

## Silence as Language

Verbal silence touches on every possible aspect of daily life. This book provides a full linguistic analysis of the role of silence in language, exploring perspectives from semantics, semiotics, pragmatics, phonetics, syntax, grammar and poetics, and taking into account a range of spoken and written contexts. The author argues that silence is just as communicative in language as speech, as it results from the deliberate choice of the speaker, and serves functions such as informing, conveying emotions, signalling turn switching and activating the addresser. Verbal silence is used, alongside speech, to iconically serve linguistic functions in all areas of life, as well as being employed in a wide variety of written texts. The forms and functions of silence are explained, detailed and illustrated with examples taken from both written texts and real-life interactions. Engaging and comprehensive, this book is essential reading for anyone interested in this fascinating linguistic phenomenon.

MICHAL EPHRATT is Professor of Linguistics at the University of Haifa, Israel. Her research interests include language and life: neologisms, iconicity, pragmatics, proper names and linguistic models in psychoanalytic theory and practice. Her major research focus is on the study of silence as a means of expression.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment  
978-1-108-47167-1 – Silence as Language  
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# Silence as Language

## *Verbal Silence as a Means of Expression*

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Michal Ephratt

*University of Haifa*



CAMBRIDGE  
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Frontmatter  
[More Information](#)

## CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom  
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA  
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia  
314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,  
New Delhi – 110025, India  
103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

[www.cambridge.org](http://www.cambridge.org)

Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108471671](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108471671)

DOI: 10.1017/9781108650779

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First published 2022

*A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.*

*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Ephratt, Michal, author.

Title: Silence as language : verbal silence as a means of expression / Michal Ephratt.

Description: Cambridge, United Kingdom ; New York, NY : Cambridge University Press, 2022. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2021039267 (print) | LCCN 2021039268 (ebook) |

ISBN 9781108471671 (hardback) | ISBN 9781108458214 (paperback) |

ISBN 9781108650779 (epub)

Subjects: LCSH: Silence. | Nonverbal communication. | BISAC: LANGUAGE ARTS & DISCIPLINES / Linguistics / Semantics

Classification: LCC P99.7 .E476 2022 (print) | LCC P99.7 (ebook) | DDC 401/.4–dc23/eng/20211118

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021039267>

LC ebook record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2021039268>

ISBN 978-1-108-47167-1 Hardback

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Love that never told can be  
(William Blake)

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## Preface and Acknowledgements

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I became involved in the study of silence through my interest in language and life, that is language as symptom and symptom as language, language as a prism to the speaker's inner life and his intersubjective and social contacts and not language as a means.

Tuning my academic attention to verbal silence such that shares, on the one hand, key traits with other silences (such as the stillness of nature) and on the other hand is an integral part of language, I felt like the child from Andersen's tale 'The Emperor's New Clothes'. Embracing and acknowledging the absences within language, gave way to investigating those silences as something rather than nothing. As I deepened my explorations, verbal silence emerged as a varied phenomenon, with many types, forming diverse relationships with speech and with the real world (iconicity).

I now hand the book over to you, the reader. I do hope that you will find it interesting, relevant, and that while reading you will identify an idea, an analysis, or an example significant to you, enriching you as a person and/or contributing to your endeavors as a scholar. As I say in Chapter five, I do hope that this book will be a beginning: inviting ideas, discussions and collaborations.

Studying silence requires attention to pauses, slow time, incubation, introspection as well as voids in the hope that such will be met with astonishment. I wish to thank The University of Haifa (Israel) for granting me sabbatical leaves which afforded me the space required to enable the writing of this book; I thank my many colleagues around the world, some of whom I met in person at conferences and some of whom, unfortunately, only through continuous e-mail exchanges. Contacts and ongoing discussions with these dear colleagues – devoted to the study of silence within their disciplines and interests – were most stimulating, rescuing me from the experience of the lone child in Andersen's tale and challenging and enriching my perspective on silence. I thank the students who enrolled in the Master's seminars on 'silence as language' which I taught over the years. Teaching this course is always an inspiring experience: where students studying linguistics evolve from an often

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suspicious or ignorant group with regard to silence, through the stages of puzzlement and discovery, to enthusiasm, curiosity and sometimes MA theses.

Last but not least, I warmly thank Helen Barton and Isabel (Izzie) Collins of Cambridge University Press for their endless patience and wise and helpful guidance throughout the process of compiling and producing this book. Special thanks to Dr Lynne Porat, Head of the Interlibrary Loans department of Younes & Soraya Nazarian Library at the University of Haifa, who went out of her way to help me obtain access to books and materials, enabling me to submit the final draft on time, overcoming the local and worldwide closings of international borders and academic libraries during the Covid-19 lockdowns.

Michal Ornan-Ephratt