

FOCUS ON SILENCES ACROSS CULTURES *

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We have learned to expect cultures to be different from one another in innumerable...ways; in speech, burial rites, marriage practices, and eating habits... The stuff out of which these richly variegated cultures are made is found around man and in man...None of these raw materials from which cultural elements are constructed (by selection and contrastive structuring) is more ubiquitous than silence.

(Samarin 1965: 115)

1. INTRODUCTION: Approach, Problem, Subject

The following sketch is rooted within the frameworks of contrastive pragma(linguis)tics (cf. Riley 1981; Fillmore 1984; Oleksy 1984) and the ethnography of speaking/communication (cf. Hymes 1962; Gumperz/Hymes 1972; Bauman/Sherzer 1974; James 1981). It deals with a problem which Hayes (1965; cf. Hymes 1971: 18) and Hymes (1971) name "sociolinguistic interference", which Scollon and Scollon (1981) call interethnic miscommunication", which Hymes (1971) and Loveday (1982) term "communicative interference", which Hoffer (1985) refers to as "cross-cultural miscommunication" and which Thomas (1983) labels "cross-cultural pragmatic failure". While Thomas (1983: 91) applies their term "pragmatic failure" to the inability to understand "what is meant by what is

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said," it is here applied to the inability to understand "what is meant by what is not said".

This brief and handy formulation of the problem and its source warrants some elaboration. In general, the sketch deals with the cultural relativity of abstention from talk and the concomitant cross-cultural pragmatic failure which may occur when members of different cultures interact. In particular, the sketch focuses on the variation of culture-specific norms obtaining for the following dimensions of abstention from talk:

- What is considered a 'normal' proportion of talk and silence in various cultures?
- What is, in various cultures, considered a 'normal duration of silence at transition relevance places (TRPs) where conversational partners may take turns in talking?
- What are the conditions under which silences may count as the zero-signifiers of speech acts, speech events or speech situations (in the sense of the ethnography of communication)?

Where the norms of the two interactants disagree - we hypothesize - cross-cultural pragmatic failure and cross-cultural stereotyping is likely to occur.

Since this paper is concerned with the function of absent-talk, one prominent reading of "silence" lies outside its scope. The expression "to be silent about s.th." refers not to non-talk, but rather to the non-topicalization of certain subject matters in conversations. This reading of "silence" lies within the scope of the rules for the appropriate selection and organization of speech content, and it is, for example, the dominant perspective of Barnlund's discussion of the handling of public and private self in Japan and the United States (1975), as well as of Hostetler's approach to survival strategies among the Amish (1984).

A note on terminology is appropriate. For the major part, this sketch does not require a subclassification of absent talk at TRPS. In one selection we will, however, have to use the term "silence" in the narrower sense of Sacks *et. al.* For the sake of clarity we will call it "attributable silence". Generally, in quotations different usage may obtain.

2. THE NOTION OF ZERO SIGNS

Before the cross-cultural variation of the norms governing silence can be discussed, a glimpse at the sign-theoretical status of silence is appropriate. In terms of semiotics, the problem under discussion is signs which have signifieds, but no signifiers. Since the analysis of signifying and communicating with absent signifiers such as absent speech (like absent motion, absent clothing and absent

eating) is fairly new ground, we resort to structural linguistics (where such imbalanced signs have long been topicalized) in order to throw the problem into perspective.

2.1 The Notion of Zero in Structural Linguistics

Although Panini postulated the admission of such imbalanced signs to the level of analytical constructs in the fourth century B.C., the prevalence of the *horror vacui* in occidental thought appears to have prevented for a long time the systematic analysis of the immaterial freaks among the signs, which, in order to be accepted as respectable signs, were to have a signified as well as a signifier. In less speculative terms, one can safely infer that as long as sign material was the only acceptable starting point, and as long as the exhaustive analysis of sign material was the only acceptable goal of the analysis, absent signifiers could not even be conceived of.

They have escaped the heuristic grid. The precondition of their perceivability/conceivability was a change in the analytical paradigm, and it was the structuralistic turn that ultimately permitted the (re-)discovery of the zero-notion, with Baudouin de Courtenay's (1845-1929) thinking and with Gauthiot's concept of the "zero-degree" (1902) as important forerunners. Once language was conceived of as a system of oppositions between elements on both the plane of signifiers and the plane of signifieds, unfilled nodes in the network of relationships became perceptible. It became apparent that on the plane of sign material, an opposition cannot only obtain between specific sign material and other specific sign material, but also between specific sign material and nothing. In Saussure's fundamental formula: "Language is satisfied with the opposition between something and nothing" (1959/1966: 86). Since then the concept of the zero-value has proved to be both a prolific and a hotly disputed heuristic instrument in structural linguistics. While Jakobson (1971), for example, underlined the importance and validity of the concept for the analysis of all levels of language and claimed the existence of zero-phonemes, zero-morphemes, zero-words, zero-meanings and zero-stylistic forms, its appreciation among British, German and American morphologists has ranged from total rejection (Meier 1961: 181) to partial acceptance (Nida 1970: 6-8, Haas 1957: 39-41), as Bergenholtz and Mugdan (1979: 67-71) show concisely.

These remarks on the zero-sign in structural linguistics may serve as an introduction to a discussion of behavioral zero elements, such as silence. A basic distinction between zero-elements in language systems and zero-elements in speaking systems is that the former are constructs of the system which do not manifest themselves in absent talk on the level of speech, whereas the latter are

norms of the speaking system which do so. The only exception are internal open junctures, which are part of grammar and which manifest themselves in speech: *nitrate* vs. *night rate, an iceman* vs. *a nice man*.

2.2 Assumptions on Behavioral Zero-elements

In the following we will explicate some assumptions concerning behavioral zero-elements. They deal with distributional characteristics and the sign-theoretical status of behavioral zeros. They deal also with the question of why behavioral zeros should be particularly prone to foster cross-cultural pragmatic failure.

2.2.1 First Assumption: Silence as a meaningful and significant zero-element of interaction

The basic assumption made in this article is a distributional one, namely that silences are meaningless and insignificant nothings only before, between, and after interactive periods and that, by contrast, all silences during interactive periods are significant absences and therefore have the status of zero signs, or rather of zero signifiers (cf. Poyatos 1981a: 151-153; Umiker-Sebeok 1980: 296; Samarin 1965: 115; Bauman 1974: 144-145). This basic assumption is reflected in the formulation of the lead questions in section 1.

Two contrasting cases may serve as an illustration. The abstention from talk by a lonesome lighthouse guard is a meaningless and insignificant nothing because it is located outside interactive periods, which might provide the verbal context and the situational context necessary for the attribution of meaning and significance to this verbal nothing. By contrast, a passage from Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's "Silver Blaze" provides a most appropriate illustration of silence as a meaningful and significant zero-element. Dim-witted Watson begins:

"Is there any point to which you would wish to draw my attention?"

"To the curious incident of the dog in the night-time."

"The dog did nothing in the night-time."

"That was the curious incident," remarked Sherlock Holmes.

(Doyle 1930: 347)

"...I had grasped the significance of the silence of the dog..."

(Doyle 1930: 349)

Obviously, even a Watson can be persuaded to accept that sign-material may stand in opposition to nothing, and that both the sign-material and its absence are equally meaningful: 'the dog did not know the person' vs. 'the dog knew the

person'. At the same time, the non-barking vs. the barking were pragmatically significant: 'the dog performed an act of categorization of person not directly perceived by some third parties (Holmes and Watson)'. To Holmes the behavior of the dog served as a cue for his inference. To him the zero-behavior of the dog stood for something which it was not itself (*aliquid stat pro aliquo*), but not to Watson. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle probably did not intend to provide Fernando Poyatos with perfect illustration of his argumentation, and although Poyatos had human interaction in mind when writing the following passage, he provides a perfect description of the above case of animal-man interaction by means of zero-signs:

In trying to establish a typology of somatic signs, it would be totally shortsighted to seek the costructuration and meaning of all the bodily activities but neglect the occurrence of non-activity. Since a typology of signs deals with sensible events or sign tokens, it becomes imperative that we acknowledge the occurrence of non-activities, involving both the absence and the mere lack of them, whether expected or not even suspected, the latter constituting the zero-sign par excellence. (Poyatos 1981a: 151)

Holmes may have expected that significant silence in his process of anticipatory ratiocination, or rather his abductive reasoning (cf. Eco/Sebeok 1985), but to Watson, who did not even suspect the silence as a sign-carrier, the non-activity of the dog, after its significance is brought home to him, is a zero-sign par excellence.

2.2.2 Second Assumption: The cultural sensitivity of silences: interpretable zero-symptoms vs. decodable zero-symbols

The second assumption is that the universally available sign-material called silence is universally made to serve essential and quite diverse functions in discourse and action systems (cf. Levinson 1983: 329). Furthermore, it is assumed that the silences circumscribed above originate not only in pan-cultural requirements of conversational organization of *homo loquens*, but also in culture-specific socio-pragmatic constraints on the universal speaking behavior of members of specific speech communities. This implies the assumption that the sign-theoretical statuses of non-phonations co-vary with the degree to which they normatively raised from (universally interpretable) nature-motivated symptoms towards arbitrary-conventional symbols which cannot be interpreted across cultures, except where cultural constraints coincide. On the one hand, we have interactive situations which – with regard to silences – are cross-culturally invariant, because the practical constraints override any socio-pragmatic rule of language use. On the other hand, there are situations and interactional phases for which the non-phonation rules are not determined by the nature of the event and which therefore may vary across cultures.

Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's silent dog cannot only serve as an illustration of behavioral zero-signs, but also of the cross-cultural sensitivity and insensitivity of (subclasses of) behavioral zero-signs. Doyle's text has been translated into many languages and the various audiences – irrespective of their cultural backgrounds – enjoyed the text and understood the non-barking as a zero-sign, provided that their range of experience included watch-dogs and their distinctive behavior towards friends on the one hand, and strangers on the other. This zero-token of a non-verbal *lingua franca* must be seen as the instance of a zero-sign that does not prevent understanding across cultures. With regard to sign classes the example indicates that there are, among behavioral zero-signs, certain zeros which have the status of symptoms, in this case a symptom that is conditioned on watch-dogs across the world, and across cultures. Such symptoms can be interpreted with recourse to general/universal experience with the world, but recourse to culture-specific knowledge is not necessary. Consequently, there is no danger of cross-cultural pragmatic failure.

Not only in man-animal interaction do we find silences which are correctly interpretable across cultures. Also in man-man interaction we have interactive situations which – with regard to silences – are cross-culturally invariant, because the practical constraints of the task at hand override any conventional socio-pragmatic rules of language use. For example, the abstention from speech by the technicians involved in recording a symphony is cross-culturally interpretable, because this silence is determined/motivated by the nature of the event. The case of ambushers, burglars or the sudden hush to signal the arrival of a new co-present exemplify the same category. Such nature-motivated and therefore cross-culturally interpretable zero-signs will here be called zero-symptoms. On the other hand, there are situations and interactional phases for which the silence rules are not determined by the nature of the event and which therefore may vary across cultures. The boiling of sausage, for example, is in no intrinsic way related to abstention from talk, and yet in some parts of Sweden boiling sausage and silence are closely associated in and through cultural, i.e. socially (not experientially) acquired knowledge. Their association is the result of a culture-special sociopragmatic constraint which, in turn, is rooted in a folk-belief in sympathetic magic. The parallel between the sausage casing and the human intestinal tube, because breaking wind at either end might break the sausage skin (cf. Bringeus 1975). In this case, silence is the formal exponent of a culture-motivated act of sympathetic magic.

The cradle of silences which are prone to produce cross-cultural pragmatic failure are the culture-specific pragmatic constraints superimposed on the universal speaking behavior of homo-loquens. While the nature-motivated symptomatic silences may be (correctly) interpreted across cultures, the arbitrary, convention-

based silences, which we call zero-symbols, can only be decoded with reference to socially acquired, i.e. cultural knowledge. With regard to the example given by Bringeus, one can safely say that only persons who share their cultural knowledge with the Swedish sausage boilers can decode the silences as a zero-symbol, as the signifier of an act of sympathetic magic. Others may at best misread it or may not even suspect the behavioral zero as a signifier at all, in analogy to Watson's non-reading of a zero-symptom, i.e. the non-barking of the dog in the night-time.

2.2.3 Third Assumption: intra-cultural variation of significant silences

Although the above sausage example is highly culture-specific, it illustrates at the same time the apparently universal principle of abstention from talk in what is culturally perceived as a critical situation. This, in turn, implies the further assumption that socio-pragmatic constraints on speaking vary not only inter-culturally, but also intra-culturally. Pre-patterned ceremonial situations (like church services) which confirm the societal status quo and ritual situations which transform the societal status quo are more likely to contain acts and/or events which are transacted silently than non-ceremonial and non-ritual situations – so we assume.

Furthermore, we assume that the relatively fewer and shorter silences of focused encounters are more meaningful and more significant silences than the relatively more and longer silences of unfocused encounters. What at first sight may appear as cross-cultural differences in the tolerance for conversational "time-out", may be the epiphenomena of focused vs. unfocused types of interaction in one and the same culture. In unfocused interactions participants are not so much concerned with filling time by a continuous flow of turns, but with "the management of sheer and mere copresence" (Goffman 1963: 24), as for example retired neighbors sharing a park bench. The extreme tolerance for silence which Goffman reports for Shetland Isle appears to be a case in point.

In Shetland Isle when three or four women were knitting together, one knitter would say a word, it would be allowed to rest for a minute or two, and then another knitter would provide an additional comment. In the same manner a family sitting around its kitchen fire would look into the flames and intersperse replies to statements with periods of observation of the fire. Shetland men use...the lengthy pauses required for the proper management of their pipes.

(Goffman 1963: 103)

We suggest that this case illustrates the universal distinction of focused vs. unfocused encounters rather than a culture-specific handling of conversational "time-out" on Shetland Isle.

Although the present argument does not require to go into the distinction between gaps, lapses and silences made by Sacks *et. al.* (1974), a glimpse at their turn-

taking rule might help to understand the Shetland Isle case and the long conversational "time-outs" in unfocused encounters. A summary will do. "The model specifies for each TRP an ordered cyclical application of three rules, here in abbreviated form: (1a) current-speaker-selects-next speaker, (1b) next-speaker-self-selects, (1c) current speaker continues. The non-application of (1a) means that (1b) becomes relevant; the non-application of (1b) means that (1c) becomes relevant." (Couper-Kuhlen 1989: 27). According to Sacks *et. al.* "lapses" - one subclass of absent talk at TRPS - may extend rather indefinitely: "Should current speaker not self-select to continue, rule 1a remains inoperative and there is further space (another round) available for self-selection-and, in the absence of self-selection by another, self-selection by current speaker to continue, etc. That is, a series of rounds of possible self-selection by others and self-selection by current to continue-rules 1b and 1c-may develop, in none of which are options to talk exercised, with a thereby constituted development of a lapse in conversation" (1974: 715). We suggest that this turn-taking pattern accounts for the long spans of conversational time-out in unfocused encounters across cultures generally. Cultures, we assume, may, however, differ with regard to the preference of focused and unfocused encounters (cf. below).

2.2.4 Fourth Assumption: the aptitude of silences for cross-cultural pragmatic failure

The point, I think, is fairly obvious. For a stranger entering an alien society, a knowledge of when not to speak may be as basic to the production of culturally acceptable behavior as a knowledge of what to say.

(Basso 1972: 69)

One further assumption is that stretches of silence rank extremely high on the scale of phenomena which may foster cross-cultural miscommunication. In actual fact, the absence of phonation may be the most elusive component of the discourse system, i.e. of that system which – in comparison with the language system – causes initially graver problems in interethnic interaction (cf. Gumperz 1977a, 1977b; Gumperz and Roberts 1978).

The grammatical system gives the message while the discourse system tells how to interpret a message. The greatest cause of interethnic problems lies in the area of understanding not *what* someone says but *why* he is saying it. This information about *why* people are speaking is not signaled in the same way in all ethnic groups...

(Scollon and Scollon 1981: 12)

For silence the problem is aggravated by the fact that the listener must not only realize that no material signal is uttered, but s/he must also infer why no material signal is uttered, and also what is mediated by an absent signal. In terms of information theory, silences in both intra-cultural and inter-cultural exchanges are speech segments of high

uncertainty. It is true that where there is no uncertainty – as for example in prestructured events – there can be no new information. It is, however, equally true that the reduction of uncertainty (i.e. retrieving information) is nowhere harder than where semantic meaning and the interactional significance of a materially absent signal must be inferred on the basis of its verbal context and its situational context alone. Therefore the awareness of rules for the display and interpretation of silence appears to be even more basic than the rules for selecting the speech material appropriate for a given slot in a discursive sequence. When an intercultural clash between silence display patterns occurs, the non-proficient decoder may (a) fail to perceive *that* a given silence is not just nothing, but rather the formal exponent of an act (noncommunication), and (b) fail to perceive *which* act is performed by the given silence, as, for example, turn-planning, turn-relinquishing, hesitation before taking a turn, ratification of the previous turn's content, disagreement, non-committal, prevarication, embarrassment, etc. (semi- or miscommunication). Conversely, the non-proficient encoder may a) fail to select silence as the appropriate formal exponent of his intended act, and b) – by selecting a material formal exponent – violate the speech rules, i.e. verbal etiquette, and (c) trigger an interpretation in the decoder which does not match his intentions (cf. Basso 1972: 69). In either case, the interaction is subject to cross-cultural failure. What is worse, the member of a culture 1 with an insufficient command of the display and interpretation rules obtaining in culture 2 may be considered a faulty interactant and – if such instances are repeated – be stigmatized as a faulty person. Still worse, if such interactive derailments are experienced with more members of another culture, the ascription of "faulty interactant" and "faulty person" may be generalized into the cultural stereotype of "faulty people".

However, not only can discrepancies between the discourse systems used in a cross-cultural encounter foster inappropriate displays and false interpretations of silences. Since in a cross-cultural encounter either both interactants use a *lingua franca*, or one of them uses as his L2 the other's L1, either both or one of them may be subject to incomplete learning and may therefore produce silences either due to increased utterance-planning load or due to the delayed decoding of the cues of transition relevance places in alter's contribution. Neither of such silences which originate in the transaction of the interethnic encounter itself can be accounted for in either of the participant's discourse systems. The very variability and instability of such approximative intersystems may even be the cause of the majority of cases

of interethnic bewilderment, and of the attribution of (conversational) uncooperativeness to alter.

Finally, it is assumed here that the potential of silences for cross-cultural non- and miscommunication is so great, because people expect cultures to be different where these differences have distinct material exponents, as for example in the domain of artifacts and languages, but not in the domain of the material nothings called silences.

While semioticians like Poyatos (1981a, b) and Hess-Lüttich (1978, 1979) have provided sign-theoretical and sign-typological underpinnings for the analysis of silence as a communicative conduct, ethnographers have focused on the cultural relatively of rules of speaking and silence:

...,the Quaker case points up extremely well the necessity of taking silence as well as speaking into account in the ethnographic study of language use. In no society do people talk all the time, and no adequate understanding of the communicative economy of any society can therefore be achieved without an understanding of the role of silence as well as speaking in that society.

(Bauman 1974: 144-145)

Although the significance of silence for the adequate analysis of the communicative economy of cultures has been generally acknowledged in the meantime, studies focusing on silence are still scarce. From the many asides and comments on, and from the few systematic ethnographic studies of, silence-based cross-cultural pragmatic failure only some can be mentioned here.

3. THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF SILENCE AND SILENCE-BASED CROSS-CULTURAL FAILURE

3.1 The Cross-cultural Variability of a 'Normal' Proportion of Talk and Silence

The measurement of the overall proportions of talk and silence in any given culture is difficult, if not impossible. Yet even impressionistic statements on the cross-cultural variability of the "normal" proportions of talk and silence and on the norms governing the distribution of speaking vs. nonspeaking over membership categories and situations may serve as illustration of one major source of cross-cultural pragmatic failure. In this respect, Coulthard made a pertinent statement and supported it with ethnographic observations:

All communities have an underlying set of non-linguistic rules which governs when, how and how often speech occurs. Thus the Anang value speech highly and the young are trained in the arts of speech, while for the Wolof speech, especially in quantity, is dangerous and demeaning.

French children are encouraged to be silent when visitors are present at dinner; Russian children are encouraged to talk. Among the Arucanian there are different expectations of men and women, men being encouraged to talk on all occasions, women to be silent – a new wife is not permitted to speak for several months.

Even within North-Western Europe there are surprising differences. One ethnographer reports how, when he was researching in Iceland, neighbouring Eskimos would visit once a day for an hour to check that all was well. During the hour there would be no more than a dozen exchanges, and all the rest of the time was spent in silence.

(Coulthard 1977: 48-49)

Wardhaugh draws attention to a very early observation: "In his *Laws*, Plato described how the Athenians were great talkers, whereas the Spartans were known for their brevity (...)" (Wardhaugh 1987: 236).

In a study of 1971 Hymes reports the following case from the literature:

Peter Gardener (1966) did some fieldwork...in southern India, among a tribal people called the Puliya, describing their socialization patterns. There is no agriculture and no industry, and the society is neither particularly cooperative nor particularly competitive; so children are led neither to be particularly interdependent nor to be aggressively competitive with each other, but simply to busy themselves with their own concerns in reasonable spatial proximity. He observed that, by the time a man was forty, he practically stopped speaking altogether. He had no reason to speak. People there, in fact, just didn't talk much and seldom seemed to find anything much to talk about, and he saw this as a consequence of the particular kind of socialization pattern. (Hymes 1971: 27)

Among the older age-groups of this culture doing one's own thing in the copresence of others without interacting and conversing appears to be the prevalent pattern. Gardener highlights this pattern in the headline of one section of his article: "Parallel, non-cooperative behavior" (1966: 393). Going by Gardener's description, focused encounters and, consequently, highly organized conversations, appear to be rare. Unfocused encounters appear to prevail. Accordingly, the prevalent silence is, so it seems, only interrupted by occasional stretches of speech.

The converse relationship between silence and speech appears to obtain among the Rotinese.

For a Rotinese, the pleasure of life is talk – not simply an idle chatter that passes time, but the more formal taking of sides, dispute, argument, and repartee or the rivaling of one another in eloquent and balanced phrases on ceremonial occasions. Speeches, sermons, and rhetorical

statements are a delight. But in this class society, with hierarchies of order, there are notable constraints on speech. In gatherings, nobles speak more than commoners, men more than women, elders more than juniors; yet commoners, women, and youth, when given the opportunity as they invariably are, display the same prodigious verbal prowess. Lack of talk is an indication of distress. Rotinese repeatedly explain that if their 'hearts' are confused or dejected, they keep silent. Contrarily, to be involved with someone requires active verbal encounter. (Fox 1974: 65).

Every available encounter appears to be under the norm of making it a focused encounter; unfocused encounters or sheer copresence seem to be dispreferred. The obligatory norm of speaking does not manifest itself in relationship-centered phatic communion, but in issue-centered conversational transactions. According to a report of 1891 by the naturalist Herman ten Kate this transaction-centered type of conversation has had a long tradition among the Rotinese:

'Nearly everywhere we went on Roti, there was a dispute over this or that. The native, to wit the Rotinese, can ramble on over-trivia like an old Dutch granny. I believe that his loquaciousness is partially to blame for this, for each dispute naturally provides abundant material for talk'. (1884: 221; quoted from Fox 1974: 65)

In her description of the !Kung Bushmen, Lorna Marshall arrives at the following conclusion:

The !Kung are the most loquacious people I know. Conversation in a !Kung werf is a constant sound like the sound of a brook, and as low and lapping, except for shrieks of laughter. People cluster together in little groups during the day, talking, perhaps making artifacts at the same time. At night families talk late by their fires,(...). (Marshall 1972: 181)

Coulthard illustrates the kind of cross-cultural pragmatic failure which may originate when interactants obey their respective culture's standards for appropriate proportions of talk vs. silence.

Another...ethnographer describes staying with in-laws in Denmark and being joined by an American friend who, despite warnings, insisted on talking with American intensity until 'at 9 o'clock my in-laws retired to bed; they just couldn't stand it any more'. (Coulthard 1977: 49)

However, too little silence can be just as destructive as too much silence. Kernan reports on the Belize speech community in which silence signals the regression from "withs" not only to "copresents", but to "enemies" – with concomitant consequences for the cross-cultural interaction between members and field workers:

But regardless of the particular speech act being performed, one is usually talking. In fact, it is only when a social relationship has completely broken down that one treats another with silence (...)

(Kernan *et. al.* 1977: 41)

Furthermore, Kernan *et. al.* (1977: 42) report that the cultural value of filling each moment of social interaction with talk was constantly brought home to the field-workers, insofar as periods of silence were regarded as clear evidence of the investigators' lack of any sort of linguistic competence or social grace. The Belizan interlocutors would fill what to them was an awkward vacuum, with stories. Thus some negative attributions appear to depend on what is felt to be a "normal" proportion of talk and silence. Since what is "normal" is a highly ethnocentric question, it is plausible that Belizan interlocutors should make negative attributions, even to Americans who may be sure that they are obeying the American rule according to which "someone's turn must...always be in progress" (Goffman 1963: 136).

A few more cultural differences of what is considered a "normal" proportion of talk and silence should be mentioned. Middle-class American conversationalists, who read what is sub-normal non-talk to them as a cue of "impoliteness", "social gapping", "sullenness" (Umiker-Sebeok 1980: 295), are likely to attribute these qualities to American Indian conversationalists who feel that their between-turn silences are unmarked behavior. In Europe, Mediterranean cultures with their lower tolerance for longer between-turn silences may attribute similar qualities to central and northern Europeans. Similarly, the "American talking to a Japanese associate is (...) baffled (...) by long silences that 'waste time'" (Barnlund 1975: 41; cf. also p. 50, 55, 57, 63). Conversely, to Japanese ears Americans seem to talk "incessantly" so that "they sounded (...) almost hypermanic" to Doi (1974: 21, cf. Loveday 1985: 50-51).

With regard to the cultural relativity of appropriate proportions of talk and silence Levi-Strauss (1963: 68) provides a descriptive generalization: "There are cultures...which are rather thrifty in relation to language. They don't believe that language should be used indiscriminately, but only in certain specific frames of reference and somewhat sparingly". Condon and Yousef try to account for the divergent evaluations of speaking vs. silence in conversations in terms of Florence Kluckhohn's concept *doing vs.being-in-becoming* cultures:

...persons from identifiably doing-oriented societies tend to regard silence as an absence of words, a waste of time, a period when "nothing is doing". For those who can be characterized as of the being or being-in-becoming mode, silence in conversations has positive meaning: It is essential to self-fulfillment and to an awareness of here and now.

(Condon and Yousef 1975: 137)

Hostetler (1980: 18-20, 374) attempts to account for the evaluation of speaking in Hall's (1976: 105-116) terms of low-context vs. high-context cultures: high-context cultures with widely shared socio-cultural knowledge do not have to verbalize as much as low-context cultures. However, Hostetler appears to be concerned with the principles controlling the socially appropriate selection and organization of speech content, i.e. what needs to be topicalized and what one can and must "be silent" about, rather than with conversational chronemics. With regard to the latter aspect Hall's distinction between monochronic time cultures vs. polychronic time cultures (1976: 9-24) appears to offer a framework within which the differential use of interaction time might find explanation. M-time cultures emphasize schedules, separation of activities and doing one thing at a time, while P-time cultures are characterized by several things happening at once (cf. Hall 1976: 17). With regard to the cultural relativity of proportions of talk and silence, it might be worthwhile to test the following hypothesis: when doing conversation, M-time cultures do just that and fill all time with words, while P-time cultures may fill the available time with words, and/or actions, and/or simply be present and thus "do interaction" also in other than verbal modes. This may go along with the relative frequency of focused vs. unfocused encounters in M-time vs. P-time cultures.

The difficulty of correctly decoding and appropriately "uttering" silence across cultures is aggravated by the fact that we do not only have "plus vs. minus mandatory conversation" cultures, but that there are also distinct quantities of talking that are considered appropriate for cultures and their membership categories.

Children are expected to learn to talk, and adults are expected to talk a normal amount. It is only when a person's speech varies from some pattern that it is noticed: he talks too much or too little. He talks when he should be silent, and he is silent when he should talk. (Samarin 1972: 18)

Again, just what is a normal amount of talking, what is too much and too little, is a matter of cultural relativity. The relative silence of children in some cultures, as for example the Hopi, the Japanese, the Chinese (Saville-Troike 1982: 227), the Amish (Hostetler 1980), the Hutterites, the Colville Indians (Locke 1980) compared to the relative talkativeness of children in others, as for example the British, American, German, Dutch cultures is another pitfall for cross-cultural communication and evaluation: a child that in his own culture may be praised for his/her verbal explicitness may be scolded for his/her talkativeness by the norms of another culture (cf. Saville-Troike 1982: 226-230 for the relationship between education styles and verbal explicitness of children).

In more general terms, the smooth conduct of cross-cultural exchanges requires the knowledge of what counts as a "normal" amount of talk and silence for the respective membership categories of the other culture.

3.2 The Length of Silences between Conversational Turns

More enlightening insights into the exact causes of cross-cultural pragmatic failure which is triggered by silences can be gleaned from studies which (a) focus on the precise contexts of silences and which (b) estimate or even measure their durations. The "appropriate" lengths of silences at transition relevance places are cases in point.

At TRPs we find not only split-second speaker transitions without a perceptible silence, but also turn-overlap, and, what is important in the present context, silences of varying duration. Scollon and Scollon (1981: 25) found the different timing of between-turn silences in Athabaskan-English interactions to be an important source of cross-cultural pragmatic failure and of stereotyping. The example deserves to be quoted in full; note that Scollon and Scollon use the term "pause" in order to refer to what we have so far called "silence".

Problems start to come up when two speakers have different systems for pausing between turns. Generally speaking, Athabaskans allow a slightly longer pause between sentences than do English speakers. The difference is probably not more than half a second in length, but it has an important effect on interethnic communication. When an English speaker pauses he waits for the regular length of time, and if the Athabaskan does not say anything, the English speaker feels he is free to go on and say anything else he likes. At the same time the Athabaskan has been waiting his regular length of time before coming in. He does not want to interrupt the English speaker. This length of time we think is around one and one half seconds. It is just long enough that, by the time the Athabaskan is ready to speak, the English speaker is already speaking again. So the Athabaskan waits again for the next pause. Again, the English speaker begins just soon enough before the Athabaskan was going to speak. The net result is that the Athabaskan can never get a word in edgewise (an apt metaphor in this case), while the English speaker goes on and on.

The Athabaskan point of view is that it is difficult to make one's whole point. The length of pause that the Athabaskan makes while expecting to continue is just about the length of pause the English speaker makes in exchanging turns. If an Athabaskan has in mind a series of sentences to say, it is most likely that at the end of the first one the English speaker will think that he has finished because of the length of the pause and will

begin speaking. The Athabaskan feels he has been interrupted and the English speaker feels the Athabaskan never makes sense, never says a whole coherent idea. Much of this misunderstanding is the result of something like a one half second difference in the timing of conversational pauses, but it can result in strong stereotypical responses to the opposite ethnic group.

(Scollon and Scollon 1981: 25)

What is intended to be a turn-internal rhetorical pause is interpreted as a turn-relinquishing silence, and vice versa. The fact that such potential for miscommunication arises irrespective of the variety used, i.e. English Athabaskan or the so-called Village English (a variety of Canadian English used in villages of the area; Scollon and Scollon 1981: 28), underlines the view that vocabulary and grammar are less dangerous factors than the discourse systems of the parties involved. They are part of the culture's speech protocol, that is, of social etiquette, and any deviation may count as a social misdemeanor. If such clashes between two chronemic systems occur only once, the respective alter may be judged a faulty conversationalist; if such clashes reoccur between the same interactants, the respective alters may be judged as faulty persons; if such dissynchronies occur generally across cultural boundaries, the respective other culture may be judged as a bunch of faulty people. This attribution may take the status of the stereotype which may be beyond repair, above all in the domain of pragmatics. Since conversational principles are acquired early in life (between the ages of one and two, i.e. at a time when children have little to say (Scollon and Scollon 1981: 23)), they tend to be transferred to conversations transacted in L2, like turn-internal pausological behavior as demonstrated by Deschamps (1980), and hardly accessible to later modification.

Similar, though less serious attributions, may result from different durations of "tolerable" between-turn silences in conversations among the Old Order Amish (henceforth OOA) on the one hand, and US mainstream culture on the other. Among the OOA there appears to be an outspoken tolerance for longer between-turn silences. While in American monologues (turn-internal) pauses of six seconds are acceptable, conversational between-turn silences of the same length without previous notification of temporary interactional exit and its acceptance ("Wait a minute"(i.e.'hold')-"Take your time" (i.e. 'accept')) are not easily tolerated, at least not in focused interaction. In a forty-minute conversation of three adult OOA we found no fewer than eleven between-turn silences longer than twenty seconds, the longest being fifty-six seconds. Not one of them was preceded by a 'hold-accept' pair. The absence of pre-closings like *okay* or terminal elements like *bye* alone appears to suffice to keep conversation going across long between-turn silences. The absence of turn-overlap in the same conversation appears to indicate that once a party has the status of a speaker-listener participant (children with auditor

statuses (cf. Duncan 1972: 302) were not present), s/he is given a fair share of speaking time. While the co-present German driver (the OOA ride in, but do not drive cars) felt uneasy about the silences, the OOA participants appeared not to mind although two of them had travelled for more than two hours to pay this and other visits. Obviously longer between-turn silences do not count as wasting the precious and limited good of speaking time, but as a component of the visiting event (cf. the Wishram, the Gbeya, and Black Foot Indian examples below). This view was later confirmed in interviews. As the reaction of the German participant observer, who according to the Dutch proverb "He zwijgt als en mof" does not belong to the most voluble of cultures, indicated, this timing of silences may have contributed to the attribution of taciturnity and of uncooperativeness to the Amish by American mainstream society.

In another sixty minute conversation which developed in the course of what was intended as a Saturday afternoon visit to another OOA living about five miles away, we found no fewer than 85 between-turn silences of five seconds or more. Of these, 29 were longer than ten seconds, 16 were longer than 15 seconds, eleven were longer than 20 seconds, namely 55, 38, 36, 35, 29, 27, 26, 24, and twice 22 seconds, respectively. Although the three participants "gathered close together and openly cooperate (-d; W.E.) to sustain a single focus of attention" (Goffman 1963: 24), i.e. although the situation fulfilled the criteria of focused interaction, here the focus of what was originally intended as a visit shifted from "doing conversation" to the close scrutiny of the function of an old tool. This might explain the many silences in what the visitors later claimed to have been a nice visit. On other occasions, the participant observer found the Amish to be using up all the interaction time by not leaving any longer spans of interaction "unfilled" with words. So it appears that silences are not the result of an obligatory conversational principle, i.e. "fill all the available time by talking, even if nothing needs saying" (Hayakawa 1967: 87). Among the OOA the putative universal of phatic communion appears to be replaced by an optional rule which produces a higher tolerance for between-turn silences. When members of US-mainstream culture and OOA interact, the obligatory and the optional quality of the rules governing the tolerable length of between-turn silences may produce cross-cultural pragmatic failure with concomitant attributions.

Samarin describes a similar pattern for the Gbeya (1965: 117), where there seems to be no embarrassment about not continuing a conversation when the other person has completed her/his turn. He concludes that it seems as if the Gbeya do not feel under obligation to talk. Despite the lengths of silences during conversations, Samarin does not consider the Gbeya as taciturn people. Among them, silence is looked upon as something which is as effective as speech, not unlike the OOA pattern.

In a similar vein, Saville-Troike states that certain American Indian groups are accustomed to waiting several minutes before responding to a question or taking a turn in conversation, while the native English speakers they may be talking to have very short time frames for responses or conversational turn-taking, and find silences embarrassing (1982: 23; see also Schnapper 1979: 137). If one follows Key (1975: 118-119), in some American Indian cultures silences of even up to five minutes do not have negative readings, and they do not indicate an interactional break-down, or the regression of the involved persons from interaction "withs" to non-interacting "copensents" (Goffman).

A brief remark is appropriate on the meta-information which participants give off unintentionally by taking their turn either too slowly or too quickly. In their quantitative laboratory-based study of the social perception of lying, Baskett and Freedle (1974: 117), "found that if the target person responded either too quickly or too slowly the subjects attributed his response as a lie more often than if the delay was more intermediate in duration". The mean level proportion of lie-attribution was highest at the 0.007 second level, i.e. over 50 per cent; it was second highest at the 2.57 and the 2.67 second level, i.e. about 43 per cent; it was lowest at the 0.27 second level, i.e. about 38 per cent. Thus there appear to be not only non-verbal cues to deception (Ekman and Friesen 1969), but also cues such as the reaction time of respondents. In all likelihood, speakers will not intentionally communicate that the linguistic content of their utterance is contrary to truth, but the receiver may all the same use the speaker's reaction time as cue for assigning a specific pragmatic force to the utterance meaning. Conversational chronemics appears to provide the listener with means of checking the flouting of Grice's maxim of quantity by the speaker.

In view of the cross-cultural, cross-racial, and across-sex variability of auditory reaction time reported by Klineberg (1935: 139-141; Whites 146.0 milli-seconds, Indians 116.3; Negroes 130.0, Murray Island 135.7, England 141.6, Sarawak 120.7; Caucasian males/females 181/217, Chinese males/females 205/222, Japanese, males/females 205/244, Part-Hawaiian males/females 182/231), Baskett and Freedle's analysis warrants a cross-cultural follow-up study. The reaction time that in one culture may be read as a cue to the meta-information 'speaker is lying' may have different readings in another culture. This potential for cross-cultural pragmatic failure is more prone than many others to ruin contacts among persons, even whole cultures. The only basis for such an attribution may be the difference of a few milli-seconds of between-turn silences.

3.3 (Attributable) Silences as Formal Exponents of Acts

So far we have dealt with the cultural relativity of the proportions of talk vs. silence and of the lengths of silences at TRPs. In order to show the cross-cultural relativity of silences used as the formal exponents of acts, we must briefly resort to the theory of speech acts. It clearly distinguishes "what is said" from "what is done", but assumes that something must be said in order for something to be done and thus leaves no room for acts which have no verbal material as their formal exponents. The locutionary act "there is a dog!" has referential meaning and sense. In uttering that, the speaker may perform the illocutionary act of warning an addressee, and he may thus bring about the perlocutionary effect of deterring the addressee from endangering himself. Again, the assumption is that something must be said in order for something to be done. In terms of conversation, the acts are performed through turns, whereas the silences between them only help to synchronize the turns/acts, as seen above. But cannot a sudden hush in a lively exchange also function as a warning of the participants that some third party has entered the scenario? Here we will pursue the assumption that under appropriate cotextual and contextual conditions one can do something without uttering anything. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's dog is a case in point. The silence of the dog does not help to synchronize turns, but it assumes the status of a turn, it becomes a silent turn. We will, furthermore, pursue the assumption that what is done by silent turns varies across cultures.

3.3.1 Silent Communion vs. Phatic Communion

One pertinent aspect that ethnographies take issue with is Malinowski's notion of "phatic communion", i.e. the utterance of stretches of speech whose "acthood" lies only in establishing and acknowledging the social rapport between interactants. The ethnographic studies do not deny that speech may have such an interpersonal function, but they rather disclaim the unversality of the principle that humans have to converse even if they do not have anything to say, as Sapir (1949: 11, 16) and Hayakawa (1967: 87) claim. Voegelin and Harris (1945: 458) state that the Black Foot Indians do not talk for about five minutes, even when they are making a social call (cf. Samarin 1965: 117). Among the Gbeya, a sick call is transacted, and sympathy is expressed by a lugubrious mien and sitting in silence. Proxemic patterns, posture and facial expression are vehicles of the act of calling on a sick person, and words may be reduced to a minimum.

A minimal amount of chit-chat may go on between the visitors, but it does not involve the patient. (Samarin 1965: 118)

Hymes provides an even more striking example from the Wishram, one which deserves to be quoted in full.

The Wishram are exceptions to the putative universal of language use as described by Malinowski as "phatic communion", and endorsed by Sapir as a general function: the Wishram feel no need to fill silence with talk. Tolerance for long pauses was evident in my own work with linguistic informants. That talk was not mandatory is more dramatically clear by contrast to our own society in what might constitute a visit. A friend could come to one's house, sit and leave without a word being exchanged. One would later report. 'So-and-so came to see me yesterday'. That he had taken the trouble to come was communication enough. A visit need not include talk, if nothing needed saying.

(Hymes 1966: 134)

Other exceptions to the putative universal of mandatory conversation that serves "the direct aim of binding hearer to speaker by a tie of some social sentiment" (Malinowski 1923: 315) are reported by Coulmas for Japan and Finland (1981: 181), by Hostetler (1980: 374-382) and Enninger (1982: 113) for the Amish, by Key (1975: 117) for some tribes of Peru, by Scollon and Scollon (1981: 14-16) for the Athabaskan Indians, by Hunter (1982: 393) for the Hausa, by Loveday (1982, 1983, 1985) and Barnlund (1975) for Japan. In such cultures silence during encounters does not have negative readings, and it does not indicate an interactional breakdown, or the regression of the involved persons from "withs" to "copresents" and to "enemies". By contrast, in cultures where silence is anathema in spontaneous conversation, and where "someone's turn must always and exclusively be in progress" (Goffman 1963: 136), non-talk is read as 'impoliteness', 'sullenness', 'social gapping', although Emily Post (1940: 80) does not appear to fully agree with Goffman. What etically is identical material, or rather zero material, constitutes quite different emic units in different cultures. How is an L2 learner who is struck by silence to know whether or not his rapport has broken down, unless he has been taught the rules of silence obtaining in cultures?

With regard to the above Wishram example, and in modification of Cherry (1971: 12) and Goodwin (1981: 13), we suggest that in certain cultures conversation is not *the*, but *a* fundamental mode of human communication, and that in certain cultures types of interactions in which no words are exchanged are just as fundamental. At the same time, the example illustrates Goffman's tenet that conversation is but one type of focused interaction. Furthermore, it underlines Labov's view that the question "Why should anybody say anything?" (1972) is the fundamental question of sociolinguistic approaches which aim at complementing the descriptions by explanations.

This pattern of transacting a complete visiting situation appears to be a radical extension of the speaking principles applying to the Amish, the Gbeya, and Black Foot Indian events described above and following below. While among the Amish, a typical visit has at least a verbal opening and a verbal closing and some

verbal exchanges as obligatory components, among the Wishram 'doing communion' can have the formal exponent of silence extending over the complete situation of a focused interaction.

There are also cases in which silence can be the appropriate formal exponent of a rite of passage extending over days and even years, at least for some membership categories. In a chapter with the title "The silent widow" James G. Frazer (1918: 71-81) culls from the then extant anthropological literature not fewer than eleven cultures (the Kutus of the Congo, the Sihanaka in Madagascar, the Nandi of East Africa, the Nishinan Indians of California, the Kwakiutl and the Bella Coola Indians of British Columbia, the Waduman and Mudbarrra of Northern Australia, the Arunta, the Warramunga and the Deiri of Central Australia) in which extended silence is a component of the rites of passage obtaining for mourners. The periods of silence vary between four days (Bella Coola Indians) and two years (Warramunga). In most cases the principle of silence applies for widows, in a few cases also for widowers (Kwakiutl, Bella Coola). In the case of the Warramunga the principle applies not only for the dead man's widow, but also his mother, sisters, daughters, mother(s) in law, and – what is more – for all females who in the local kinship system reckon in the above categories. As a consequence, Frazer notes, it is not uncommon in a Warramunga camp to find the majority of women prohibited from speaking. While they do not converse, and therefore would not "show up" in conversation analytical data, they continue to interact and even to communicate, although in some gestural language. Here we have the rare case of a communicative community, (a) whose signaling repertoire used for the ad-hoc coding of novel content comprises linguistic and gestural varieties in complementary distribution over (temporary) membership categories, and in which code-choice signifies (b) the inclusion in one membership category rather in the other, and (c) the (non) involvement of the communicator in the activity of mourning.

Not only complete situations (in terms of Hymes) and complete rites of passage can be transacted without words, but also shorter components of such situations. This applies to cases where silence is the culturally expected exponent of an act, mostly in highly prestructured contexts such as (silent) prayer in the church service of various cultures, and the (silent) condolences of, for example, the Abbey speakers of the Ivory Coast, the Igbo speakers of Nigeria (cf. Saville-Troike 1982: 157-160) as well as in European cultures where mutual gaze and a handshake alone is acceptable. Bringeus' examples of performing an act of sympathetic magic (1975) is also a case in point. The "acthood" of silences becomes most salient in turn pairs of all kinds, if and when a second pair (part) is replaced by silence. The term "turn-pairs" is here used to comprise (a) strict adjacency pairs with one and only one expected second pair part, such as greetings and farewells, (b) adjacency pairs with a limited set of strict expectations with regard to preferred (unmarked) and

dispreferred (marked) second pair-part options such as acceptance vs. refusal following an invitation, or such more open pairs as questions and answers (Sacks *et. al.* 1974: 717), as well as (c) less tightly paired action-chains (Hall 1976: 141-167; Pommerantz 1978), "where a first part does not seem to require but rather makes apt some response or second" (Levinson 1983: 337). Where the second constituent of such pairs is replaced by silence, it has the status of a silence attributable to a specific participant because, even where an address term is not included in the first constituent, either the limited number of interactants or the content of the first constituent or a nonverbal cue (gaze, gesture) will, as a rule, isolate a relevant next speaker. Such attributable silences (cf. Sacks *et. al.* 1974; Levinson 1983: 298-300) are the prototypical instances of silent turns through which an identifiable interactant performs an act which in many cases is identifiable as an act X, Y, or Z. In intra-cultural communication where the participants share the stock of turn-pairs and, therefore, also their expectations with regard to the second pair-parts in conversation, the replacement of the latter by a silent turn may be intended and interpreted as a loaded silence, as socially marked behavior, and as a definitely dispreferred second. It should be noted that in this case the socially marked and dispreferred second-pair part "silence" is, however, not linguistically marked in the sense that it has additional morphological material, which is a characteristic of verbalized dispreferred seconds in polite interactions. In this case the socially marked, i.e. dispreferred, second has rather a zero-exponent which — because of its very phonological, morphological and semantic emptiness — has the pragmatic force of adversely affecting a cooperative endeavor in the extreme. Conversational face-work is reduced to its absolute material minimum by substituting expected verbalized second pair-parts by silent turns (for exceptions, above all intercultural communication cf. below).

In those inter-cultural interactions in which turn sequence patterns of the interactants clash, the decoder may interpret a silence in what s/he assumes to be a second pair-part slot as an attributable silence and thus as the formal exponent of a socially marked act, while the other participant only follows the unmarked pattern of his culture which happens to have fewer constituents than the decoder expects. Let us illustrate this potential for cross-cultural pragmatic failure by a few examples from cross-cultural greeting patterns.

Greetings and farewell-pairs are considered to be next to universal, and to vary mainly with regard to the degree of their elaboration. In this respect, greetings in Arabic, Indonesian and Igbo, for example, are more elaborate than greetings in English (cf. Saville-Troike 1982: 13). In cultures where greetings are paired by an obligatory conversational rule, such as the European, the substitution of the second pair-part by silence is socially marked communicative behavior and thus carries a high information load on the relationship level of interactants.

Heeschen *et. al.* (1980: 152-153) report an encounter among the Eipo of West New Guinea, in which – after an initial eyebrow movement establishing contact – the expected greeting and politeness formulae such as "You are coming" were not exchanged, and in which further eye contact was avoided and a distance of at least three meters was kept during some minutes. Heeschen, *et. al.*, conclude:

From the standpoint of ethology the silence and ongoing absence of communication can be interpreted as hostility, arising when a stranger or another party penetrates another's territory (...) silence conceals the efforts to suppress or to control feelings of hostility. (Heeschen 1980: 152-153)

This tension in the subsequent phase was released either by humorous remarks, nonverbal communication such as eye contact and proxemic shifts, the exchange of gifts, the sharing of cigars and sugar canes or a combination of these. With regard to the later phases of the interactional opening, the authors conclude: "In our view this exchange is the true equivalent of the Western type of greeting and politeness formulae" (*ibid.*). Even where verbal greetings exist in the speaking economy, they may be less important than nonverbal communication or instrumental interaction for signifying a rapport.

The replacement of (part of) the verbal or kinesic greeting pair by silence appears to be even interpretable across cultures as socially marked behavior signaling resentment against the intrusion of one's territory. Holzach (1980: 27, 41, 47 and *passim*) reports several instances of deleted (second pair-parts of) greetings in his, i.e. the outsider's initial encounter with the Hutterites: "Auch hier wie im Kuhstall, kein Händedruck, kein Willkommensgruß, nur Schweigen und skeptische Blicke" (1980: 41).

Likewise, the concept of territoriality may serve to understand the rare instances in which well-acquainted Amish delete the normally expected greeting and politeness formulae such as "Hi. Wie bischt?" (probably a loan rendition of American English "How are you?"). Our field-protocol contains several entries which lead to the conclusion that an Amish person on seeing another Amish may delete the knock on the door, enter, offer no salute, sit down and either be silent for a while or immediately proceed to the business-phase of interaction. The fact that Amish may enter Amish homes even in the absence of the host (as experienced by the author on occasion of one of the visits described above) underlines the assumption that in this culture one dimension of the territoriality principle appears to be different from that of US mainstream culture. It applies not to a single home, but rather communally to "all our homes" even if they lie in different states, and even if guest and host have not met for years. Obviously, the replacement of a normally expected greeting formula by silence is not in all cultures read as the formal exponent of an act of hostility. Absent greetings may have

completely different, and even contrasting readings depending on the given interpretation and application of the territoriality principle. In turn, the particular manifestation of the territoriality principle may change the strict adjacency pair associated by obligatory rules to a less tightly paired pattern with preferred and dispreferred options.

To the outsider, such a differential usage of greeting pairs shared by his and the others' culture may pose graver cross-cultural communication problems than the interaction with cultures where the repertoires themselves are different. In about 1880, White reported for the Apache: "they seem to have no form of salute or greeting — when meeting or taking leave of each other" (cf. Saville-Troike 1982: 6). He illustrated this generalization by a situation in which one Apache, after an absence of several months, returned to his dwelling.

In this instance the Indian simply rode up to his little brush dwelling and dismounted. One of his wives took charge of the horse. (He) approached the fire alongside of his hut where his family were collected without exchanging a word with any of them — not even to the wife who had taken the horse. There he stood motionless and speechless for some ten or fifteen minutes when at last he took a seat on the ground and engaged in ordinary conversation without having observed any form of greeting.

(cf. Saville-Troike 1982: 7)

The same pattern is described for the Apache of Arizona by Basso in 1972, in which case the participants were children returning to their parents after a term in boarding school.

As the latter (children; W.E.) disembark (from the bus; W.E.) and locate their parents in the crowd, one anticipates a flurry of verbal greetings. Typically, however, there are few or none at all. Indeed it is not unusual for parents and child to go without speaking for as long as fifteen minutes. When silence is broken, it is almost always the child who breaks it.

(Basso 1972: 74-75).

These cases throw some doubt on the universality of verbal greetings in the interactional opening. Verbal greeting formulae may be universal, if this means to say that every culture has such formulae in its repertoire; however, their use and their deletion or substitution by silence or nonverbal activities appears neither to be universal, nor to be governed by categorial, but rather by context-sensitive rules, both across cultures and within one and the same culture. For intra-cultural variability, the Older Order Amish greeting patterns are a case in point. Besides the patterns mentioned above, there is at least a third. For the entry passage to the Old Order Amish church service, Enninger and Raith (1982: 15) report that a handshake and a fleeting gaze are obligatory, and that a mumbled greeting is optional. It is this intra-cultural variability of the formal

exponents of the greeting act (verbal, kinesic, gaze, proxemic, silence) which makes behaving appropriately so difficult even for the well-intentioned outsider. How is he to know when he is expected to do something by saying nothing? Germans may be baffled by the absence of a verbal pair sequence before meals in other cultures. The pair "Guten Appetit!" plus "Danke!" has, for example, no equivalent in Britain or the US.

Mackey (1968: 574) provides an example of adjacency sequences which in the routine patterns of some cultures have just a two-turn structure, while in others the second pair-part of the first pair is at the same time the first part of another second, so that a three-turn sequence, or a "double" pair emerges.

	English Counterpart	German Model	English Replica
X	Here's a seat	Bitte	Please
Y	Thanks!	Danke!	Thanks!
X	(silence)	Bitte.	Please.

While a person that has acquired the English discourse pattern may in the German context not be able to assign pragmatic force to the semantically clear third part, a person that has acquired the German discourse pattern may in an English context be disappointed at the expected third part being withheld. That is, s/he may assign a reading to what s/he considers to be a significant silence, whereas the English interactant did not mean anything, but only followed her/his two-constituent routine.

(NOTE: It is debatable whether the silent pair part in Mackey's example represents the general usage, or only that of Canada. Several native speakers of English insisted that in their respective home contexts they might give and receive a "You're welcome!" instead. Conversely, to many Germans the second "Bitte" appears to be optional.)

Heeschen *et. al.* (1980: 151) report for the Eipo of New Guinea that "There is no verbal equivalent to our 'thank you' in Eipo language". From the context one can infer that also the offer is not accompanied by an equivalent of the German "Bitte". While the absence of such a pair poses no problem in intra-cultural contexts, in inter-cultural interactions what is normal absence to the Eipo may be given a socially loaded reading by the outsider. The case of the Amish is slightly different. Their trilingual repertoire contains a variety of lexical items which are semantic equivalents of "please" and "thank you", yet their use is subject to rigid constraints. In some situations, as for example, when passing food around at a meal, outsiders expect the equivalent of a "please: thank you" pair, which, however, is never uttered. Here, like in many other routine-situations, silence is the socially unmarked behavior.

Question-answer pairs are less tightly prestructured, insofar as the second pair-part can be taken from a limited set of options. With regard to the WH-question-and-answer pair, the near-universality of Radio Erivan jokes attest to the near-universality of the principle of the morphological markedness of the socially marked dispreferred second pair-part, while the Japanese culture is notorious for providing the exceptions to the rule. Levinson (1983: 333) states that preferred seconds are linguistically unmarked insofar as they tend to have less morphological material, whereas dispreferred seconds are linguistically unmarked insofar as they tend to have less morphological material, whereas dispreferred seconds are linguistically marked insofar as they tend to have more material such as delays, announcement of dispreferreds like *Uh* and *Well*, token agreements before disagreements, appreciators, apologies, qualifiers (*I don't know, for sure (...)* *but*), restarts, self-editing, accounts, declining component (cf. Levinson 1983: 334). Some Radio Erivan jokes exploit this pattern systematically.

Question to Radio Erivan: Is it true that comrade cosmonaut Gagarin won a car at a charity banquet in Moscow? Radio Erivan answers: In principle yes. Yet we have to point out that it was not the cosmonaut Gagarin, but the teacher Gagarin. Furthermore, it was not in Moscow but in Kiev, and it did not happen at a charity banquet but at a party congress. Finally, it was not a car that he won, but a bicycle that was stolen from him.

According to the Japanese discourse system, however, dispreferred seconds such as declines or refusals do not always take an elaborate formal exponent — as predicted by the above assumptions concerning the morphological markedness of dispreferreds — but rather, and in order to avoid the face-endangering and the therefore dispreferred *no*, just silence is used.

One would prefer to be silent than utter words such as 'no' or 'I disagree'. The avoidance of such open and bald negative expressions is rooted in the fear that it might disrupt the harmony and order of the group.

(Nakane 1970: 35)

The third kind of conversational sequences to be mentioned here are action-chains. The cross-cultural decoding of the verbal zeros occurring in such chains is complicated by the fact that certain acts such as inappropriate questions, indecent remarks, insults, invectives in some cultures or subcultures must obligatory be responded to by verbal correction, verbal retaliation (as for example the "raps and caps" in "playing the dozens" in the Black Ghetto (Abrahams 1964, Kochman 1969)), or the verbal duelling of Turkish teenage boys (Dundes/Leach/Özök 1972), or verbal reproach, while the speaking principles of other cultures, such as the Amish, make silence the mandatory response. Among the Apache, there is a first pair part "Getting cussed out", in which an individual, angered and enraged, shouts

insults and criticisms at another, irrespective of whether the addressee is the source of the speaker's anger or not. "But whether they (the addressees; W.E.) are innocent or not, their response to the situation is the same. They refrain from speech" (Basso 1972: 76). In still other cultures, like my own, both verbal retaliation and silent disdain are available as response parts of such action chains. Their alternative use appears to depend on the individual speaker's strategy. Both across cultures and across sub-cultures, such contrastive exponents of seconds in action-chains are open to misinterpretation and lead to false attributions, although from an internal perspective the "verbose" and the silent respondents do what makes sense in their behavioral schemas and the value systems governing them.

3.3.2 Verbal Transactions vs. Silent Transactions

It is generally assumed that the prototypical function of (attributable) silence is the relationship level of interaction. The many examples quoted above support this view. However, there are a few cases in which attributable silences function as the formal exponents of transactions.

As the above Japanese example in which the dispreferred "No" is replaced by silence shows, the act of negation can have a zero-exponent in some cultures. In the same (Japanese) culture a silent second can also have the meaning of 'affirmation'. With reference to Harumi Williams, Saville-Troike (1982: 159) reports the following pattern: a young Japanese male adult intending to propose holds the hand (optional) of a young female adult, and, looking at her, says "Please, marry me". The female, with head down, remains silent and thus accepts, i.e. performs the preferred second with the least possible morphological material – in accordance with the prediction that the preferreds have less morphological material than the dispreferreds. In the Japanese conversational matrix obtaining for this encounter, the expected uptake is silence, and it is the appropriate ratification of the proposal.

In this area of "silent transactions of business" – in contrast to the silent management of the interpersonal level – there are fewer answers available than burning questions. Among the potential questions are: How much silence on the part of the witness is tolerated (except for certain legal provisions) before it counts as the act of 'contempt of court'? What are the contextualization cues for the silence of defendants in political trials – meant as a rejection of the proceedings – to be interpreted as an admission of guilt (cf. Levinson 1983: 321)? Under what conditions does attributable silence count as a 'silent declaration of intent' of the German "Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch"? According to Heinrich (Palandt und Bearbeiter 1982: 76-78), mere silence (in the absence of concludent action) does not count as a declared

fact, neither as consent nor dissent. Exceptions are (a) if silence has been agreed upon to count as a sign; if a superior present has abnegated his inferior's declaration, (b) if the silent person is under obligation to declare his will to the contrary (*qui tacet consentire videtur, ubi loqui debuit atque potuit*) (c) if silence is subject to legal stipulation: a request for permission is, as a rule, not granted by silence; in certain cases (§§ 416 II, 2, 49652, 1943, HGB 362 I, 377 II) silence as a response to a request for permission counts as a permission. In sum: silences are worthy of being treated from the perspective of their pragmatic force in legal contexts, yet the field is still wide open for cross-cultural analyses. These questions need to be answered for various cultures separately before the question of their potential for cross-cultural pragmatic failure can be raised.

4. CONCLUSION: The Need for Contrastive Pragmatics

On the basis of their analysis of politeness phenomena, Brown and Levinson (1978) have convincingly shown how universal motives and reasoning underlie politeness behavior, and have convincingly rebutted "the once-fashionable doctrine of cultural relativity in the field of interaction" (1978: 61). In view of their well-documented argument, it appears to be hazardous to take a relativistic stance and to compare interactional surface phenomena across cultures and to delineate areas of potential cross-cultural failure, much in the fashion of the once fashionable paradigm of structure-oriented contrastive linguistics. At first glance it seems that even Carl James, an outstanding figure of contrastive linguistics joined this view:

The same (universality precludes contrastivity; W.E.) must be said of the generalist analogue to technical rhetoric, communicative competence, the proper study of which is in the province of Linguistic Pragmatics: As I understand the term, from my reading of Stalnaker (1972) and of Lakoff (1976) such things as Grice's (1967) conversational maxims and Lakoff's rule of politeness, are very probably universal, so there will be no 'contrastive pragmatics' to occupy us in the near future. (James 1981: 59-60)

In a subsequent passage, however, James seems to find room for contrastive pragmatics, even if he accepts its restriction to surface phenomena:

Yet, as we have already seen, the communication system *per se* 'as a kind of cognitive deep structure' does not need to be taught, since it is already acquired knowledge in adult generalists and in scientists who know how to be scientists in the L1. What do need to be taught therefore, are the structural or formal resources that realise communicative acts in the L2. Where some of these formal resources are isomorphic with those of the L1 they will not have to be taught either, since as contrastive analysts have

long insisted, they can be transferred from the L1 to L2. The task at hand is to ascertain which formal resources can be allowed to be transferred, and the answer will be: only those which are both isomorphic and have the same semantic, rhetorical and pragmatic values as the L2 form with which they are matched. It seems that the communicative competence teaching movement is irrationally eclectic in recognising learner's right to transfer his underlying systems of communication, but not their formal realizations, to the L2; even though the feasibility of their transfer within the L2, from generalist to specialist use, is endorsed by a writer like Widdowson.

(James 1981: 60-61)

Even if it were only perceptible surface phenomena which mediate universal and imperceptible deep-processes, and that in culturally divergent ways, a systematic contrastive analysis of the pragmatics of L1 and L2 is mandatory. A stronger point may be made from the perspective of the ethnography of communication. In 1966 Hymes stated:

My contention is that people who enact different cultures do to some extent experience different communicative systems, but not merely the same natural communicative condition with different customs affixed. Cultural values are in part constitutive of linguistic reality. (Hymes 1966: 116)

If there are cultures whose speaking systems do not contain the act of 'thank you' (cf. above) or the speech act of 'swearing an oath' (the OOA) and in which "our" performative speech act of 'baptizing' is actually separated into an act of 'baptizing an adult applicant into the church' and an act of 'performative nomination' at birth (as the OOA) there is reason to assume that the differences between the speaking systems of cultures may be more than but skin-deep. The universally available sign-material called "silence" which is homophonous across cultures, might be a good testing ground for the assumption that different speaking systems do not represent one universal pragmatic system in different surfaces, but that different speaking systems are enactments of distinct cultural deep levels. At the same time the universally available sign-material called "silence", which is "homophonous" across cultures warrants more thorough analyses starting from either the universal or the different surface level assumptions, because these nothings are particularly treacherous sign "material" because such nothings are often not even suspected of being sign carriers, and if so, not expected to vary across cultures, neither semantically, nor pragmatically.

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