

Communicative Functions and Meanings of Silence: An Analysis of Cross-Cultural Views

Wong Ngan Ling

Introduction

Generally, verbal communication plays a major role in determining responses in interpersonal communication situations. Those who are able to express their feelings fluently in words seem to be much admired and well-accepted, especially in Western and American countries. While aware of the obvious benefit of communicating with words, many of us are rarely sensitive to the absence of words and usually equate silence with a lack of communication. There are many visual nonverbal cues that help silence to function: body movements, such as a shrug of the shoulders and a clenched fist; and changes of facial expressions, such as frowning. However, expressionless silence can still be considered a paramount factor in many communicative situations

The meaningful silence discussed here is distinguished from the cases in which an individual's refraining from speaking does not carry any meaning. Johannesen (1974) argues that as with any meaningful silence, we have to assume that some thought processes are involved. To elaborate this idea, Jaworski (1993) indicates that silence (about something) occurs and is perceived as significant and meaningful when talk (about something) is expected by the hearer and/or intentionally withheld by the speaker. Indeed, a number of cross-cultural differences in the use and

valuation of silence have been explored. For example, Oliver (1971) noted in his substantial study of Eastern rhetoric, “ In the ancient Orient [...] silence was valued rather than feared [...] silence in Asia has commonly been entirely acceptable, whereas in the West silence has generally been considered socially disagreeable.” Likewise, according to Lebra (1987), in Japanese society, talking is denigrated as an excuse for procrastinating, and the decisive action is characterized by silence. Thus a man of few words is trusted more than a man of many words. Generally, it seems that the Japanese not only use silence as a tool to communicate, but also consider silence more persuasive and convincing than words. In other words, we need also to be aware of the multitude of meanings and functions that are served by interactive silence and its prevalence and predominance in different cultural contexts and in all of life’s interpersonal communicative situations

In writing this paper, study of the theoretical texts pertaining to silence have been examined. The major ones are J. V. Jensen’s communicative functions of silence, T. J. Bruneau’s discussion of the forms and functions of communicative silence, Lebra’s work on the cultural significance of silence in Japanese communication and A. Jaworski’s analysis of pragmatic silence.

This paper aims to provide some clues on how silence actually plays a communicative role in our daily life, how often people use silence to communicate with each other, and how it works in different areas of human communication in various cross-cultural contexts. In addition, it is to find out what the cultural differences in attitudes are concerning silence in communication. As cultural attitude plays a marked role in interpreting and assessing what has been said and been left unsaid, misjudging someone’s use of silence can take place in many contexts and on many levels. Misunderstanding based on the differences between people in their use or understanding particular concepts (for example, the degree of tolerance of silence) could cause unwanted communication breakdown. To avoid these types of misinterpretation, or to enhance better interpersonal

and intercultural communication, while improving the quality of communication, a greater awareness of the multitude of silence meanings and serious consideration of the varied communicative functions in various social-cultural contexts should be promoted. By decoding the positive facilitative uses or negative-inhibitive functions played by silence in different cultural contexts, not only could someone's silence be interpreted more correctly in various situations, which would help to minimize misunderstanding, but also a better mutual understanding among different cultures could be promoted, assisting smoother inter-cultural communication between Japan and other countries, perhaps particularly those of the West.

The focus of this paper is on the functions and meanings played by silence in different social contexts across a sample of 82 British, 54 Japanese and 30 other respondents (see samples details at page 4) in a questionnaire survey aimed at attaining a broader viewpoint and greater awareness of silence in interpersonal communication. The main objective of this research is to discover whether in a different cultural context people use silence as a means of conveying messages, and if this is correct, what the functions of silence are, and to what extent and in what way they are different or similar across cultures. This could be achieved by focusing on a European society, specifically the British, which shares a certain insularity as an 'island' nation, with Japan. Are the communicative functions performed by silence unique to each culture? Does the meaning of silence change when the situations vary? Answering such questions is another objective of this survey.

The survey is divided into four areas. The first part is designed to extract information on how different and how often people use nonverbal communication to express themselves in their daily life, in order to determine whether there is any degree of differences in accepting and valuing silence as a tool of communication, particularly between the British and the Japanese. The second part aims to investigate whether there is any expressive variation in formal and informal situations. It

includes an evaluation of formal and informal situations where someone may refuse to give any opinions in order to determine the reasons for which silence may be kept in various contexts. From there the functions of silence could be brought to light. The third part examines how different people express themselves when strong emotions (for instance, sadness, anger, fear or joy) well up. Will they share their emotions with someone or suppress them by saying nothing? The final part aims to discover what silence means and how it functions in close relationships where intimacy changes in different social-cultural contexts.

For this paper, the focus and discussion will be concentrated mainly on the first part and the second.

Research method

The questionnaire survey was chosen to elicit information from respondents with a wide range of cultural backgrounds. Multiple-choice questions and open-ended question were combined in this survey to allow respondents to write what they wished and to minimize the loss of information from respondents. In addition, 'other' (requiring greater specificity) columns were placed amongst the various multiple-choice questions to catch additional responses, which might occasionally be encountered.

For this paper, SPSS method is used for data analysis.

Sampling

This questionnaire survey was administered to 166 men and women, aged 16 to 80, who inhabit, study in or are visiting Bristol, University of Bristol and University of Essex.

1. 82 British
2. 54 Japanese
3. 30 other speakers ('Others' for analysis and discussion): 9 German, 2 Austrian, 7 North American (USA and Canada), 2 Italian, 1 Latvian, 1 Romanian, 1 Turkish, 1 Australian, 1 Mexican, 5 Asian (China, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Korea)

(Samples from other, continental countries were taken as a comparative group to aid comparison between British and Japanese)

Samples details

Table A Group (age)	British		Others		Japanese		Total
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Group 1 (20 or under)	10	11	1	5	0	4	31
Group 2 (21-30)	10	12	8	7	10	24	71
Group 3 (31-50)	11	11	3	5	6	8	44
Group 4 (51 and above)	10	7	0	1	0	2	20
Sub-total	41	41	12	18	16	38	166
Total	82		30		54		166

There are, admittedly, some limitations in comparing British in Britain with Japanese in Britain; considering the questions of gender, age, and class, the two groups are not comparably representative.

Part one

In this section, three questions were asked to determine and compare the extent to which silence is accepted and valued, particularly with regards to the British and the Japanese.

1 How often do people in your country use non-verbal expression to express themselves in their daily life? (Only 'very often' and 'often' results are taken into account.)

Very often & often	Facial expression (grimace of disgust, frowning, etc.	Body gesture (shrug of shoulders, tilt of heads, etc.	Touching (hugging, kissing, patting on the shoulders, etc.	Saying nothing
British	86%	72%	20%	19%
Others	67%	63%	23%	20%
Japanese	52%	15%	2%	81%

As can be seen from the table, British people followed by Others believed people in their own country use facial expression and bodily gesture frequently, but touching and saying nothing less often, to express themselves. In contrast, the Japanese believed their compatriots have a

strong tendency to use silence as a means to communicate, but less body gesture and almost no touching to express themselves in their daily life.

1.2 It is more effective to use action rather than words

Action	True	Partially true	Not true
British	12%	62%	26%
Others	20%	53%	27%
Japanese	33%	48%	19%

One third of the Japanese, compared to approximately one out of ten of the British and two out of ten of the Others agree with this statement. Based on the open question and response given by the respondents, the following table represents a further analysis (by number of persons rather than percentage), which was done to determine why such an answer was chosen. The answers were placed in 5 categories as below.

1.2.1 A further analysis on 'actions are more effective than words'

Reasons	British No. of persons / 65 persons	Others No. of persons /24 persons	Japanese No. of persons /43 persons
1.Action more effective	13	8	18
2.Action needs to be backed-up by word	10	1	5
3. Need both	31	10	12
4.Action less effective	2	3	1
5.Words more effective than action	12	2	7

- 1 = action is more effective, respected/action needs more effort/ people lie with words/ sometimes words are not enough/can say anything with word
- 2 = action need to be back-up by words/action is more appropriate but can bring misunderstanding
- 3 = need both/depends on the situations, circumstances
- 4 = action lead to severe misunderstanding/anger hinder people from talking
- 5 = words are more understandable, more effective/talk then action/actions are good way of backing up words discuss and negotiate should always precede action/needs to explain why you do things

1.3 There is a proverb: ‘Silence is golden, speech is silver. How true is this in your country?’

Silence is golden, speech is silver	British	Others	Japanese
Silence is golden	20%	21%	40%
Both are needed	19%	32%	30%
Speech is golden	43%	43%	20%
Traditionally true but less applicable today	18%	4%	10%

The Japanese group demonstrates the highest percentage of believing people in their country agree with the proverb ‘Silence is golden’, while the British show the strongest agreement with ‘Speech is golden’. As for the Others, they seem more ready to deny than agree with the above statement. Clearly, however, some of the British and Japanese agree that ‘Silence is golden, speech is silver’ as traditionally true, though less applicable today.

1.4 Discussion

The results of the first section can be summarized as follows. First, silence is one of the ways that people used to express themselves in their daily lives. Saying nothing as a form of self-expression is particularly prevalent amongst Japanese. Also consistent with expectations, British and Others think that as a whole, they are verbally expressive, while the Japanese demonstrate the opposite. Turning the focus to actions speaking louder than words, many of the British suggest that both words and actions are needed to communicate. The reasons given (‘action needs to be backed-up by words’ and ‘talk first act later’), suggest British and Others see words and actions as complementary rather than putting weight on actions alone.

More importantly, when it comes to preferentially valuing either speech or silence, as expected, the difference between the British (who opted for speech) and, the Japanese (who opted for silence) is quite clear. It should also be noted that some of the British are in agreement that this proverb ‘Silence is golden, speech is silver’ is traditionally true but its use is less

applicable nowadays. What has caused the apparent British shift towards valuing silence is another intriguing topic that needs to be explored.

Part two

This section is designed to investigate whether there are any variations in expression in formal and informal situations. It also includes an evaluation of formal and informal situations where someone may refuse to give any opinion, in order to elicit the reasons for which silence may be kept. From this the functions of silence in different cultural contexts could be brought to light. At the same time, the differences and similarities (in the use of silence as a communicative tool) by people from different cultural backgrounds could be examined.

2.1 In what situation do you think direct and open disagreement should be avoided or allowed?

Allowed	British	Others	Japanese
Formal situation	66%	53%	52%
Informal situation	79%	77%	66%
Among peers/ friends	88%	97%	65%
Closely related family, partner	92%	97%	91%

Generally, when the situations change from formal to informal, each group displays a significantly increasing tendency to allow open disagreement. The British show the steadiest rise, and the Others a marked tendency to allow open disagreement among friends, while the Japanese would be more careful in giving their opinions in informal situations, even among friends. Nevertheless, all of the groups tend to be more direct, more open when the intimacy of the relationship increases.

The meaning of silence

The nonverbal meanings and functions are differentiated by the unit of analysis. Meanings refer to the interpretations of messages, while functions refer to the goal and outcomes of interactions. Each provides a

useful system for understanding nonverbal behavior because they are potentially grounded in theoretical explanations of nonverbal communication such as systems theory, interactionism, and cognitivism.

For the following analysis, the meanings of silence are divided into three sections, i.e., positive, negative, and neutral pertaining to interpersonal communicative situations.

Positive silence relates to someone who uses silence as a tool of communication to promote, to solidify or to maintain the existing relationship.

Negative silence involves isolating, ignoring, disagreeing etc which would destroy or melt away the existing good will of interaction.

Neutral silence is kept when both the negative and positive value of silence exist. Sometimes, this type of silence demonstrates not much of emotional expression e.g. to hurt or to heal a relationship but more to convey a period of thoughtfulness.

No silence means someone would not keep quiet in formal or informal situations

2.2 Silence can mean many things. Do you use silence to convey to others what you are feeling or thinking? If yes, please describe the situation:

- 1. Formal situation
- 2. Informal situation

2.2.1 Silence in formal situations

Silence in formal situations	Positive	Negative	Neutral	No silence
British	12%	30%	19%	38%
	61% silence			
Others	21%	35%	24%	21%
	79% silence			
Japanese	29%	31%	29%	12%
	88% silence			

One of the important points that can be noticed from the above table is, all the three groups of people clearly had their experience of using silence to convey their feelings and thoughts in formal situations. It is clear however

that more than one third of the people in each group kept silence with a negative intent. While silence in formal situations carried more negative connotations for the Others and British respondents, the perception of silence is more evenly distributed among positive, negative and neutral meanings for the Japanese. In other words, for the Japanese respondents, silence carries a positive or a neutral meaning more commonly than for the other two groups. It is important to consider the percentage in the 'no silence' category, where the British people show the least tendency to keep quiet in formal situations. As expected, the Japanese produced the lowest figure in this category. The following observations were extracted from the responses.

2.2.1.1 Typical meaning of silence in formal situations according to groups

Positive

The British and Others

1. as a form of respect
2. to avoid confrontation/as a refusal in case of really giving offense/to imply no comment/to show no objection on issue
3. to create concentration and dignity/only as a result of the want of being polite and well-mannered

The Japanese

1. consent/agreement
2. to give someone time to think, to persuade someone to change his or her mind
3. becoming tuned *to* someone else's ideas
4. to show that I want to be asked, or nominated or designated to speak
5. to give a good impression to someone (e.g. seniors)

Negative

The British and Others

1. to show disapproval/disagreement on an issue, ignorance of an issue or question, if hostility is apparent in the other party, if the other person becomes overwrought/angry/stubborn
2. indicates a lack of enthusiasm, shyness, grief (bad news), when it is not appropriate to voice feelings of displeasure, giving up, showing disappointment
3. to avoid getting involved in talking on a sensitive issue/discomfort with the topic under discussion

The Japanese

1. when someone is highly offended, so there is no point in saying anything to them
2. to show anger, objection/when someone digressed from the main subject
3. when my point of view is against the general opinion

Neutral

The British and Others

1. to show that I am listening/I am taking time to think
2. respect, hesitation, displeasure, contentment, sadness, etc./sometimes agreement but other times disagreement

The Japanese

1. neither acceptance nor refusal; it is up to the others to guess what I am thinking
2. usually don't give any opinion in public
3. when I need time to think about an issue

2.2.2 Discussion

In formal situations, on the positive side, the silence the British and Others respondents keep could be a way of showing respect, avoiding confrontation or causing hurt. At the same time, for those who wish to impress someone, silence could indicate politeness by keeping quiet in formal situations. On the other hand, amongst the Japanese, silence means consent or adjustment to the ideas of others. Sometimes silence is thought of as a form of power to persuade someone to change his or her mind. More interestingly, silence could mean that someone wants to be nominated to speak in a formal situation (e.g. 'to show that I want to be asked, or nominated or designated to speak')

On the negative side, all of the groups more or less agree that silence is frequently used as a form of emotional expression, showing indifference, lack of enthusiasm, avoidance of talking about something sensitive or offensive. Nonetheless, it must be noted that the Japanese might keep quiet when they think their opinions are against a generally held opinion. There is not so much difference shown across the groups when it comes to neutral silence. It often means a period of thought or listening or a mixture of positive and negative positions (e.g. agree and disagree with something being discussed.)

2.2.3 Silence in informal situation

Silence in informal situations	Positive	Negative	Neutral	No silence
British	13%	55%	15%	17%
	83% silence			
Others	21%	50%	14%	14%
	85% silence			
Japanese	14%	62%	20%	4%
	96% silence			

Two striking aspects noted when the situation changes from formal to informal are that people become quieter, and that the number of those opting for negative silence increases markedly. Amongst Japanese respondents, the incidence of negative silence doubles, while that of positive silence is halved. For the British and Others respondents, positive meanings remain unchanged even as the situation changes to a less formal one. However, the neutral silence shows a slight drop across the groups.

2.2.3.1 Typical meaning of silence in informal situations according to groups

Positive

The British and Others

1. sometimes if a truthful answer can be hurtful/where to speak would exacerbate the situation
2. if too much talking would be out of place(e.g. when somebody is upset it may be better to stay quiet)
3. to create a meaningful pause to allow others to consider things
4. I am comfortable in an other's presence(i.e. no need for polite conversation – I am able to relax)

The Japanese

1. consent/agreement/I feel content
2. I think that it is more effective to keep quiet than to speak out
3. I do not want to spoil the atmosphere of certain occasions with friends

Negative

The British and Others

1. to show disapproval/disagreement/anger at someone showing a need of attention
2. lack of enthusiasm, shyness, grief (bad news), displeasure when it is not appropriate to voice feelings, resignation, tiredness, dissatisfaction, distress, disappointment

3. as a weapon in quarrel, discomfort with the topic of discussion

The Japanese

1. mostly to show anger
2. my point of view is at odds with the general opinion
3. alerting someone that he or she is behaving impolitely

Neutral

The British and Others

1. to show that I am listening/I am thinking carefully/when someone is annoying me
2. with people who know me well enough/it depends on who I am with
3. respect, hesitation, displeasure, contentment, sadness etc./sometimes agreement but sometimes disagreement

The Japanese

1. neither acceptance nor refusal; it is up to the others to guess what I am thinking
2. if I am deeply moved or overwhelmed, I would be silent because I cannot find appropriate words to say anything or I expect others to understand my deep feeling or emotion
3. when the topic is serious and requires serious treatment I would try to think before saying anything

2.2.4 Discussion

When the situation becomes less formal, the positive silence of the British and Others is used to avoid hurting someone, to prevent exacerbating an existing situation or to give someone time to think. The most important point distinguishing the groups informal situations is that for the British and Others respondents, silence gives a message of comfort and relaxation in others' presence (e.g. I am comfortable in an other's presence i.e. no need for polite conversation – I am able to relax), while for the Japanese to keep quiet is to solidify the existing situation or friendship (e.g. I do not want to spoil the atmosphere of certain occasions with friends). The meaning of negative silence shows little variation across the groups other than showing strong emotion, disagreement, distress, etc. To the Japanese, however, silence contains the power to warn someone of impoliteness in informal situations. The neutral silence serves more to convey thoughtfulness or to evaluate whether to keep quiet or speak up. It depends on the intimacy of the relationship with the person one is with.

2.2.5 No silence

While discussing the meanings of silence, one essential point that should not be left out of the investigation is the meaning of *no* silence.

2.2.5.1 Example of no silence responses

(note: *grp* =age group ; group 1 = 16 to 20, group 2 = 21-30, group 3 = 31-60, group 4 = 61-80; *m* =male, *f*=female)

1. How can I communicate with silence? (grp2m, British)
2. Silence in a formal setting is uncomfortable (grp3m, British)
3. Never a good idea, we always have to let others know how we feel as tactfully as possible (grp4m, British)
4. People don't know me well enough to understand what I try to express by saying nothing (grp2m, German)
5. If I don't say anything people will think I don't have anything to say on the topic (grp2f, German)
6. Never a good idea. We should let others know how we feel as tactfully as possible (grp4m, British)
7. Silence could not convey any meaning in many situations, so you should express yourself verbally when you have something to say (grp2f, Japanese)

For those who do not use silence to convey their thoughts or feelings, silence seems to mean 'nothing is happening' in the interaction. Some respondents believed that people would not be able to understand you if you kept quiet, or it could even be regarded as a sign of less intelligence or the inability to communicate well through words. Thus, it can be concluded that words speak louder than silence amongst these people.

The functions of silence

Apart from using the three communicative functions of silence categorized by Jensen (1973), (affective, judgmental [here "evaluative" is used] and linkage), 'face-saving' as a function of silence is added to the list for analysis.

1. ***face-saving***: *face* refers to public self-image not only where someone tries to project a self-image, to maintain a self-image, to save face if possible, but also where someone tries to conceal things or be covert in public or social assembly. Thus, it relates to silences caused by environment, situation, shyness, and unfamiliarity

2. **affecting**: *silence can heal and it can wound. It can also solidify or weaken an existing relationship. It has the power to affect us for both good and ill.*
3. **evaluating**: *silence provides judgments of another's behavior (character, motives and personality of other participants), showing favor or disfavor, assent or dissent.*
4. **linkage**: *Silence binds people together, or it can act to separate or to isolate someone from others. It has both a positive and negative sense*

2.3 Have you ever come across a situation where you refuse to give any opinions? If yes, please explain in detail:

1. Formal situation
2. Informal situation

2.3.1 Refusal in a formal situation

Refusal in a formal situation	British	Others	Japanese
Face-saving	49%	32%	43%
Affecting	10%	18%	12%
Evaluating	6%	18%	31%
Linkage	3%	11%	0%
No refusal	32%	21%	14%

It can be seen from the table that as a whole the most common reason for people across the groups refusing to give their opinions in a formal situation is to maintain their public self-image. This is especially clear in the British respondents. The Others may refrain from speaking if they feel that what they are going to say will offend or displease someone (affecting), or if they have no confidence in convincing someone who is too set in their opinions (evaluating). The Japanese are more likely to keep quiet in either judging someone's behavior or the flow of the discussion. They also will refuse to give any opinion if their opinions are against the generally-held one (evaluating). Nevertheless, personal conditions, such as boredom, tiredness, lack of interest in the subject matter (linkage) appear not to be the causes that would restrain the Japanese from speaking, though they might have that effect amongst the British or Others.

It is also worth noting that of the groups, the British people are the most

likely to give their opinions. In other words, silence in formal situations is less likely to occur among the British or Others, but would be quite common among the Japanese.

Example of responses

Face-saving

1. When I don't have enough evidence to back up my argument (grp1f, British),
2. If the other person would think less well of me as a result (grp2f, British),
3. When I may feel particularly inhibited by social anxiety e.g. if I were among a large number of people (grp3m, British)
4. generally I try to avoid giving opinions in formal situations (grp2f, German)
5. around more senior adults or people with higher status (grp1f, Canadian)
6. I usually do not give any opinion in the public unless I have been asked (grp3f, Japanese)
7. In the presence of other participants who are more knowledgeable or have more experience than me, I would keep quiet. (grp2m, Japanese)

Affecting

1. when unsure if my opinion would offend or displease another member of the group (grp2f, British)
2. difficult, sensitive meeting (grp3f, British)
3. something too personal, belief etc. (grp2f ,German)
4. in a PTA meeting, as my opinion would have openly criticized a teacher present (grp4f, Austrian)
5. when feel from the flow of conversation that things are settled and my opinion would help in any way (to solidify existing relationship) (grp3m, Japanese)
6. when no one says anything (to solidify existing relationship) (grp3f, Japanese)

Evaluating

1. when the discussion is never ending or pointless (grp3m British)
2. when to do so will cause further debate and extend a meeting (grp4m, British)
3. where people are so set in their ideas that offering a differing opinion is futile (grp2m, USA)
4. resignation, i.e. you cannot convince this person (grp3m, German)
5. when someone appears does not want to listen to others' opinion, or when someone does not obey the rule of conversation (judgment of another's behavior) (grp2m, Japanese)
6. when my opinion is against the generally-held one. (grp3m, Japanese)
7. when someone flies into a rage, and I feel what I say would not be of any use to him (grp3f, Japanese)

Linkage

1. if I am worn out and tired (to isolate) (grp1m, British)
2. if I am not interested in the subject matter (to ignore) (grp3f, Latvian)

2.3.2 Refusal in an informal situation

Refusal in an informal situation	British	Others	Japanese
Evaluating	12%	26%	52%
Affecting	45%	30%	25%
Face unfamiliarity	19%	9%	6%
Linkage/intimacy	2%	13%	4%
No refusal	23%	22%	13%

There are several marked changes in the functions of silence when the situation changes from formal to informal. As expected, *face-saving* is no longer the major reason that might restrain someone from giving an opinion. The *affecting* matter (for instance ‘avoiding arguments with people’, ‘often to prevent conflict’, ‘if my opinion will hurt somebody’s feelings’) would be the main reason to keep approximately half of the British and one third of Others from speaking. Some of the Others would refuse to give any opinions if the person involved is not a direct family member, or they do not feel close enough to them; for example, ‘...don’t express an opinion to the person involved because they are not a direct family relation’. The main factor that more than half of the Japanese (an increase of 20% compared with the formal situation) would take into account in judging to keep quiet or speak up in an informal situation is the behavior of the persons involved, such as in the following instances:

1. I would first try to guess what the speaker is thinking, and only then decide whether to give my opinion or not.
2. At first I would listen to the others’ opinion, if I thought theirs was correct, I would not voice my opinion.
3. I would take the speaker’s position and behavior into account before saying anything to avoid falling into a deadlocked situation.
4. I kept quiet when I talk to someone who does not easily accept other people’s opinions.

When the focus falls on those who would never refuse to give an opinion in informal situations, there is a significant drop shown by the British respondents. That is to say, the British might maintain their silence more in informal situations than formal ones. In contrast, not much change

could be found amongst the Japanese and Other respondents regarding either formal or informal situations. In other words, regardless of the situation, the amount of people who always make an effort to say something remains unchanged.

2.3.3 Discussion

On the whole, for this second section, the meanings and functions of silence as the situation changes from formal to informal can be summarized as follows. For the question of whether direct and open disagreement should be allowed or avoided, each group revealed significant ascending figures in demonstrating more tolerance to direct and open disagreement, when the situations change from formal to informal. Likewise, in terms of intimacy, the stronger a relation, the more open and more direct people will become. However, the degree of intimacy seems to be perceived differently by the Japanese respondents. For the Other and British respondents, the boundary line for permitting someone to express opinions freely among friends is vague compared to the Japanese one. Thus, it could be inferred that the frame of close relationship for allowing direct and open disagreement is smaller for the Japanese than the other groups. In formal situations, to use silence to convey thoughts and feelings appears to be relatively common to all the groups. With regards to the value of silence, to Japanese silence has multiple meanings and is more positive than it is to the other groups.

On the positive side, apart from carrying the meanings of respect, politeness, consent, and confrontation avoidance, which are common to the other groups, Japanese silence has the power to persuade others to change their minds. It appears that when a Japanese keeps quiet in a seminar it does not mean that he or she has no opinion on the topic under discussion, but it could mean he or she wants to be nominated to speak. On the negative side of silence, across the groups it is used to express emotion, showing indifference, lack of enthusiasm, or avoiding something offensive. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the Japanese might keep

quiet when their opinions are against a generally held opinion. Although in neutral silence, there is less divergence shown among the other groups other than giving ambivalent (positive and negative) meanings or showing a sign of mental activity, Japanese silence stands out as the one that is harder to interpret. This is due to the fact that the silence could mean either acceptance or refusal, but it is up to the others to guess what he or she is thinking. This indicates that when interpreting Japanese silence in a formal situation, some extra elements (for example, the character, or behavior of that particular person) need to be taken into account in order to guess the meaning of silence more accurately. Another intriguing feature needing attention is the Japanese tendency not to give opinion in public, and it could be considered as a cultural difference that this phenomenon is unlikely to be found in other groups.

As a whole, the communicative silence plays a more negative role when the situation becomes less formal. This is especially obvious among the Japanese. This is to say, silence in an informal situation frequently brings the meaning of disagreement, distress, disapproval, anger, or others strong emotions flaming quietly in someone's heart. Conversely, positive silence gives the message of comfort and relaxation in an other's presence for the British people, while to keep quiet is to solidify the existing situation or friendship for the Japanese.

For those who do not use silence as a tool to communicate, silence conveys either negative meanings or means nothing to them. To these people, words appear to be the better choice to convey thoughts and feelings. However, unquestionably, there is one common feature, which could be found in each of the groups, that people become quieter when the situation changes from formal to informal.

Turning to the functions of silence in a situation where someone refuses to give any opinion, face-saving is the major factor that would cause someone to refrain from speaking in formal situations across the groups, whereas affective matter (for example, to prevent conflict) is the main reason that would keep almost half of the British and one third of

Others from voicing their opinions in informal situations. One other essential point, which should be taken into consideration when the situation becomes less formal for the Japanese is, regardless of situation, to keep quiet or to voice their opinions depends heavily on the character or personality of the interlocutor.

Finally when it comes to the category 'never refuse to give any opinion', the British appear more likely to give their opinions in public, but prefer to maintain their silence in informal situations more than the other groups do. Situation, whether either formal or informal is not the factor here, but other factors such as, the intimacy of relationship, or the character of the speaker, would cause the Japanese and Others but not the British to refrain from speaking.

2.3.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, it is now generally recognized that people in different cultures have different ways of valuing and using silence as a tool of communication in varied situations. As demonstrated in part one, the viewing of silence as a form of expression is in general more prevalent in Japan than in Britain. This was true especially in the case of the question pertaining to nonverbal communication where more than eighty percent of the Japanese agreed that saying nothing is one of the occasional means of expressing themselves. This contrasted with the British respondents, who were more inclined to use visual nonverbal communication such as body movements and facial expressions to accompany speech in expressing themselves in their daily life. Many of the British people and Others seem to believe that words and actions are complementary, and that they may be manipulated tactfully in order to communicate effectively rather than remaining totally silent to make a point. More importantly, when it comes to preferential valuation of silence and speech, the variation between British people who opted for speech and the Japanese who opted for silence is clear

However, delving further into whether silence is used as a means of

communication in different contexts and situations, surprisingly, all three groups of people demonstrate clearly they had experience of using silence to convey feelings and thoughts. Thus, it can be inferred that many of them use silence as a means of communication without any conscious intention.

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