expectations. Hence there arises miscommunication
among speakers of different backgrounds. Moreover, judgments are made
not about how others speak but about their abilities and/or personalities.

Thanksgiving Dinner Data

I have been engaged in extended analysis of a tape-recorded, transcribed
conversation which took place over Thanksgiving dinner among six par-
ticipants—three native New Yorkers of Jewish background (of which I
was one), two Californians of non-Jewish background, and one native of
England (who had one Jewish parent) whose style was clearly distinct but
more closely approximated that of the Californians than that of the New
Yorkers. I had begun that study with the intention of analyzing each participant's conversational style—how s/he used the features I have noted in interaction. It soon became clear, however, that I could not equally study the styles of all those present. For one thing, the three New Yorkers at times were the only speakers, but there was no time that the non-New Yorkers spoke to each other with no New Yorker participating. Furthermore, according to the recollections of the non-New Yorkers, the New Yorkers had 'dominated' the conversation. (The ensuing analysis demonstrates that the perception of 'dominance' and the intention to dominate are not always congruent.)

It became clear after analysis of the data that the three New Yorkers tended to use certain features in certain ways that had one effect—a positive one—when used with each other, and another effect—a negative one—when used with the non-New Yorkers. I will briefly indicate what those features were and suggest that they may be understood as an outgrowth of a negative attitude toward silence in casual conversation.

New York Jewish Conversational Style

The features characterizing the styles of the New Yorkers in this conversation included:

1. Fast rate of speech
2. Fast rate of turntaking
3. Persistence—if a turn is not acknowledged, try try again
4. Marked shifts in pitch
5. Marked shifts in amplitude
6. Preference for storytelling
7. Preference for personal stories
8. Tolerance of, preference for simultaneous speech
9. Abrupt topic shifting

These features are combined in conversational devices. For example, the machine-gun question typically exhibits fast rate of speech, marked high or low pitch, reduced syntactic form, and personal focus, as seen in my questions to Chad, intended to show interest in him.

Scollon (1982) points out that rate of speech has at least two distinct components, tempo and density. I use the term to refer to both.

In transcription, three dots (...) represent a half second pause; each additional dot (.) represents another half second of pause. ? = rising intonation. Period (.) = falling intonation. : = lengthening of vowel sound. acc = fast; p = soft; / = loud. * = high pitch on word; r = high pitch on phrase. ' = primary stress; " = secondary stress; underline = emphatic stress. / = incomprehensible utterance.

The questions got little response because their machine gun nature made Chad feel under fire, and his resistance to answering them made me instinctively throw out more as I tried harder to draw him out.

Another device was mutual revelation, which operates on the principle: 'I tell you about me; you tell me about you.' Yet another is the storytelling round, in which each speaker tells a story with a point similar to that of the preceding one, with no introduction, and the point is dramatized rather than stated. Expressive reaction is a loud, fast, and para-linguistically gross response to someone's point, like 'Wow,' 'You're kidding!'

Many of these devices have the effect of filling up conversational space. Among the most salient features of the style are fast rate of speech, fast turntaking (i.e. minimal pause between speakers), and loud voices. This can be seen in the excerpt from the transcript presented above. There are no hesitations in my speech, many in Chad's. My question (7), "You an artist?", overlaps with Chad's answer (6) to my question about where he works.

The persistence device—the tendency of speakers to introduce freely new topics that are unrelated or tangentially related to prior talk—is another salient feature of the style. In one interchange, for example, the three New Yorkers each pursued their own topics: one talked about the food, another talked about the tape recorder on the table, and I talked about how our immigrant parents and grandparents felt about Thanksgiving. The British guest responded to my topic (though in a way that I thought missed my point). There were instances in the conversation of New Yorkers pursuing their own topics as many as seven tries before dropping them for lack of listener response. There were no instances of non-New Yorkers pursuing topics for more than two tries, if they were not picked up.

The persistence device grows out of the conventionalized assumption that others want to hear anything one has to say, and is necessarily
associated with a tolerance for overlapping and diffuse talk. The jumping from topic to topic was noted by all non-New York participants when the tape of the conversation was played back to them later, to the effect that it seemed odd to them: in fact, they remembered this feature of the talk even before they heard the tape. It was not remarked upon by New York participants, either when I asked what they remembered or when I played the tape for them. Furthermore, it was clear from their responses as well as their comments during playback that the New Yorkers did not mind when a comment they made was ignored. In contrast, the non-New Yorkers felt that if they said something it should be attended to.

An example of a segment of fast-paced, overlapping interchange follows:

(1) Deborah: Probly not. Did you go to the Coliséeum?

(2) Chad: No

(3) Deborah: Probly he didn't go to the West Side?

(4) Steve: [Coliséeum?]

(5) Deborah: That's where the beginning of the West Side is.

(6) Steve: Oh right.

(7) Peter: What's the Coliséeum

(8) Deborah: Fifty nth and uh:

(9) Chad: [sings] East Side, West Side.

(10) Peter: What is it.

(11) Deborah: What is it? It's a big exposition center

(12) Steve: And office building.

(13) David: [?]

(14) Peter: By fifty nth. And Columbus Circle.

(15) Deborah: *mmm*

(16) Steve: *Hmm.* And office building.

(17) Deborah: By fifty nth. And Columbus Circle.

(18) Steve: Remember where W 1 N S used to be?

(19) Deborah: No

(20) Peter: Did I give you too much? [re turkey]

(21) Deborah: By Columbus Circuit? ... that Columbus Circle?

(22) Steve: [Right on Columbus Circle.]

(23) Deborah: Here's Columbus Circle, ... her's Central Park West, the Huntington Hartford Museum.

(24) Peter: That's the Huntington Hartford, right?

(25) Steve: Nuhnuhno. ... Here's Central Park West, here's...

(26) Deborah: *Yeah.

(27) Peter: Did you go to the Coliséeum?

(28) Deborah: Now it's... And now there was... And there was a-... And we listened to:

(29) Steve: And there was... there was a-... And now there was a huge skyscraper right there

(30) Deborah: oh. And now there was a huge skyscraper right there

(31) Peter: What's the Coliséeum?

(32) Steve: That's the Huntington Hartford, fight?

(33) Deborah: What's the Coliséeum?

(34) Peter: Uh huh. And now there was... And there was a...

(35) Steve: And now there was a huge skyscraper right there

(36) Deborah: oh. And now there was a huge skyscraper right there

(37) Peter: Uh huh.

(38) Steve: [What's the Coliséeum?]

(39) Deborah: No. Where was that.

(40) Steve: Right where Central Park West met Broadway. That

(41) Peter: Did I give you too much? [re turkey]

(42) Deborah: By Columbus Circuit? ... that Columbus Circle?

(43) Steve: [Right on Columbus Circle.]

(44) Deborah: Here's Columbus Circle, ... her's Central Park West, the Huntington Hartford Museum.

(45) Peter: That's the Huntington Hartford, right?

(46) Steve: Nuhnuhno. ... Here's Central Park West, here's...

(47) Deborah: *Yeah.

(48) Peter: Did you go to the Coliséeum?

(49) Deborah: Now it's... And now there was... And there was a-... And we listened to:

(50) Steve: And there was... there was a-... And now there was a huge skyscraper right there

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(55) Peter: Uh huh. And now there was... And there was a...

(56) Steve: And now there was a huge skyscraper right there

(57) Deborah: oh. And now there was a huge skyscraper right there

(58) Peter: Uh huh.

(59) Steve: [What's the Coliséeum?]

(60) Deborah: No. Where was that.

(61) Steve: Right where Central Park West met Broadway. That

... One way to understand these features is to understand that the New Yorkers would have been uncomfortable with silence in this setting. Hence it is better to toss out a new topic rather than risk silence as an old one peter's out. There is an economy by which participants are free to ignore comments, enabling others to toss them out as exuberantly as they like. In the economy practiced by the non-New Yorkers, comments are coercive: listeners had to pay attention to them. Therefore speakers were inclined to be much more tentative about offering topics, hesitating when starting and beginning vaguely, in order to temper that coercive effect.
FAST TALKERS AND SLOW TALKERS

A psychologist at UCLA, Gerald Goodman (Esterly 1979), has identified the conversational style I have been describing, although he does not identify it as such. He calls fast-paced speakers 'crowders' and considers them a conversational menace. He offers a course—at a price—to teach crowders patience. Goodman eloquently articulated the effect fast talkers have on those unaccustomed to their style:

There's a dehumanizing aspect to being crowded; there's a lack of respect involved. Interrupting arises from a variety of factors—anxiety, a desire to dominate, boredom, the need to express freshly stimulated thought. People walk away from conversations with crowders feeling upset or dissatisfied or incompetent, though they may not understand why. (p. 68)

Goodman allows only one positive interpretation of fast talking: the 'need to express freshly stimulated thought'. All the other reasons he can think of for it are negative, associated with the evil motive 'domination'. Moreover, he equates the effect of domination on the hearer with the speaker's intention to dominate.

Goodman is expressing an interpretation of fast pacing similar to that evidenced and expressed by the three non-New Yorkers in the dinner conversation I analyzed. It is the feeling of being imposed upon, in violation of Robin Lakoff's (1973) politeness rule 'Don’t impose', and in violation of negative face. However, universal as this need is, the question of what constitutes an imposition is culturally relative. Hence the dehumanizing aspect Goodman observes, the vague feeling of dissatisfaction and incompetence, is not a response to only one specific linguistic feature used by others, but to any linguistic feature used in an unexpected way. It is the lack of sharedness of style that is disconcerting. Fast talkers walk away from those same conversations feeling similarly uncomfortable, most likely having interpreted the slower pacing as a failure of positive politeness: the need for interpersonal involvement, in other words, a violation of Lakoff's politeness rule, 'Maintain camaraderie'.

What we have, then, is two senses of politeness: the need to show involvement and the need not to impose, that is, to be considerate. Taciturnity and volubility can be seen as ways of honoring and not violating one or the other of these needs. The question for each speaker (and, in a larger sense, for each culture) is whether it is better to risk offense by saying too little or too much—put another way, too much silence or too little? The 'mainstream' American notion of politeness prefers to risk saying too little; in other words, considerateness is valued relatively more than involvement.6

Goodman notes the opposition between fast pacing and silence. He recommends: 'It may come as a bulletin to crowders that one of their options is S-I-L-E-N-C-E'. Here he has hit upon something important. But I wonder—and don’t yet know—whether slow talkers would consider their pauses to be silence. Because, no doubt, one person's silence is another's pause. A silence is differentiated from a pause only by the intentions and conventions of the speaker. Silence and pause can be distinguished only by reference to prior experience: how long does a person typically pause within the stream of speech, and before taking a turn at speech? Teachers, for example, know the problem of determining whether a student who has been called on is pausing because s/he doesn't know the answer (silence as omission of something), or because s/he is formulating the answer (silence representing underlying action).

WHEN ARE SLOW TALKERS FAST TALKERS?

Differences in attitudes toward and uses of silence between Southern Athabaskan Indians (Apaches) and non-Indian Americans have been demonstrated by Basso (1979). Scollon (Chapter 2) notes that the image of the silent Indian is associated with an attitude toward silence as negative, the malfunction of a conversational machine which ought to proceed with a steady hum. He suggests that Athabaskans are found by non-Indians to be 'passive', 'sullen', 'withdrawn', 'unresponsive', 'lazy', 'backward', 'destructive', 'hostile', 'uncooperative', 'anti-social', and 'stupid', largely because of their greater use of silence with outsiders making these judgments. He notes experimental research by Feldstein, Alberti and Ben Debb (see also Crown and Feldstein, Chapter 3) that women who took shorter pauses than their conversational partners see themselves as: 'warmedhearted', 'easygoing', 'cooperative', 'attentive to people', 'outgoing', 'talkative', 'cheerful', 'adventurous', 'socially bold'. Women who took longer pauses than their conversational partners felt themselves to be 'reserved', 'detached', 'critical', 'distrustful', 'skeptical', 'taciturn', 'sober', 'shy', 'restrained', 'rigid', 'prone to sulk', 'changeable', 'self-reproaching', 'tense', 'frustrated', 'easily upset'. These women also took shorter speak-

6My interpretation of silence-resistant or short-pause styles as conventionalizing politeness as display of involvement, and of silence-favoring or long-pause styles as conventionalizing politeness as display of considerateness corresponds in a number of ways with Kochman's (1981) of black and white styles, which he discusses in terms of 'rights of sensibilities' and 'rights of feelings.'
ing turns. Scollon notes the similarity of these negative self-attributes to negative stereotypes of Athabaskans and suggests that 'for our society, a slower pace in exchanging turns is a highly negative quality'.

These findings seem to conflict with my findings based on the Thanksgiving conversation (and reinforced by Goodman and Kochman). I found that the speakers who tended to speak more quickly than their fellow conversationalists, and those who tended to speak more slowly, both had negative views of the others' intentions. The faster speakers, indeed, felt the slower ones to be withholding, uncooperative, and not forthcoming with conversational contributions. But the slower speakers, for their part, felt the faster ones to be dominating; they found it hard to get a turn to speak. The negative attributions of the slower speakers by the faster ones do indeed correspond to those Scollon and Feldstein et al. found for slower speakers—but the participants characterized as 'slower' in my conversation were the kind of 'mainstream' Americans who evaluate Indians negatively for talking slowly, and who are, in the spirit of Goodman, condemning faster talkers as dehumanizing. (A corollary to the negative attributions of the slower speakers toward the faster ones can be seen in Basso's [1979] demonstration of negative stereotypes among Apaches of white people as insincere and preposterously gregarious.)

Furthermore, the slower speakers in my study were able to talk positively about their habits and negatively about those of the others with a self-assurance that the faster speakers did not evidence. The necessary result of differing pacing with respect to turntaking was that faster speakers spoke more. This happened in two ways. First of all, one who expects more pauses between turns is still waiting for that amount of pause when a faster speaker perceives the pause to be bordering on silence and starts to talk. Second, those who wish to avoid silence in conversation, who place greater value on the show of involvement, prefer overlap—that is, simultaneous talk. Often listeners talk at the same time as speakers, not to wrest the floor but to show involvement, appreciation, enthusiasm. However, with speakers who do not use this style, what was intended as a cooperative overlap often became an interruption. That is, the overlap-resistant speaker, instead of being encouraged by the vocalization of the listener, thought that the listener wanted to take the floor away and therefore stopped talking. The resultant change of turns felt and looked to all concerned like an interruption—even to the unwitting 'interruptor' who might not know how it happened but knows an interruption when s/he sees one—and knows it is valued negatively, and knows who has to take the blame for it.

When listening to fast-paced, loud, overlapping segments of the conversation among the New Yorkers, the slower speakers responded with disbelief (for example, 'I don't see how you guys can all talk at the same time'). But the participants themselves, on hearing the tape of those portions of the conversation, also reacted with negative feelings; in their case, embarrassment ('Do we really sound like that?'). Interruption is negative by definition. Someone in our society can accuse, 'Don't interrupt', but not, 'Don't just sit there. Interrupt!'  

CONCLUSION

The findings of my study, then, were that slower-paced speech is more positively evaluated by 'mainstream' American speakers than faster speech, and longer switching pauses preferred. How could this be, in light of the findings of Feldstein et al., as corroborated by Scollon, that slower paced speech and shorter switching pauses are more positively evaluated by the same group? The answer was really quite simple. A call to Feldstein revealed that his study had been conducted at the City College of the City University of New York, and the subjects were primarily New York Jewish women, directly confirming my findings that New York Jewish speakers prefer a faster-paced style.

But what of Scollon's own findings, to the effect that the slower paced and more silence-filled speech of Athabaskan Indians is negatively evaluated? The answer there, I think, is the relativity of judgments of rate. Slower-paced style is negatively valued, but slow and fast have meaning only with reference to expectations. 'Slow' is, in other words, 'slower than I expect', which, regardless of absolute rate, results in the impression of having nothing to say or being unwilling to speak. 'Fast' is 'faster than I expect', which, regardless of absolute rate, results in the impression of crowding. Allowing for individual differences, such expectations are culturally based.

And, finally, when is a pause a silence? When it is longer than expected, or in an unexpected place, and therefore ceases to have its 'business as usual' function and begins to indicate that something is missing. When does talk become oppressive—that is, perceived to be in violation of appropriate silence? When that talk is causing the pause or silence to be shorter than expected, or omitted where expected.

Thus, while there certainly are broad cultural differences with respect to the unmarked valuation of silence and noise (as seen, for example, in Maltz's [Chapter 7] demonstration of contrasting valuation of noise and silence in religious worship by Quakers and Pentecostals), nonetheless, the most significant differences are those reflecting how much pause is deemed appropriate for a given function and in a given context. A pause becomes a silence, and a silence is negatively valued, when it is too long or appears at what seems like the wrong time and the wrong place.
REFERENCES


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