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COMMUNICATIVE SILENCE IN ENGLISH AND UZBEK TOURISM INTERACTION

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Abstract: The paper examines communicative silence as a meaningful nonverbal resource in English and Uzbek tourism interaction. Silence is approached not as the mere absence of speech but as a communicative phenomenon capable of regulating interaction, signalling attention, hesitation, expectation and readiness to respond. Particular attention is given to guide–tourist and service employee–visitor encounters in which the pragmatic value of silence depends on its position in discourse, participant roles and accompanying nonverbal behaviour. The comparative analysis demonstrates that silence may perform similar interactional functions in both communicative environments, while its interpretation remains sensitive to culturally established expectations. The study argues that the meaning of silence emerges through its contextual integration with gaze, facial behaviour, prosody and the organisation of conversational turns.

Keywords: communicative silence, tourism interaction, nonverbal communication, pause, pragmatic meaning, English, Uzbek, intercultural communication…

Silence constitutes a specific component of nonverbal communication because its meaning is generated without an independently verbalised message. In tourism interaction, the temporary absence of speech does not necessarily indicate the interruption or failure of communication. A pause may provide time for understanding unfamiliar information, regulate the transition between speakers, signal expectation of a response or direct attention towards a particular element of the communicative situation. Silence therefore acquires functional significance when it is interpreted in relation to the surrounding discourse.

The communicative status of silence has received considerable attention in pragmatic and interactional research. A. Jaworski argues that silence cannot be reduced to the simple absence of verbal activity because it may constitute a socially meaningful communicative choice [1, p. 3]. D. Tannen associates conversational interpretation with timing, pacing and participation patterns, demonstrating that meaning is also influenced by the temporal organisation of interaction [2, p. 93]. R. Scollon and S. W. Scollon further emphasise that expectations concerning participation and conversational behaviour vary across cultural environments [3, p. 69].

This theoretical position is particularly relevant to tourism communication, where participants frequently differ in linguistic competence and cultural experience. When a guide pauses after presenting information about an unfamiliar historical or cultural phenomenon, the pause may create additional processing time for tourists. When silence follows a visitor's question, it may indicate hesitation, lexical search or the preparation of a response. A pause accompanied by gaze towards the interlocutor may signal that the conversational turn is being transferred. Consequently, the communicative function of silence cannot be determined from duration alone.

The relationship can be expressed as: **silence + communicative context + accompanying nonverbal behaviour → contextual meaning.**

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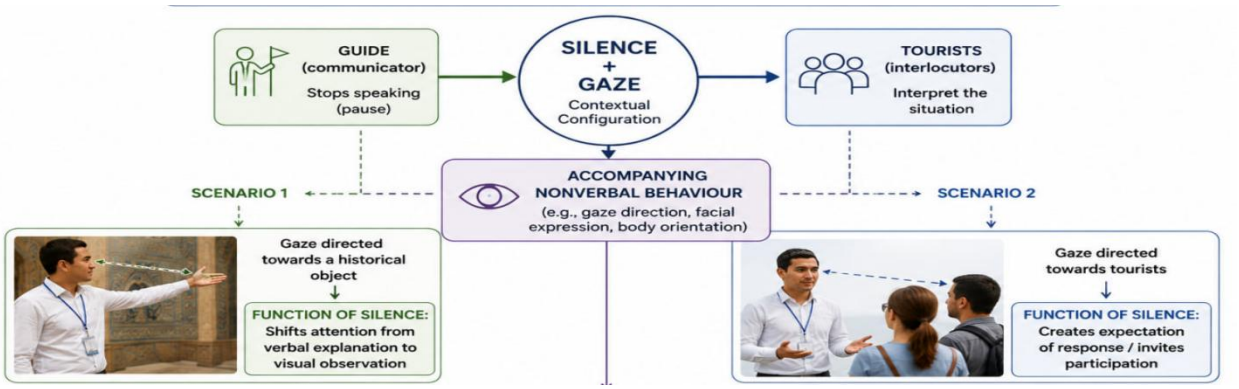


Figure 15. The Contextual Configuration of Silence and Gaze in Tourism Interaction

The position of silence within interaction is particularly important. A pause occurring before an utterance may signal preparation or hesitation, while a pause following an utterance may create space for response. Silence within a guide's explanation can highlight informational boundaries and allow the tourist to process newly introduced material. Thus, apparently identical periods of non-speaking may perform different communicative functions depending on their sequential position.

In English and Uzbek tourism interaction, the comparison of silence should therefore avoid simplified assumptions concerning which communicative culture is more or less silent. The analytically relevant issue is the functional distribution of silence. Its meaning is determined by the relationship between conversational position, communicative role and contextual expectation. This approach makes it possible to examine silence as an organised component of interaction rather than as an accidental gap between verbal utterances.

The analysis of tourism encounters indicates that communicative silence can be grouped according to the function it performs within interaction. Processing silence occurs when a participant requires additional time to understand culturally unfamiliar information or linguistically complex content. Turn-regulating silence marks the transition from one participant to another and creates an opportunity for the interlocutor to enter the conversation. Attentional silence accompanies the redirection of perceptual focus towards an object, person or event. Hesitation silence, in contrast, may reflect uncertainty concerning lexical choice, behavioural appropriateness or the expected response. Such differentiation shows that silence is not pragmatically homogeneous.

The interpretation of these functions depends considerably on accompanying nonverbal behaviour. A guide who stops speaking and directs the gaze towards a historical object may use silence to shift the tourists' attention from verbal explanation to visual observation. The same pause accompanied by gaze towards a tourist may instead create an expectation of response. Accordingly, silence and gaze form a contextual configuration in which each component contributes to the interpretation of the other. This supports the broader view that nonverbal behaviour operates through coordinated communicative resources rather than through isolated signals [4, p. 24].

A further distinction can be observed in service encounters. When a tourist is searching for a document, selecting a service or attempting to formulate a question in an unfamiliar language, immediate verbal intervention by an employee is not always communicatively necessary. A short period of silence may provide the visitor with sufficient interactional space to complete the intended action. In this case, non-speaking performs a facilitative function. Its communicative value lies precisely in temporarily withholding verbal intervention.

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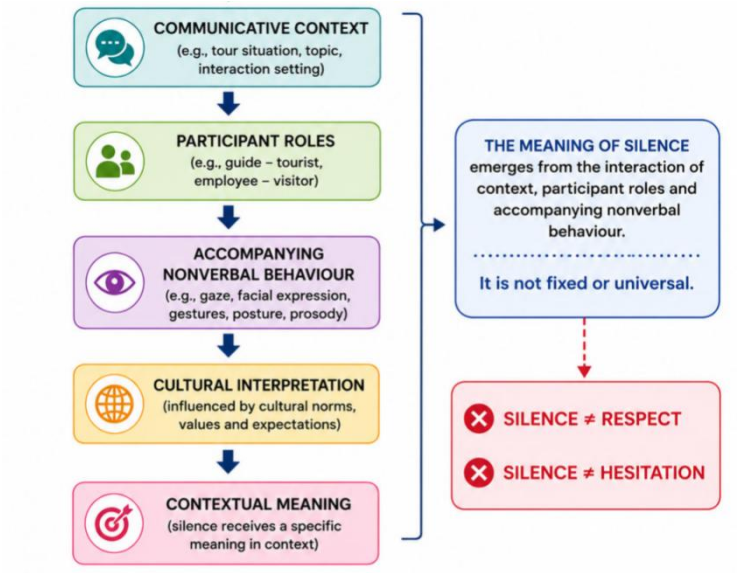


Figure 16. The Formation of Context-Specific Meaning in the Interpretation of Communicative Silence

The comparison of English and Uzbek interaction suggests that the interpretation of silence should be connected with culturally formed expectations concerning interpersonal involvement. The same pause may be interpreted as respectful attentiveness in one contextual configuration and as communicative distance or uncertainty in another. . The pragmatic value becomes identifiable only when the pause is analysed together with participant role, conversational sequence and accompanying behaviour.

This relationship may be presented as: **pause position → contextual expectation → participant interpretation → interactional function.** The proposed sequence demonstrates that the meaning of silence develops gradually within interaction. The pause itself provides a temporal space, while contextual expectation narrows the range of possible interpretations. The participant then relates the pause to the preceding communicative action and identifies its probable function. Silence consequently acquires meaning through sequential interpretation rather than through an invariant semantic value.

An important feature of tourism communication is that silence may also compensate for limited linguistic resources. A tourist who cannot immediately produce an appropriate verbal response may rely on a pause combined with gaze, facial reaction or bodily orientation. In such cases, the absence of speech does not eliminate communicative participation. Instead, other semiotic resources maintain the interaction until verbal communication becomes possible. This function is particularly relevant to intercultural encounters, where differences in linguistic competence may influence the rhythm and organisation of conversation.

The broader research material confirms that nonverbal resources in tourism discourse perform functional and linguopragmatic tasks across guide communication, tourism materials and multimodal interaction. The corpus includes 120 communicative fragments drawn from guide speech, tourism advertising and internet-based multimodal communication, which provides a wider basis for examining the functional organisation of nonverbal behaviour.

The analysis therefore allows four principal functions of communicative silence in tourism interaction to be distinguished: processing, turn regulation, attention management and interactional facilitation. These functions are not mutually exclusive. A single pause may simultaneously provide processing time and signal that the interlocutor is expected to respond. The dominant function is determined by its position within the communicative sequence and by the nonverbal cues surrounding it.

Communicative silence should consequently be regarded as an active temporal resource of tourism interaction. Its meaning does not originate from non-speaking alone but from the relationship between silence, contextual expectation, participant roles and accompanying behaviour. English and

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Uzbek tourism communication share the capacity to employ silence for interactional organisation, while the interpretation of particular pauses may remain culturally and situationally conditioned. Recognising these distinctions contributes to a more precise understanding of intercultural tourism discourse and prevents silence from being mechanically interpreted as hesitation, disagreement or communicative failure.

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