

PRAGMATICS OF SILENCE AND PAUSE IN ENGLISH AND RUSSIAN DISCOURSE

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Abstract: Communication is not solely about words and utterances; it also involves the strategic use of silence and pauses. These elements, though non-verbal, hold significant meaning and contribute to the flow of conversation in profound ways. Silence and pause can indicate a range of social functions, such as showing agreement or disagreement, signaling contemplation, or indicating power dynamics between speakers. However, the role of silence and pause can differ depending on cultural contexts and linguistic norms. The present article explores how silence and pause are used in communication, with a focus on English and Russian languages, which exhibit unique patterns in terms of these non-verbal communicative strategies.

Key words: silence, pause, pragmatics, non-verbal elements, non-verbal communication, social functions

The function of silence and pause can vary greatly between cultures and languages. In both English and Russian, silence carries important pragmatic functions, but it is interpreted and employed differently in specific contexts.

In English-speaking cultures, silence is often viewed with caution, especially in casual conversation. Long pauses can be perceived as awkward or uncomfortable, as they may be interpreted as a lack of interest, uncertainty, or an indication of an unresolved topic. In social interactions, English speakers may feel the need to "fill" silence with conversational fillers, such as "um," "uh," or "you know," to keep the interaction flowing smoothly and avoid uncomfortable pauses. Silence in English has the following common functions:

1. Hesitation or Uncertainty. Silence can indicate hesitation or uncertainty in conversations, especially when speakers are unsure of what to say next. A pause before

answering a question or offering an opinion might signal the speaker's need to think or process the information before responding. For instance, if someone asks, "What do you think of this proposal?" and there is a noticeable pause, it may suggest that the speaker is unsure or weighing the options.

2. Signaling Agreement or Understanding. English speakers often use silence to acknowledge that they are following the conversation or to show that they do not feel the need to provide additional commentary.

3. Dramatic Effect or Emphasis. Silence can also be used for emphasis in English. In public speaking, storytelling, or emotional expression, speakers may intentionally pause before delivering a critical piece of information or to build anticipation. For example, a speaker might say, "This is the moment we've been waiting for..." followed by a pause, to increase the impact of the upcoming announcement.

4. Emotional Signaling. Silence is often used to convey emotions, especially in difficult or sensitive discussions. For example, a speaker might remain silent after a tragic statement to give others time to process the information.

In Russian culture, silence is less likely to be interpreted as awkward or uncomfortable. Instead, it is often viewed as a sign of maturity, respect, and self-control. This contrasts sharply with the English preference for smooth, uninterrupted conversation. Prolonged silences in Russian discourse are not seen as socially awkward; rather, they are viewed as appropriate in certain contexts, particularly when dealing with heavy or serious subjects. While English speakers may rush to fill pauses, Russian speakers may embrace silence and allow it to convey certain meaning:

1. Respect and Deference. Silence in Russian often signifies respect for the speaker and the subject matter. In formal or hierarchical contexts, silence is a way of showing that the listener is attentively considering what has been said and is giving due regard to the speaker's authority or status.

2. Emotional Control. Silence is seen as a way of containing emotions rather than expressing them verbally. It can indicate sadness, anger, or disapproval without explicitly stating it. In this context,

3. Strategic Silence in Conversation. Silence is often used as a deliberate conversational tool in Russian discourse. Speakers may pause to assert control in a conversation, to provoke thought, or to create a sense of authority. Silence can be a way of allowing space for the listener to reflect on what has been said. In negotiations or discussions, a Russian speaker may use silence to let the other party speak first or to put pressure on them to fill the silence with some additional information.

4. Intellectual Reflection. Silence is often used as a means of intellectual reflection. In more serious conversations, pauses are often employed while speakers organize their thoughts or weigh their responses carefully. This type of silence is viewed as an important part of thoughtful discourse, particularly when discussing complex or sensitive topics.

To conclude, silence can be considered as a tool with profound pragmatic effects in conversation, whose role varies across cultures and languages, shaping the flow of discourse and influencing social relationships.

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