

Abstract

Böhringer, Heike. 2007. *The Sound of Silence: Silent and Filled Pauses in English as a Lingua Franca business interaction*. M.A. Thesis, University of Vienna.

This paper focuses on silent and filled pauses (*er/m*) in English as a lingua franca business interaction. It intends to give initial insight into the possible functions these highly volatile phenomena may fulfil with regard to different aspects of language and interaction. It thus attempts to show that apart from primarily serving the speaker as a time-gaining device in the cognitive process of speech production, silent and filled pauses may also assume relevance for the (ELF) speaker, the hearer, the *interaction* between them and the business context as a whole.

The theoretical part provides the background as to how silent and filled pauses can be approached and moreover illustrates that this has mainly been done in the area of first language research. The section on psycholinguistics, the ‘founding discipline’ of ‘pausology’, describes their purpose in demarcating and producing ‘codable’ language. In ‘the wider context of communication’, pauses/silences are outlined from a more interactive perspective showing that they can be used as TRP signals in conversation, as a possibility of realising speech acts or a way of expressing interpersonal politeness. From a crosscultural perspective, culture-related differences in the evaluation of silence are mentioned. Furthermore, the potential of between-turn silences to be misinterpreted for cultural reasons is addressed and ELF perspectives – although not many exist yet – are provided.

In the empirically-motivated part of the thesis the ‘time-gaining’ effect of pauses in speech production is acknowledged. In addition to that it is described that and how pauses also seem to be interactively involved in the creation of meaning and comprehension (in ELF) and appear to function also as mitigation devices related to social/hierarchical aspects of the business interaction. As a last aspect, the probably most business-specific occurrence of (silent) pauses as structural and topical device is addressed.

The analysis moreover reveals that the pause, both in its filled and unfilled form, is too ambiguous and semantically ‘empty’ a linguistic element to be pinned down conclusively, particularly with respect to its significance in ELF interaction. The present study thus concludes that it can merely be an ‘invitation’ to listen to ‘The Sound of Silence’. Future research will have to take into consideration more qualitative and quantitative information on the phenomena in question.