THE SIGNIFICANCE OF SILENCE IN THE JORDANIAN SOCIETY: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC PERSPECTIVE

by

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Abstract

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The study investigated the functions of silence in the Jordanian society in general and in Jordanian classrooms in particular. Three instruments were used. The first instrument was a direct personal observation of situations involving silence aimed at finding out the meanings of silence in different settings. The second instrument was a questionnaire followed by a tape-recorded interview whose purpose was to explore the functions of silence as a whole, and in deaths, engagements, and wedding parties in particular. The third instrument consisted of two questionnaires aimed at exploring the meanings of students' and teachers' silence in classrooms.

The results of the study demonstrated silence as a significant means of communication extensively experienced by Jordanians in everyday life, particularly in deaths, engagements, and wedding parties. The general functions of silence were avoidance of confrontation, safety and security, obedience, consent and agreement, wisdom, secrecy, patience, authority and power, thoughtfulness, attentiveness, respect, embarrassment, shock and astonishment, anger and unfriendliness, worship, dignity and boredom.
Silence had other functions in death, such as sorrow and sadness, condolence, fear, expression of transience of life, thinking of the dead, sharing of feelings, control of emotions, equality and remorse. The functions of silence in engagements were consent at a marriage proposal, shyness, anxiety, ignorance of the future and expectation of an answer. The functions of silence in wedding parties were enjoyment, imagination of future weddings, tiredness, shyness, excitement and admiration, unfamiliarity, and harmony. The results of the study also revealed that students' and teachers' silence in classrooms was also functional and meaningful. Students' silence indicated fear and anxiety, respect, obedience, attentiveness, carelessness, thoughtfulness, ignorance, concentration, and avoidance of confrontation with the teacher. Teachers' silence also revealed other functions such as self control, reprimand, avoidance of confrontation, dissatisfaction, anger, seriousness, satisfaction and a means of holding students' attention.

Finally, the study compared between the functions of silence in the Jordanian society and other foreign (e.g. American and Danish) societies. The comparison revealed more similarities than differences between the functions of silence with Jordanian society and other communities.