SILENCE, INTERCULTURAL CONVERSATION, AND MISCOMMUNICATION

by

Alina Lemak

A thesis submitted in conformity with the requirements

for a degree of Master of Arts

Graduate Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, Second Language Education

Ontario Institute for Studies in Education

University of Toronto

©Copyright by Alina Lemak (2012)
Silence, Intercultural Conversation, and Miscommunication
by Alina Lemak
Master of Arts (2012)
Graduate Department of Curriculum, Teaching and Learning, Second Language Education
University of Toronto

Abstract

Because of its ambiguous function and usage, silence is a major source of intercultural miscommunication, which frequently leads to negative judgments, and breeds stereotypes. Grounded in a cross-cultural and interactive framework, I conducted a five-month descriptive qualitative study, which explored silence perceptions among Chinese, Korean, Russian, Colombian and Iranian ESL speakers, and Canadian native-speakers of English (NS). Multiple perspectives were investigated using stimulated recall, in a context of intercultural mentoring sessions and interviews. Eight ESL 'silence producer' participants were asked to explain their silence use, and their interpretations were compared with the functions attributed to these silences by other participants, one from the same cultural background as the 'silence producer', and a NS. Participants' silence perceptions were described, and most negatively-interpreted silences were identified. Analysis revealed intra-cultural acrimony, that high language proficiency perceptions increase negative silence attributions, cross-cultural differences in attitudes towards fillers, and the systematic silencing of ESL speakers.
# Table of Contents

Abstract........................................................................................................................................... ii  
List of Tables................................................................................................................................... v  
List of Figures................................................................................................................................... v  
List of Appendices............................................................................................................................ v  

**Chapter One: Introduction**........................................................................................................ 1  

**Chapter Two: Literature review and Theoretical Framework**.................................................. 5  
   Silence and Its Many Definitions............................................................................................... 5  
   Different Approaches to the Study of Silence........................................................................... 7  
   Positive and Negative Aspects of Silence................................................................................ 9  
   Intercultural Communication and Miscommunication.......................................................... 11  
   Functions of Silence................................................................................................................ 18  
      Cognitive Function of Silence............................................................................................... 19  
      Social and Stylistic Function of Silence............................................................................. 20  
      Interactive and Communicative Function of Silence....................................................... 21  
      Politeness Strategy Function of Silence............................................................................ 23  
      Ideological Function of Silence.......................................................................................... 24  
      Identity Function of Silence............................................................................................... 25  
   Silence in Institutional Talk..................................................................................................... 26  
   Silence in an L2 classroom....................................................................................................... 30  
   Patterns, Limitations, and Gaps.............................................................................................. 32  
   Study Rationale and Theoretical Framework......................................................................... 35  

**Chapter Three: Methodology**.................................................................................................... 40  
   Participants............................................................................................................................... 40  
   Recruitment and Data Collection Procedures......................................................................... 41  
   Instrument................................................................................................................................. 46  
   Choosing the Silences Criteria................................................................................................. 48  
   Data Analysis........................................................................................................................... 50  
   Researcher's Role...................................................................................................................... 53  

**Chapter Four: Findings of Participants’ Perspectives on Silence Causes and Functions**........ 55  
   Prosodic.................................................................................................................................... 56  
   Cognitive................................................................................................................................. 56  
   Stylistic..................................................................................................................................... 58  
   Social, Interactive, and Communicative................................................................................ 58  
   Politeness strategy.................................................................................................................. 61  
   Identity and Ideological.......................................................................................................... 63  
   Feeling Rattled......................................................................................................................... 65  
   Unattributable.......................................................................................................................... 66  
   Dishonesty............................................................................................................................... 67  

**Chapter Five: Findings of Participants’ Perceptions of Silence Norms and Inter/Intracultural Comparison**................................................................................................................. 70
Chinese Case Study................................................................. 72
  Perceptions of Chinese vs. Canadian English Silence Norms................................. 72
  Listeners' Evaluations of Qing................................................................. 77
  Listeners' Evaluations of Chengjiang...................................................... 79
Korean Case Study.................................................................................. 82
  Perceptions of Korean vs. Canadian English Silence Norms.............................. 82
  Listeners' Evaluations of Jamie................................................................. 85
  Listeners' Evaluations of Stellar............................................................... 89
Russian Case Study................................................................................ 93
  Perceptions of Russian vs. Canadian English Silence Norms............................ 94
  Listeners' Evaluations of Svetlana............................................................. 95
  Listeners' Evaluations of Stepan...............................................................101
Colombian Case Study........................................................................... 112
  Perceptions of Colombian vs. Canadian English Silence Norms........................... 113
  Boomie's Description and Progress............................................................ 116
  Listeners' Evaluations of Boomie.............................................................. 118
Iranian Case Study.................................................................................. 127
  Perceptions of Farsi vs. Canadian English Silence Norms.................................. 127
  Keivan's Description and Progress............................................................. 129
  Listeners' Evaluations of Keivan.............................................................. 131
Native Speakers' Attitudes...................................................................... 142
  Researcher's Silence Use........................................................................ 147

Chapter Six: Discussion........................................................................ 150
  Linking Findings to the Literature.................................................................. 150
    Participants' Perceptions of Silence's Causes and Functions.......................... 150
    Features of Silence.................................................................................... 153
    Inter/Intracultural (Mis)Communication.................................................... 153
  Negative Interpretations of Silence............................................................. 155
  Expanding existing knowledge.................................................................... 158
  Cultural Differences.................................................................................... 159
  Individual Differences................................................................................ 162
  Intersubjectivity......................................................................................... 163
  With compatriots like these, who needs enemies!....................................... 164
  Proficiency and Negative Attributions......................................................... 168
  Filler Hate............................................................................................... 171
  Silencing of L2 speakers........................................................................... 179

Chapter Seven: Final Thoughts............................................................ 184
  Conclusions............................................................................................. 184
  Implications............................................................................................. 190
  Limitations............................................................................................... 198

Summary................................................................................................. 203
References.............................................................................................. 205
Appendices............................................................................................. 215
List of Tables

Table 1: Distribution of participants by phase
Table 2: Distribution of participants by country
Table 3: Distribution of Chinese participants
Table 4: Chinese silence interpretation average agreement totals
Table 5: Distribution of Korean participants
Table 6: Korean silence interpretation average agreement totals
Table 7: Distribution of Russian participants
Table 8: Russian silence interpretation average agreement totals
Table 9: Distribution of Colombian participants
Table 10: Colombian silence interpretation average agreement totals
Table 11: Distribution of Iranian participants
Table 12: Iranian silence interpretation average agreement totals
Table 13: Summary of findings for research questions three, four and five

List of Figures

Figure 1. Participants across the two phases of the study.

List of Appendices

Appendix A: Figure 1
Appendix B: Participant Consent Letters
Appendix C: Biographical Information Form
Appendix D: Character Questionnaire
Chapter One

I decided to design a study on silence in intercultural conversation after I had read an article, which compared communicative behaviour in conversation among Finnish, Swedish-Finnish, and Swedish families (Tryggvason, 2006). In this article, despite the author's best efforts to remain purely descriptive and not favour one silence usage norm over another, I still sensed a bias that made it seem as though the “silent” families were somehow not as “involved in communication” (Tryggvason, 2006, p. 1080) as the “vocal” families, and that the more “voluble” Swedish norm was preferable to the “silent Finn” norm. This struck a chord with me, because it immediately reminded me of my father, a native speaker of Ukrainian and an L2 speaker of English, who has been judged negatively by people just because his silence usage did not conform to Canadian norms. My father told me that he preferred silence to what he saw as “frivolous” speech, and, despite my best efforts to encourage him to use fillers or speed up his speech rate, he chooses not to change his manner of speaking.

When I thought about my father and his silence usage, I quickly realized that, while I consciously understood that it was simply his speaking style, I, too, because I was raised in the Canadian culture for more than half of my life, have been guilty of judging him as less competent in English than those who used more fillers and had fewer pauses. When I talked to my father, I frequently became acutely aware of my own intolerance towards silence, because I always wanted to push him to speak faster, and get to the point without all those pauses.

Thus, it appears that even for sociolinguistic researchers (like Tryggvason) and ESL teachers (like me), people who, due to their chosen professions, were supposed to be more aware and more sensitive to intercultural differences in language usage and norms than the general population, the pull of culture was still undeniable.
This realization led me to want to explore what was it in people's silence usage that made, even those who should know better, make these (almost unconscious) unfounded negative attributions about the speaker? In other words, I wanted to compare the perspectives of people from different cultures, to find the areas of biggest norm mismatch that led to intercultural miscommunication and adverse judgments.

Furthermore, as an ESL teacher, I always seek to find a way to apply research findings to classroom practice. As a teacher, I want to raise my students' awareness of the differences in silence usage and norms, and show them what they need to do, in a particular context, to avoid unfavourable judgments and raised eyebrows. Unfortunately, I do not know where to start, and how much to teach. Which mismatches are potentially more dangerous and should be addressed in class, and which can be left alone because they are generally benign? I hoped to find the answers to some of these questions by doing this study.

Thus, I conducted an explorative, descriptive, qualitative study of naturally occurring conversational silence in one-on-one institutional verbal interactions. I had access to two types of speech events: intercultural language mentoring and interviews. I looked at participants' own interpretations of their silence usage, and compared the functions they attributed to their own silences with what functions others attributed to these silences. I investigated the following research questions:

1) How do participants explain their use of silence in the context of an intercultural mentoring/interview speech event?

2) To what extent are the participants aware of silence's pragmatic value or function?

These two speech events were selected for three reasons: 1) it was exciting to explore silence usage in these two particular speech events; 2) using more than one speech event allowed for triangulation of the results; and 3) this was the type of data to which I had access.
3) What reasons do silence producers give for their own instances of silence, compared to what reasons do listeners (from the same or different cultural background) attribute to these silences?

4) What are the similarities and differences between the interpretations of these silences by native speakers of English (NS) and non-native speakers of English (NNS)?

5) Which silences do the listeners consider deviant (and thus, judge negatively)?

Finally, I also hoped that this study would allow me to confront my own use of silence, and expose areas where I could be more sensitive to cross-cultural differences.

This thesis consists of seven chapters. Chapter One serves as an introduction, while Chapter Two features a literature review on silence, and concludes with the current study's theoretical framework and rationale. Chapter Three deals with methodology, and Chapter Four and Five cover the study's findings. Specifically, Chapter Four outlines the range and variety of silence causes and functions that have been elicited and explained in the data, providing the participants' perspectives on the various silence functions outlined in the literature. Meanwhile, Chapter Five examines participants' perceptions of silence in a cross-cultural comparison of silence attribution and interpretation in a series of five case studies. These case studies represent five different cultures: Three of them (Chinese, Korean, and Russian) contain data from silence producers who were interviewees, while two other case studies (Colombian and Iranian) consist

2 In this study, negative evaluations/judgments of silence were operationalized as silence interpretations that may have had adverse repercussions for the silence producer by making an unfavourable impression on his or her interlocutor. An unfavourable impression was conceptualized in a following way: if, because of a particular silence, the interlocutor interpreted the silence producer as not very smart, showing off, being calculating and insincere, not knowing English well enough, not being cooperative, not being committed or engaged in the conversation, being unprofessional, lying, or hiding something. Furthermore, if the interlocutor interpreted the silence producer as feeling embarrassed, or shy, or insecure, or overwhelmed with bad emotions, this would also be considered a negative interpretation of silence, because, even if it may not necessarily signal something unsavory about the silence producer and his or her character, it does reflect negatively on the situation and the interaction itself, and can be face-threatening for one, or both, of the interlocutors.
of data from silence producers who were mentees. Each subgroup is presented in alphabetical order.

Chapter Six comprises the discussion of these findings, by examining what they mean, and highlighting recurrent themes in the participants' ideologies about their silence use. It begins by showing how this study's findings compare to the existing literature, and then exploring four main themes that emerged from the data. In the seventh (and final) chapter, conclusions are drawn and major implications, as well as the study's limitations, are explained.
Chapter Two: Literature review and Theoretical Framework

This chapter reviews literature on some of the key features of silence: its ambiguous nature and definition, and the various approaches used in studying it, its both positive and negative aspects, its role in intercultural (mis)communication, its variety of functions, and how it is dealt with in institutional talk research, and second language classrooms. Finally, this chapter concludes with a section on gaps and limitations within the existing literature, and then, provides a rationale and theoretical framework for the present study, highlighting how it attempts to fill some of these gaps.

Silence and Its Many Definitions

Within the field of linguistics, the vital communicative role of conversational silence has long been ignored. For the longest time, it was believed that silence only had a boundary-marking, prosodic function, and accordingly, silence was defined as an absence of speech or as “periods of non-speech or non-vocalization in conversation” (Zuo, 2002, p. 4; Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985). Whereas words were normally considered the prototypical communicators, silence was believed to be a prototypical non-communicator, in other words, the background against which talk was perceived (Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985). However, some scholars argued that silence was, in fact, communicative. As cited by Basso (1970, p. 213), “It is not the case that a man who is silent says nothing” (Anonymous); in fact, by ignoring silence, researchers risked overlooking a bulk of communication, because, as Samarin (1965, p. 115) suggested, "Silence can have meaning. Like the zero in mathematics, it is an absence with a function."

Once people started to recognize the communicative value of silence, scholars argued that “silence warrants further research attention than it has received in the past 30 years”
As interest in silence was revived, the nature of inquiry in the field shifted (Sobkowiak, 1997), and not a moment too soon, as silence exists in almost every human interaction (Sharpley, 1997) and it is pervasive in conversation. As a matter of fact, it constitutes 5-65% of total conversational time because an average conversationalist is silent 40-50% of the time (Zuo, 2002). Today, the majority of linguists agree that silence is not a void, but a linguistic category with its own structures, meanings, and functions, which jointly contribute to the organization and operation of conversation. Some researchers even argue that it can be considered as a form of speech (Jaworski, 1993; Saville-Troike, 1985). Notably, Matarazzo, Hess, and Saslow (1962b) found that speech and silence behaviours have similar distribution curves.

Recent research shows that because silence is characterized by its multideterminism, which means that its occurrence is determined by multiplicity of physical, psychological, linguistic, stylistic and interactive factors (Zuo, 2002). Accordingly, we cannot examine it in isolation; psychological, linguistic, identity-based, stylistic and interactive aspects of silence matter too, but they are often overlooked (Chafe, 1985; Nakane, 2007). As a consequence, silence is difficult to define. Sobkowiak (1997) believes that silence is best defined acoustically or pragmatically. Tannen and Saville-Troike (1985) distinguish silence that is utilized for structuring communication from communicative silence. Enninger (1987) classifies silence into two kinds: situation-specific silence and culture-specific silence. The former is influenced by contextual demands, whereas the latter is affected primarily by culture. Due to this evident lack of consensus, a prominent silence scholar, Adam Jaworski (1993), altogether rejects any final definition of silence.

---

3 Structural silences (such as brief and often unconscious pauses and hesitations, which occur between turns and give interlocutors time to think before their next contribution (Sifianou, 1997)) are used to structure speech; communicative silences carry meaning (Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985).
Regardless of how it is defined, it is becoming quite apparent that silence is syntactic, because it shapes sequences of speech, semantic, because it carries meaning, and pragmatic, because it organizes social relationships (Kivik, 1998). Furthermore, since “it only takes one person to produce speech, but it takes the cooperation of all to produce silence” (Jaworski, 1993, p. 18), silence is inherently social and communicative.

**Different Approaches to the Study of Silence**

Silence has been studied using various approaches and perspectives. The first approach, the social-psychological approach, explores whether silence usage correlates with social and psychological characteristics such as class, age, gender, and personality. There is evidence to show that it does. Researchers found higher prevalence of silence use among middle class people than working class people, as well as differences in silence prevalence between cross-gender and same-gender communication (Scollon, 1985). Other studies showed that age may also affect frequency and duration of silence, and that attitudes towards silence use differ intergenerationally, with older generations using silence in a more culturally stereotypical manner (Kivik, 1998). Other research found that introverts tend to use more and longer silences, and talk more slowly, than extroverts (Crown & Feldstein, 1985). In fact, it appears that silences in English conversations recorded in a lab setting have a more stable relationship to personality differences (as measured on standard psychological instruments) than do vocalizations (Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985).

The second approach, the psycholinguistic approach to silence, focuses on the distribution of silence in speech sequences, and on the role it plays in speech planning and production. Researchers who adopt this orientation believe that silence in speech reflects the speaker's lexical decision-making processes and his/her choice of individual words. Studies
from this perspective reveal that silence in spontaneous speech tends to precede words of high unpredictability and difficulty (Chafe, 1985; Zuo, 2002; Nakamura, 2004). However, compared to simpler speech, syntactically complex speech does not necessarily entail more silence, and, hence, does not require any more planning to produce it (Zuo, 2002). In fact, it appears that silence between syntactic units performs two functions: boundary-marking and hesitation. Hesitations are usually attributable to the speaker having difficulty deciding, not what to verbalize, but how to verbalize something (Chafe, 1985). Moreover, having something in one's peripheral consciousness may suppress hesitation where it would otherwise occur (Chafe, 1985). All in all, most of the research that falls under this approach is confined to spontaneous speech in monologues and narration, and there is little research on silence in conversation (Zuo, 2002).

The third major approach to studying silence comes from a cross-cultural perspective, which I will examine in more depth later in this chapter. Within this approach, silence is considered from two points of view: the relativist and the universalist (Jaworski, 1993). The former states that there are no universals in silence usage cross-culturally, while the latter suggests that, despite the differences, there are still some things we all have in common in our use of silence. For example, Riazantseva’s (2001) initial findings indicate that while pause duration patterns may be language-specific, pause frequency and pause distribution might be universal. Further research is required before such a claim can be fully validated.

Finally, earlier scholars of silence viewed silence and speech as two discreet, opposed categories (Jaworski, 1993). However, more recently, scholars have argued that instead of seeing silence as an antithesis to speech, it is better (and more plausible) to place silence and speech on a communicative continuum of linguistic forms from most to least verbal. Thus,
speech is placed on one end of a continuum, and silence on the other end, and both are conceptualized as overlapping forms rather than two distinct, dichotomous, clear-cut opposite categories (Jaworski, 1993). This conceptualization of silence and speech promotes a new interactive approach to silence, which attempts to resolve most, if not all, dichotomies in silence research.

Positive and Negative Aspects of Silence

Due to its symbolic nature, silence is inherently ambiguous. After all, a woman's silence after a marriage proposal may be interpreted as acceptance by one person, but a rejection by another (Nakane, 2007). Accordingly, Jaworski (1993, p. 24) called it “probably the most ambiguous of all linguistic forms.” In fact, literature is rife with examples where silence is interpreted differently by two individuals. While this ambiguity makes it a rich area for research, it can also lead to communicative problems. Therefore, in communication, silence is axiologically ambiguous: It does both good and bad in interaction (Jaworski, 1993).

Beginning with some of the positive aspects of silence, it has been shown to be indispensable to the production of speech because it allows for planning to occur (Riazantseva, 2001). In addition, Nakane (2007) found that pauses benefit both speaker and listener: Without pauses listeners have great difficulty in keeping up with ongoing talk and interpreting it correctly.

In some instances, silence can also provide feedback by getting both interlocutors to display mutual understanding, or make up for a lack of understanding (Nakamura, 2004). For example, in a classroom, if teachers approach silence as an interactive device and a source of feedback, they can use it to provide students with appropriate support, such as rephrasing questions and requests, switching the order of words and making subject pronouns more explicit.
Furthermore, when using silence, non-native speakers of English prevent loss of face by avoiding asking native speakers of English to repeat. Likewise, silence can be polite in those cases when the speaker feels that what he or she intends to say could generate disagreement (Cruz, 2008).

However, silence has a dark side too. Silence that carries meaning is called “attributable silence” (Cutting, 2008, p. 29), and in cultures with low tolerance for silence, long unattributable silences result in awkwardness. In most Western conversations, participants usually terminate silences after about one second, because long pauses create a tension that people want to escape (Gould, 2008). In fact, researchers found that silence often carries negative connotations because talking simply for the reason of sociability (phatic communion) is desirable behaviour for competent language users (Sifianou, 1997).

As Scollon (1985) pointed out, there is an abundance of unfavourable (often ethnic) silence stereotypes, and attributions associated with slower turn exchanges are virtually all negative. Oftentimes, silence is seen as disruptive of smooth conversational flow (Jenkins, 2000). In fact, many people view speech as a machine. If one assumes that the engine should always be running, then silence indicates failure. Even researchers (who use terms like “productivity” to describe a reduction of within-turn pausing in interviews) perpetuate the view that the normal state of the “machine” is a steady hum, with hesitation or silences indicating trouble, or difficulty (Scollon, 1985, p. 26). In fact, the silence-is-bad message is so deeply ingrained in the Western psyche that when people speak to someone they do not like, they speak more slowly, with longer pauses between turns, and use more silences (Jaworski, 1993).

---

4 I am aware that this, and many of the findings in the following chapter, are generalizations that essentialize different ethnicities and cultures, and I will address this concern in the Patterns, Limitations and Gaps section.
Furthermore, Walker's (1985) research on witness testimony found that silent pauses can create doubt in the hearer. He showed that negative attribution about one feature of the testimony can lead to misattributions about other aspects of it as well. Therefore, what appears as a pause for thought in a friendly witness is suspected to be a pause for concealment in a witness for the other side. In some cases, think-before-you-speak may be bad advice, after all (Walker, 1985).

Research from classroom settings shows that, there, too, silence can be a double-edged sword. In her study, Duff (2002) reported that NNS students are often afraid of being criticized or laughed at in class because of their English, so silence protects them from humiliation. However, this interactional withdrawal attracts disdain from NS students, for whom silence represents "a lack of initiative, agency, desire to improve one's English, or attempt to offer interesting material for the sake of the class" (Duff, 2002, p. 312). Likewise, Nakane (2007) reported that silence is often inaccurately seen as a lack of commitment or a negative attitude towards studies. Therefore, the NNS students are caught between two unfavorable options: mockery or hostility.

**Intercultural Communication and Miscommunication**

The aforementioned negative aspects of silence become most apparent in intercultural communication (Jaworski, 1993). Historically, intercultural research on silence generally investigated ethnic minorities (Athabaskans, Western Apache, or other Indian Nations, and African tribes) or Asian cultures (Kivik, 1998). Recently, however, the focus has shifted somewhat to include Greeks, Finns, and Estonians (Kivik, 1998). These empirical studies on intercultural communication found no universal norms in silence, and, in fact, documented that profound differences in cultural norms affect interpretations of silence in interaction (Tannen & Sav-
ille-Troike, 1985). They discovered that Americans and Europeans regard talk as desirable and use it for referential as well as social/affective purposes (Sifianou, 1997). This emphasis on volubility and use of phatic utterances in Western society is due to the operation of the phatic maxim, which encourages interlocutors to keep talking (Cruz, 2008). In contrast, in many Asian cultures, people believe that talk is desirable only when there is some verbal information to be communicated. The same is true for the American Indian Nations: When one witnesses silence of American Indian people, one may be witnessing communication, except this communication is simply nonverbal. In fact, Mowrer (1970) found that Navajo's silence use was governed by rules and its function is quite specific. In Western Apache culture, the absence of verbal communication is associated with social situations where the participants' social status is ambiguous, and silence is, thus, a response to the resulting uncertainty and unpredictability (Basso, 1970). All in all, it appears that silence is more context-embedded than speech, and thus, more dependent on context and culture for interpretation (Saville-Troike, 1985).

Not only are silence use norms cross-culturally different, cultures even differ with respect to what is perceived as silence. What is considered silence in American society is seldom free of noise (such as appliances, traffic, chirping birds) and may not be considered silence in another culture (Saville-Troike, 1985; Tryggvason, 2006). What is even more interesting is that who is labelled talkative or taciturn is also quite relative. For example, Tryggvason (2006) reported that Finns find Swedes, who are internationally known for their taciturnity, to be extremely sociable and talkative. This further highlights the lack of universality in silence perception: What is “idle chatter” in one culture is actually “phatic communion” in another, and vice versa (Sifianou, 1997, p. 63).

In addition, studies have shown that there is an unwritten agreement in different cultures
about acceptable duration of pauses between turns (Tryggvason, 2006; Cutting, 2008). One such study was Scollon and Scollon's (1981) examination of silence in American and Athabaskan cultures. The authors found that Athabaskans allow a slightly longer pause between sentences than Americans. This seemingly small difference had an important effect on inter-ethnic communication: Americans dominated conversational turns because Athabaskans did not want to interrupt them. Consequently, Athabaskans could never get a word in edgewise, while Americans kept talking. Even more problematic, as a result of this, Americans developed a stereotype that Athabaskans were incoherent, did not make sense, and had nothing to say (one can only imagine what stereotype Athabaskans developed about Americans). To think, at the root of this inter-ethnic conflict were simply different expectations about how long someone should speak and when s/he could relinquish his/her turn!

In a similar study, Enninger (1987) investigated how the Amish used silence, and he found that they were much more tolerant of silence than mainstream American society. In fact, they frequently used between-turn gaps that were 20-56 seconds long (Enninger, 1987). In contrast to mainstream Americans, the Amish believe that successful interactive events do not necessarily involve the use of speech, because in their culture, silence can replace formulaic acts/speech. Unfortunately, such beliefs incite American mainstream society to view them as taciturn and uncooperative (Enninger, 1987).

Another intercultural study found that, in a classroom of Anglo children, the time elapsed before a response was just a few seconds long, whereas for a class of Navajo students, it could be 15-30 seconds long (Plank, 1994). This often felt like an eternity to a new teacher on the reservation, where the teacher was thinking, "they are not getting any of this at all," while in reality the students knew everything (Plank, 1994, Teachers' Responses to Silence section, para.
3). As a matter of fact, Plank's data (1994, para. 1) corroborated other research that indicated that Navajo students were quite accustomed to "not speaking," because they were used to learning by silent observation at home,\(^5\) rather than by asking questions and receiving information (Hirst & Slavik, 1989). Because of these differences between the teacher's culture and that of students' (especially if the teacher was unfamiliar with American Indian behavior patterns), many times silence was misunderstood and misinterpreted. This led to conflict (Hirst & Slavik, 1989; Basso, 1970) because “the very behaviours that indicate attentive listening in the Indian context indicate inattentiveness in the White context” (Wieder & Pratt, 1990, p. 60). To make matters worse, if the frazzled teacher started demanding answers to questions from Navajo students, it only served to exacerbate the problem: The teacher's frustration created confusion, and since in Navajo culture the proper student response to uncertainty and ambiguity is silence, then the educator's culturally mismatched expectations of the children only intensified this behaviour (Basso, 1970).

Likewise, in her investigation of intercultural communication in an academic context, Jenkins (2000, p. 488) found that all NS faculty saw silence as an indication that students were being uncooperative and unwilling to improve: They attributed students' silence to unflattering character traits, such as “lack of motivation, isolationism, and unwillingness to cooperate” (Jenkins, 2000, p. 497). On the other hand, the Chinese students reported that they acted according to their cultural politeness norms of deference. Because the faculty were unaware that students' silence stemmed from “polite deference and concern for maintaining appropriate face for unequal status interactions” and that the students were trying to protect their own and the professors' face (Jenkins, 2000, p. 497), students' silence had the opposite effect of what was expected.

---

\(^5\) Navajo children are “primarily visual learners,” and they use more senses to communicate (Plank, 1994, Discussion section, para. 6).
intended, and only exacerbated the faculty's negative interpretations. This led to typical statements such as "they refuse to speak English," and "The attitude of the students is wrong. They are not motivated to work on English" (Jenkins, 2000, p. 494). What was even more troubling, was that the more the professors interacted with the students, the more negative their attributions became as their frustration grew.

In her in-depth analysis of silence and intercultural differences, Nakane (2007) argued that in the context of globalization, there was a need for more comprehensive research on silence in intercultural encounters. Accordingly, she set out to identify communicative problems of Japanese native speakers taking mainstream courses in Australian universities. She found that instead of “ways of speaking,” their major concern was “not speaking,” particularly underelaboration in the classroom (Nakane, 2007, p. 1). This was due to the fact that values such as taciturnity (“a man of few words is trusted more than a man of many words”) are promoted in Japanese culture, but are negatively judged as “underelaborated communication” by Australian NS (Nakane, 2007, p. 28).

Saville-Troike (1985) found more of such intercultural differences when she showed that children talked more when they were enculturated into societies where there was a high value placed on individualism and individual achievement, and less when family/group achievement was valued. Although this cultural orientation dichotomy (that people in individualistic cultures are talkative and that people in collectivist cultures are silent) has been supported by a number of other studies (Kim, Hunter, Miyahara, Horvath, Bresnahan, & Yoon, 1996), more recent research shows a non-linear relationship between individualistic and collectivist dimensions of culture and silence (Kivik, 1998). Scholars are starting to recognize that it is not simply an East-West dichotomy: The situation is much more nuanced than that. Although some
“silent” cultures are very collectivist, the Nordic cultures are both very “silent” and quite individualistic (Kivik, 1998, p. 69). In fact, two examples of such silent cultures are Finns and Swedes, who see silences and pauses in a positive light. According to Tryggvason (2006), Swedes and Finns are more silent and less talkative than people of other nations: They interpret silence as a device to show respect for the person having the floor, while others see them as tedious partners in conversation. These findings were replicated for Estonians as well, in a cross-cultural study of Estonian, Canadian, and American university students, in which the author used questionnaires to measure attitudes about cultural differences in communication (Kivik, 1998).

Probably, it has become quite apparent from the research findings cited above, that intercultural differences can have very unfortunate side effects. In an age when intercultural interaction is the norm, not only across societies but also within them, different rules of speaking and silence usage have the potential to lead to miscommunication and pragmatic failure. This is very dangerous because it can cause stereotypes, prejudice, and discrimination against entire groups of people (Boxer, 2002).

In fact, Kivik (1998) described the sequence of attributions that leads from miscommunication to stereotype formation as follows: A faulty interactant is judged to be a faulty person, and then s/he starts to represent a group of faulty people. In this manner, although miscommunication arising from difficulty with vocabulary or grammar can be clearly identified as such, pragmatic errors are less visible and more likely to be attributed to the speaker’s personality than to the speaker’s pragmatic competence in English. The frequency of this misattribution is illustrated by the fact that when NNS make pragmatic errors they are rarely overtly corrected (Huth & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006). Since dispositional attributions lead to group stereotypes,
problems of miscommunication and incomplete understanding (i.e., when a message which one side wants to relay is not the one that the other side receives) provoke tension and irreconcilable ethnic conflicts and disputes (Ross, 2000). This problem is further exacerbated when the two sides are not aware of their differences, or how other groups interpret their actions (Hall, 1959). Thus, cultural differences in attitudes and norms can become a barrier to effective intergroup communication, and often lead to misperception and distrust.

How do intercultural differences precipitate miscommunication? When participants converse, they approach encounters with certain assumptions about the situation and their co-participants (Huth & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006). If speakers belong to the same culture, none of these assumptions need to be stated, or even consciously recognized, because they are learned through socialization (Huth & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006). However, when participants have different cultural knowledge of specific situations, this may result in different intentions and different expectations of the interactive process. For example, some speakers may think that the pauses others leave for them are not long enough to claim the floor without being rude, while others may think that longer pauses create awkward silences (Jaworski, 1993). As a consequence, they may misunderstand one another, and this is particularly likely to occur if interlocutors are not aware of the socio-pragmatic differences between their respective cultures.

Thus, learning appropriate rules for silence is a crucial part of developing communicative competence in L2. However, it is not an easy task. Because silence functions at a lower conscious level than speech, most fluent (in all other ways) bilinguals, even when using new verbal structures, still retain their native silence patterns in their L2 (Saville-Troike, 1985). For example, Nakane (2007, p. 28) reported that Japanese interviewees underelaborated their responses in English oral proficiency interviews (in particular, questions which addressed
personal issues received very little response), because they were using the “minimalist approach” strategy, which they transferred from the pragmatic rules of interview interaction in their own culture. As a consequence, the interviewer evaluated them quite negatively. This phenomenon, known as pragmatic transfer, “can only be replaced by immersion in the host culture and language” (Jenkins, 2000, p. 481), and has been found to play a major part in intercultural miscommunication (Golato, 2003).

Finally, misjudging someone's use of silence can take place in many contexts and in many different ways. The examples described above are only a sample of communicative problems caused by silence. In order to be able to overcome them, we need to understand what is at the root of these problems. It appears that intercultural miscommunication is caused by differences in attributions of silence's purposes and functions, and disparities in participants' intentions, expectations and performances of silence. Thereby, next, the discussion turns to the various functions frequently assigned to silence.

**Functions of Silence**

The numerous lists of silence functions found in the literature vary somewhat from one another, but they seem to be in general agreement that silence can have prosodic, cognitive, social, stylistic, interactive, politeness, ideological and identity functions. Each of these categories is examined below.

The first (and for a long time believed to be the only) function of silence is prosodic: Silence can be used to define boundaries of utterances and mark them as prosodic features of discourse (Nakane, 2007). Pauses that belong to the prosodic and paralinguistic system of language play a role in identifying and making sense of speech units (Jaworski, 1993). In fact, this type of silence is treated on par with other paralinguistic attributes of speech, such as voice
volume, tempo, pitch and intensity. Be that as it may, Tedlock (1983) found that pausing is only minimally dependent on breathing, as breathing pauses simultaneously satisfy both the physiological and linguistic needs of the speaker (Lieberman, 1968). Therefore, psycholinguists now believe that silence can go beyond its prosodic function.

**Cognitive Function of Silence.** Another function of silence, the cognitive function, has been explored by looking at within-turn and between-turn silences. Within-turn silences are those that occur within a turn (when one hesitates during a verbalization) (Chafe, 1985; Nakamura, 2004). It has been shown that within-turn silence in speech reflects the speaker’s lexical decision-making process and his or her choice of individual words (Zuo, 2002). Recently, it has been suggested that within-turn silences could also be used for phrasal planning, and Zuo’s (2002) analysis supported this proposition by documenting the occurrence of within-turn silences before function words.

As a matter of fact, although silence is often regarded as a speech error, this is usually incorrect. For the most part, silence is an indication of cognitive activity. Zuo (2002) found that silence in the stream of speech is one of the most important indicators of the cognitive processes of speech production in conversation, and in addition to syntactic planning, it also reflects (and allows for) some super-ordinate, semantic planning operations. In addition, silence reveals mental search processes, codability of objects/events, and discourse-organizational considerations, as the speaker attempts to put together a description of an event from memory (Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985).

In spontaneous speech, silence tends to precede words of high unpredictability, with hesitations usually reflecting difficulties in how to verbalize something one already has in mind (Zuo, 2002; Nakamura, 2004). The more difficult and unpredictable the word, the greater the
hesitation (Zuo, 2002).

However, silent pauses are not universally cognitive. Beattie and Bradbury (1979) showed that it is possible to decrease the number and length of silent pauses in one's speech without distorting the speech content, which suggested that some such pauses are non-cognitive and are not necessary to speech. In an extension of their first study, when Beattie and Bradbury (1979) removed these silent pauses, filled hesitations (pauses with fillers) increased, and overall speech rate did not change. This suggests that the amount of hesitation necessary for cognitive processing of speech production is fixed.

**Social and Stylistic Function of Silence.** Silence can also serve a social function when social distance is created, maintained and reduced by silence. Jaworski and Coupland (1999) described the skew in the distribution of phatic talk and silence on the social distance continuum: Those relationships towards the center (casual friends and acquaintances) show more frequent use of phatic talk than those at the extreme ends of social distance (intimacy or detachment). In support of this theory, Zuo (2002) indicated that silence can help achieve a high degree of intersubjectivity between interactants (thus reducing social distance), while Kivik's (1998) examination of the use of phatic silence in the Canadian context revealed that Canadians stay silent when they disagree with a friend, and that they are less likely to talk to someone when they are depressed.

Enninger (1987) argued that conversation is but one type of focused interaction. Wishram tribes can 'do communion' and have legal transactions/exchanges without any words, which is another example of silence serving a social function. In this culture, a friend can come to someone's house, sit, and leave without a word being exchanged, and one would later report that “so and so came to see me yesterday” (Enninger, 1987, p. 289). Moreover, a legal
transaction like silent bartering can be done in complete silence: Items for exchange are put in a certain designated place, and people from other tribes takes these items and replace them with items of approximately equal value (Enninger, 1987).

Silence can also be used as a means of social control. For example, in the Akan community in Ghana, and the Igbo community in Nigeria, people refuse to talk to those who violate social norms as a form of punishment (Nakane, 2007).

Finally, silence can also have a stylistic function. Some pauses, which are less influenced by context and are more trait-like, tend to reflect personal conversational style (Scollon, 1985). In addition, silence is often employed by experienced speakers to impress the audience and elicit applause (Jaworski, 1993). Research shows that listener-oriented stylistic within-turn pauses are shortest in prose readings, longer in poetry, even longer in spontaneous narratives, and the longest in storytelling (Scollon, 1985).

Interactive and Communicative Function of Silence. Although cognitive function is, after all, its primary one, in the context of conversation, silence also carries an interactive function. First, silence serves as a turn-maintaining device and prevents the listener from taking over a turn (Zuo, 2002). In fact, pausing within a turn is one of the most effective strategies used to prevent the turn-holder from getting interrupted, because it is a signal indicating that the message is not finished. In addition, Scollon (1985) found another interactive function of silence when he showed that the rhythm of pauses between sequences was the critical factor in synchronizing the join action of a mother and an infant. Moreover, another type of within-turn silences, the between-unit silence, functions as linguistic boundary marker, and thus, facilitates interaction (Zuo, 2002).

In L2 classrooms, silence is often viewed as a failure of communication. Wanting to
refute this position, Nakamura (2004) explored possible interactive uses of silence in two
different settings: in a classroom and during an interview. He demonstrated that a student can
use silence to weigh the consequences of saying “yes” or “no,” while the teacher can use it as
time to rephrase her question or emphasize certain instructions (Nakamura, 2004). Also,
particularly in the interview setting, silence seems to function as a form of feedback, prompting
the speaker to rework the question.

In addition, silence can also be utilized in communication by people who have limited
verbal communication capacity (Nakane, 2007). In a case study investigating L2 English con-
versations of three Japanese female college students, Gould (2008) looked at between-turn si-
lences (silences that take place during turn-taking interaction). He found that “turn-avoidance”
and not “turn-acquisition” seemed to be guiding this talk-in-interaction (Gould, 2008). In this
study, in L1 conversations, turns were valuable resources that were allocated and exploited by
participants. However, during L2 interactions, the participants seemed to be playing a game of
conversational “hot potato,” where the object was to end one’s turn as quickly as possible
(Gould, 2008). Thus, this study showed that long silences that occur between turns could serve
as self-protection devices, by providing an interactional “safe zone” where no specific partici-
pant was responsible for contributing an utterance.

Furthermore, although silence may not cause particular actions, these actions are noticed
in the turns following silence, so it can be an effective emphasis device, and it can also be used
to create suspense (Zuo, 2002; Nakamura, 2004). Besides, silence can also be used for manag-
ing emotional states: Surprise and confusion is often marked by pauses (Tryggvason, 2006). Fi-
nally, silence can go beyond the limitations of words and allow people to express extreme psy-
chological states like madness, outrage, and ecstasy (Jaworski, 1993).
As follows from the examples above, silence can be (and often is) a communicative and interactive resource: it helps structure social interactions, it can be a device to make adjustments and accommodate one's interlocutor; it allows people to manage and communicate emotional states, and it can be used as an emphasis device, or a device for self-protection and turn avoidance.

**Politeness Strategy Function of Silence.** Another major silence function category is when it is implemented as a politeness strategy. Although they do not elaborate on silence, Brown and Levinson see it as an ultimate expression of politeness: a realization of the “don't do a face-threatening act (FTA)” super-strategy (Jaworski, 1997, p. 5). In fact, silence is great for conflict avoidance: It is easier to undo silence than to undo words (Jaworski, 1993). However, other scholars point out that silence can also realize other super-strategies (like positive and negative politeness), and that silence can also be impolite or face threatening (Jaworski, 1997).

Although silence can serve as both positive and negative politeness strategies, it more clearly reflects the latter (Cruz, 2008). The speaker can use silence to show consideration for (or deference towards) the hearer, especially if the hearer is older or more powerful. Hence, negative face politeness silence is frequently used in situations of unequal status (Cruz, 2008; Scol- lon & Scollon, 1983). In addition, silence is often used as a distancing device, which could be considered a positive act in one society, but a rude one in another. In her study, Sifianou (1997) found that Greece is a society where taciturnity does not only mean unfriendliness, but indirectly reflects bad character. Children are taught to use silence for self-protection, and to distance themselves from strangers, because it is believed that danger lurks in the silent person (Sifianou, 1997). As follow, societies with negative politeness orientation will value silence more than societies with a positive-politeness orientation, and individuals who value interdependence use

---

6 This explains why Kivik (1998) found that Canadians stay silent when they disagree with a friend!
negative politeness silence more than people who value independence (Kim et al., 1996).

Nonetheless, while silence can indicate a desire to avoid imposition, it can also serve as a positive-politeness strategy by indicating a shared common ground and an expression of solidarity in situations of equal status (Scollon & Scollon, 1983). These types of silences can be interpreted as a sign of closeness: “you don't need to say anything because we have shared knowledge” (Jaworski, 1993, p. 78). They can also strengthen confidence about the intimacy of a relationship. Lastly, silence can also affect one's positive face: It can be interpreted as either a sign of a bad mood or shyness (Cruz, 2008).

**Ideological Function of Silence.** The penultimate function of silence that will be examined refers to silence being utilized as an ideological practice. Some scholars suggest that silence can be used to create and perpetuate status and gender roles. In fact, Watts (1997) argues that any silence that is interpreted as communicatively meaningful will contribute to the status of the person saying it. In his study, he demonstrated that strategic silence could significantly strengthen the status position of an individual, and help give him the position from which power can be exercised.

Interactional silences can be used to manipulate participants' conversational status within a group because the use of silence can mark not only authority, but also subordination (Scollon, 1985; Nakane, 2007). For example, in a classroom, teachers' silence always marks their dominant status over students, whereas student silence is subordinate, but it need not be submissive. In fact, Jaworski (1993) believes that both sides use silence when they are negotiating power: exerting and displaying in the case of teachers, and claiming and defying in the case of students. Moreover, as Maramatsu (2012) demonstrated in her case study of Verina (an L2 learner of Japanese), she used silence to mark the status separation between teachers and
students, and her resistance to being socialized by teachers was enacted through silence.

In Losey's (1997) study on classroom interactions in California, she found that Anglo-Americans attempt to maintain power over Mexican-Americans by silencing them in as many arenas of life as possible: political, economic, cultural and ethnic. She found that Mexican-American men were silenced in written interactions, while the women were silenced in classroom talk. Furthermore, even though Mexican-American women were actively developing strategies to break this silence, by findings openings and warding off interruptions, they were eventually silenced by the content and structure of the class interaction.

Finally, Plank's study (1994) revealed that silence is implemented by the Navajo to safeguard an individual's knowledge and power. A Navajo teacher explained that, in their culture “It was believed that we shouldn't freely give out our knowledge to strangers. They might gain all of your knowledge and that person will lose his/her power” (Cultural Difference section, para. 2).

Identity Function of Silence. An interesting finding in the aforementioned Kivik (1998) study was that while Estonian bilinguals transferred their L1 silence usage pragmatics to English, not everyone transferred. Why? It appears that the moderating variable may be the relationship between communication and national identity. Kivik’s (1998) data suggested that people may use silence to assert their ethnic identity. While speaking in an L2, participants either switched to that language's cultural understanding, or chose to affirm their own values, and hence, became culturally more ethnic than when speaking in their own language. This connection has been observed in other research as well: Blum-Kulka (1991) found that high proficien-

---

7 As institutions of socialization into the local culture, schools teach silencing from generation to generation. Because of their economic segregation, lack of bilingual instruction in schools, and school content that does not relate to what is important in these students' lives, Mexican-American students are silenced by the lack of access to equal educational experiences. These students are taught that they are not expected to excel or succeed, and so they are expected to remain silent (Losey, 1997).
cy NNSs resisted adopting the NS’s pragmatic norms in order to maintain their own cultural identity.

While these ideas and preliminary findings are quite intriguing, it should be acknowledged that Kivik's (1998) study had some methodological limitations, including a translation problem (from English to Estonian) which may also account for the results. If nothing else, however, it does show educators that when teaching silence usage in the classroom, they should be mindful that it is not just students’ language ability that is changing; their identity is undergoing a transformation as well.

Silence in Institutional talk

The current investigation of silence's functions, perceptions and interpretations was conducted in a context of intercultural mentoring sessions and interviews. Since both interviews and mentoring sessions are considered one-on-one institutional discourse, this section provides a brief overview of how researchers approach silence in institutional talk.

Study of silence in interviews is complex. In fact, “silence behavior during interviews presents a somewhat more complicated problem than does analysis of the speech (action) behavior” (Matarazzo et al., 1962b, p. 422). This makes it even more regrettable that silence in institutional settings is a fairly under-explored, and empirically under-researched, area (Moston, 1993; Sharpley, 1997). Nonetheless, some research does exist.

For instance, Matarazzo et al. (1962b) investigated the distribution of two different types of silences in screening psychiatric interviews, which were used as part of an application process for prospective firemen or policemen. They found that while both types of silences have J-shaped distributions, latency silence (also known as between-turn silence) is shorter than quickness silence (also known as within-turn silence), probably because interlocutors assume

---

8 This means they are skewed towards the high end (Matarazzo et al., 1962b).
that, in the latter case, the speaker will eventually say something (and so they wait). Moreover, although this study examined standardized interviews, authors claimed that similar J-shaped distributions were replicated using unstructured interviews as well.

Another manner in which silence comes up in institutional interview research is when silence is used as a tool. For example, a ‘silence stress’ test is often implemented in psychiatric interviews to assess behaviour. This is a type of assessment procedure when the interviewer remains silent (for up to 15 seconds) 12 times during an interview, in an effort to assess an interviewee’s reaction when his or her conversational partner provides no response (Matarazzo et al., 1962b).

However, while they study its distribution and its use as a tool (as illustrated above), in general, researchers investigating silence in institutional settings do not attribute much meaning or value to the silence itself. For example, in their analysis of the sequential organization of phone calls to the emergency services, Whalen and Zimmerman (1987) treated silence as a gap that signified that the caller was disengaged. In fact, they classified silence as an ambient event, putting it in the same category as background noise and dogs’ barking. Incidentally, in their study, they found that silence did carry some meaning for the emergency dispatchers: Even though most calls to the emergency that did contain silence were simply misdialed numbers, because the silence-is-bad mentality was so prevalent, the dispatchers interpreted silence as a sign of trouble, and an indication of a possible emergency, in other words, as virtual requests for help.

Regardless, some institutional research does acknowledge the communicative value of silence. For instance, Cook (1964) found that there was significantly more silence in successful interviews than in unsuccessful ones, and that greater amounts of silence were associated with
better scores on outcome measures (he used counsellor’s ratings to measure outcome). As a 
follow-up to Cook’s study, Sharpley (1997) investigated a client’s perception of silence’s value 
during counselling interviews, and found that interview minutes, which were assessed to 
embody very high rapport, contained more silence than the minutes judged to have moderate 
rapport. Therefore, the author claimed that silence can play a causal role in client-perceived 
rapport, and, thus, can be a positive feature of standard one-to-one interviews or counselling 
interactions. Moreover, this study discovered that the most effective use of silence occurs in the 
middle and the end of interviews, while silence at the beginning of the interview is not 
associated with very high perceptions of rapport. More importantly, this data lent more support 
to the idea that silence is beneficial for client-perceived rapport: Both this study and Cook’s 
(1964) investigation, using two different outcome measures, showed that silence occurs more 
frequently during very effective interviews than during the less effective ones.

Cook’s (1964) and Sharpley’s (1997) research is important for two reasons. First, it 
represents institutional interview research that taps into silence’s meaningfulness and 
usefulness. Second, it has relevance for the current study because rapport is as crucial to the 
success of the mentoring process as it is to the counselling process. Thus, implications from the 
findings regarding rapport-building can easily apply to mentoring sessions as well.

Another piece of research that is quite relevant to the current investigation was Moston’s 
(1993) study that indirectly addressed the impact of silence misinterpretations in the context of 
police interrogation interviews. Because the use of silence is relatively widespread in 
contemporary police interviews, Moston (1993) investigated typical strategies policemen used 
for dealing with suspects who exercised their right to silence. He found that, most of the time,

---

9 Silence at the start of the interaction may not be beneficial because, during the opening stages of a counselling 
session, the client is seeking leadership from the counsellor, and silence can be seen as a lack of this quality.
officers were stumped by silence and were unsure of how to proceed. Hence, they relied on strategies. One such technique, the avoidance strategy, was based on an assumption that silence was the antithesis of communication. Adhering to this viewpoint, officers saw suspects’ silence as preventing any form of questioning, and the majority of interviewers saw no point in interviewing a suspect who was not going to say anything. Thus, the suspect’s use of silence forced the interview to end. However, Moston (1993, p. 232) found that, in reality, reliance on the avoidance technique “almost certainly reflects a lack of confidence in the interviewer's own questioning skills,” and this strategy, based on a flawed assumption, was not very fruitful or useful. In fact, in some interviews in which avoidance was observed, the suspect was not asked a single offence-related question at all!

Another strategy, the persistence approach, was implemented when an interviewer assumed that silence meant ”I can't remember." Thus, he or she asked a series of questions in an attempt to jog the suspect's memory. This was a very common technique, and, unfortunately, it was a bad one. Moston (1993) described persistence as a form of fixation, which exposed the interviewer's panic: The interviewer kept asking the same question over and over again, sounding more and more desperate with each repetition, and this caused the interviewer to lose credibility, the suspect stopped paying attention (sometimes, suspects even laughed mockingly), and the interview disintegrated. As the above clearly demonstrates, the misinterpretation of what interviewee's silence actually meant ended up being harmful to the interviewing process, and, ultimately, it resulted in the interviewer's failure to get any information out of the suspect.

Finally, Moston (1993, p. 236) concluded that officers tended to perceive the use of silence as leading to a number of problems, even though there was “scarcely any empirical research to suggest that suspects who exercise their right to silence are systematically eluding
justice.” He lamented, “the interviewer will end the interview, probably attributing their 'failure' to gain a confession to the stubborn resistance of the suspect, rather than their own lack of skill” (Moston, 1993, p. 236), when, in reality, the interview actually fell apart because of the faulty strategies (like avoidance or panicked persistence), which were a product of faulty assumptions about (and misinterpretations of) silence.

**Silence in an L2 classroom**

Because two of the case studies in this study involved long-term mentoring sessions, and because one of the main goals of the current investigation was to find out how silence usage can be taught in ESL classrooms, this section will outline research on silence in L2 classrooms.

Plank (1994) conducted a qualitative study exploring how silence effects the school environment by analyzing perceptions of educators who worked with Navajo children. Among other things, he found that there was a lot of teacher frustration regarding the disintegration of the widely-implemented question-and-answer/dialogical teaching framework “that characterizes most of Western instruction” (Wieder & Pratt, 1990, p. 60). As already mentioned in the section on Intercultural Communication and Miscommunication, the problem lay in the fact that Navajo students were unlikely to ask or answer questions in the classroom, even when they knew the correct answer, because, in Navajo home culture, it is considered improper to verbally respond to the teacher's questions. As a matter of fact, “Indians regard asking questions in such a situation as being inattentive, rude, insolent, and so forth,” because one should not set oneself apart from, or above, one's peers (Wieder & Pratt, 1990, p. 60; Youngman & Sadongei, 1974). Furthermore, according to the Navajo tradition, a student shows his or her attentiveness and respect by avoiding eye contact and by being silent. It is easy to imagine how this behaviour can frustrate teachers who were trained in the North American system! All in all, Plank's (1994)
study demonstrated how different cultural norms in silence usage can lead to miscommunication in L2 classrooms, and highlighted the dire need to try to find solutions to this conundrum.

How can teachers prepare their students for intercultural communication and help them avoid miscommunication? Again, regrettably, silence gets less attention than it warrants from language researchers and practitioners because it is not easy to study or teach (Riazantseva, 2001). Research shows that in many L2 classrooms, silence is utilized as a way of coping with cultural differences: Teachers rely on silence to avoid embarrassing students for their poor English, or feeling embarrassed themselves if any miscommunication occurs (Nakane, 2007). In her research, Losey (1997) found that many teachers do not think it is important for L2 students to talk in class, and they only worry about silent students if they are obviously inattentive. Unfortunately, by teaching students to stay silent, they are not addressing the complicated issue of silence and L2 learning that the students are facing.

What complicates this problem is that, as previously mentioned, the pragmatic rules for using silence are difficult to acquire. One of the reasons why it is such a challenge is because it may be culture, and not language, that determines the discourse pattern. For example, Tryggvason (2006) found that, while one can learn the syntax and lexis of a different language, in many cases, he or she still adheres to the pragmatic rules of one's first language. Nakane (2007) supported this finding by showing that even students of very high English proficiency still use Japanese pragmatic conventions in classroom communication, and these norms seem to override their language proficiency. In fact, Kivik (1998) suggested that silence/talk relationship in conversation cannot always be related to competence, because she also found that English speaking Swedes who were less prone to initiate communication saw themselves as more
linguistically competent. Thus, it appears that the most important influence on silence usage comes from culture, which makes teaching silence use in a classroom particularly difficult. Moreover, personal choice plays a crucial role in the adoption of a context-appropriate communicative style (Wigglesworth & Yates, 2007).

Whatever the students' attitudes towards the values of the target community, the teacher needs to supply them with the right tools, so if they want to, they can use them. Unfortunately, it appears that learners are either not equipped with the proper ways of doing things or are unaware how things should be done in a particular situation. Huth and Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) suggest that learners may need more explicit help in pragmatics. In addition, a number of researchers advocate that the best kind of instruction should focus on raising awareness and understanding, and providing a safe place (the classroom) in which students may experiment (Wigglesworth & Yates, 2007; Riazantseva, 2001). After all, the teacher's role should be to help learners understand some of the cultural values underlying silence usage, but not force students to adopt them. Crucially, learners need to become more aware of the potential consequences of the choices they make in interaction. In order to promote interethnic peace, educators need to make all people more aware of the ambiguous, and potentially dangerous, aspects of intercultural communication (Gudykunst 1991).

Patterns, Limitations, and Gaps

In the following section I outline some emerging patterns within the literature that I examined, as well as some of its gaps and limitations.

Most of the studies on intercultural silence use and interpretation take the Western (usually Anglo-American) perspective as the norm (in a non-prescriptive sense) and present various alternative approaches to usage, distribution and appreciation of silence (Jaworski,
1993). While it is important to teach L2 English students to be aware of the interlocutor's style, and converge to it consciously when needed, it is highly problematic to treat English as the norm in both theory and practice.

Another problem is that many studies claim that, in the West, speech is normal behaviour, whereas silence is deviant. This is an over-simplification: Tolerance of silence in conversation varies, even among the seemingly culturally homogeneous white Americans (Jaworski, 1993). In fact, Zuo (2002) reported that there can be varying silence norms in subcultures or different ethnic groups within one culture, and Jaworski (1993) advocated for research that does not group participants into such dichotomies and stereotypes, but instead, is sensitive to the diversity of silence appraisal across cultures and subcultures.

Another closely-related limitation within existing literature is the prevalent comparison between Western and non-Western cultures. What group 'Western' covers is ambiguous, and the overuse of this label reinforces stereotypes regarding "voluble" or "silent" racial groups (Nakane, 2007, p. 16). In addition, the contextual and social identity factors that contribute to silence usage have been frequently overlooked.

Furthermore, empirical analyses of silence in intercultural communication (e.g., Nakane's (2007) study of ESL Japanese and NS Australians, or Plank's (1994) study of Anglo teachers and Navajo students) have been scarce and long overdue. Much more needs to be done. We need to study different contexts to find out what behavior is perceived as marked silence (in those particular contexts), what silence is noted as "deviant," and what silence is taken for granted by the participants of intercultural communication (Nakane, 2007, p.207).

The main limitation of Kivik's (1998) cross-cultural study of Estonians, Canadians and Americans was one that frequently appears in silence research. Kivik administered an
attitudinal survey where participants were required to answer Likert-scale questions from long-term memory. This is problematic, because whenever participants have to rely on memory, it always creates a potential for inaccuracies, since long-term memory retrieval is heavily influenced by recall interference (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Nonetheless, these types of attitudinal studies can still be quite useful as background information for discourse micro-analysis of real life conversations.

Another common limitation, this time from Nakamura's (2004) study, is that the author did not take into account the non-verbal cues that may play a significant role in silence function and interpretation. Non-verbal communication is important. Psychologists estimate that between 60% and 80% of all of our communication with other people is non-verbal. Moreover, non-verbal cues are usually considered a more accurate sign of underlying emotions than the words themselves (Breckler, Olson & Wiggins, 2006).

A broader limitation within this sample of silence research is that researchers tend to adopt either a psycholinguistic or conversation analysis (CA) perspective and, thus, neglect either the interactive or the cognitive function of silence. Zao (2002) argued that because both the cognitive and interactive function of silence are so important, neither the psycholinguistic nor CA approach is sufficient, and an integration of the two is needed.

All in all, the existing research on silence has a number of gaps that should be addressed in future research. First, it would be interesting to investigate a situation where Anglo-saxon students were a minority. Would they be just as silent, or at least, more so than non-Anglo majority peers (Nakane, 2007)? In addition, Jaworski (1993) talked about the need to carry out further detailed case studies of the way silence worked (and was used) in everyday conversation. He said that because silence still had no universal definition, maybe future studies would
redefine it using other terms, such as implicature, inference, nontalk, and negative space.

Furthermore, he emphasized the importance of considering the participants' perspective when assessing attitudes about silence, and not just relying on the researchers' point of view. Finally, Jaworski (1993) advocated that to study silence cross-culturally, it was necessary to adopt a relativistic perspective, as opposed to an absolutist one.

**Study Rationale and Theoretical Framework**

As described above, intercultural differences in silence usage and norms can lead to miscommunication and pragmatic failure, which is dangerous, because it can contribute to the evolution and maintenance of racial or ethnic stereotypes (Wigglesworth & Yates, 2007). Tryggvason (2006), Nakane (2007), Kivik (1998) and Huth and Taleghani-Nikazm (2006) all talk about pragmatic transfer being a major reason for cross-cultural miscommunication. Moreover, the fact that silence/talk relationship in conversation cannot always be related to L2 proficiency suggests that there may be gaps in L2 learners' pragmatic knowledge.

The initial rationale for this study was based on the need to find ways to address some of these problems. In particular, it is evident that we need to teach silence norms in ESL classrooms, but which particular silences should teachers address, and which silences should they leave be? In other words, which silences can lead to a breakdown in communication, and which are simply benign? As outlined above, silence is not adequately addressed in L2 classrooms (Cruz, 2008), mainly because teachers want to avoid their own embarrassment. However, by doing this, they are ignoring the complicated silence usage issues that the students are facing (Cruz, 2008). Furthermore, because both learning and use of silence is more unconscious than speech, silence norms are much more difficult to acquire (Nakane, 2007). Accordingly, one proposed way of teaching silence is to raise students' awareness of silence
conventions and their own silence use. Will that help? There is evidence that awareness of different silence norms, and the resulting increase of wait time in conversation to accommodate these norms, has increased the quality of classroom communication in Canadian Aboriginal reserves, in Japan, and in Poland (Nakane, 2007).

In order to answer these pedagogical questions, we need to better understand why the students are using silence. Although there is a body of research on the functions and purposes of silence, most of it is from the researchers' point of view. Thus, following in the footsteps of researchers like Nakane (2007), who investigated participant's perspectives on silence use, and motivated by the general need to explore participants' viewpoints instead of simply relying on the researchers' perspectives (Jaworski, 1993), this study attempted to add to the existing body of work by describing participants' perceptions of silence, its usage, and its various causes and functions. I believe such an undertaking is essential, because the participant’s viewpoint is the “final arbiter of … effectiveness” and “there are clear data that indicate that other persons are not reliably able to tap that viewpoint” (Sharpley, 1997, p. 244).

The limitations of existing studies and current research trends were another motivator for the present study. As already mentioned in the section on Patterns, Limitations, and Gaps, Jaworski (1993) advocated for relativistic, cross-cultural investigation of silence, and Nakano (2007) emphasized the fact that empirical analysis of silence in intercultural communication has been scarce and long overdue. Although Nakano's (2007) study began to fill this void, much more needs to be done. Likewise, when developing a rationale for his own study, Zuo (2002) cited the existing gap in the literature on silence in conversation. Therefore, the current study attempted to fill some of these gaps by analyzing silence cross-culturally, and in open
Accordingly, the current study's design rationale was grounded in a cross-cultural and interactive theoretical approach, which conceptualizes silence as a communicative linguistic form that is both semantic and pragmatic, and sees speech and silence not as dichotomies and clear-cut opposite categories, but as overlapping ends of a continuum (Jaworski, 1993). Stimulated recall was selected as the main methodology for this study in order to overcome the aforementioned limitations (see section on Patterns, Limitations, and Gaps) of attitudinal survey research, and because it is a good instrument to get participants' perspective (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Moreover, Riazantseva (2001, p. 518) advocated that it is “important to describe the native pausing norms of different languages under different speech conditions.” Because little literature exists on silence in interviews, and even less (if any) on silence in mentoring sessions, these two speech events were chosen as the context for this investigation. Finally, due to the prevalence of the Western vs. Eastern paradigm in silence research (Nakane, 2007; Jaworski, 1993), cultures were selected based on convenience, and also with a two-fold goal of exploring and comparing Western and Eastern norms, while examining under-investigated Iranian and Russian cultures. Thus, this study attempted to fill the existing gaps in the literature by examining how silence in a mentorship/interview setting is perceived in six different cultures.

The analysis rationale was based on the fact that much of silence research, especially research from the social-psychological perspective, studies silence beliefs and values by means of survey questionnaires. Recently, however, researchers have begun advocating for an approach that allows us to study silence usage within actual interaction. While survey data can

---

10 While mentoring sessions and interviews are considered institutional discourse (see section on Silence in Institutional Talk), the conversations that were analyzed as part of this study were quite open, and especially the mentees were able to nominate any topic they wanted for informal, improvised conversation where the mentor was taking cues from the mentee.
supply background knowledge for such micro-analysis, interactional sociolinguistic analysis provides a richer and more accurate account of language behaviour (Walters, 2007). In addition, it can be used to isolate and describe pragmatic failure (Golato, 2003), which is the focus of this study. Therefore, data were analyzed using an interactional sociolinguistic framework, which considered participants’ discourse about silence beyond mere content of the interviews/mentoring sessions. The discursive constructions of participants' perspectives, identities, and ideologies were considered in the context of the interaction itself, which was co-constructed by both interlocutors (the participant and the researcher). Furthermore, both interviews and stimulated recall were conceptualized as social practice, knowledge production and data generation as a collaborative activity (Talmy, 2010), and the relationship between talk, its sequence, its setting, and its occurrence, as reflexively tied (Whalen & Zimmerman, 1987). Therefore, in my analysis, I accounted not only for content, but also the interactional and interpersonal circumstances of data production.

Finally, I grounded my data interpretation in recent research that emphasizes silences' multideterminism, arguing that it cannot be examined in isolation, and that, although they are frequently overlooked, psychological, linguistic, identity-based, stylistic and interactive aspects of silence matter too (Chafe, 1985; Nakane, 2007). Furthermore, I based my data interpretation on Zuo’s (2002) findings of intra-cultural variation in silence use, and Riazantseva's (2001) call for an investigation of individual variability in pausing within language groups.

In addition to filling some of the gaps in the literature, this study also attempted to provide support to the existing body of research. For example, in Chapter Four, when I take each of the categories laid out in previous research, and show how they are present in my own data, I attempt to replicate some previous findings on intercultural communication, in particular,
the different causes and functions of silence, thus contributing to the wealth of knowledge on
this topic and adding validity and generalizability to previous research through triangulation
(Porte, 2008).

Furthermore, investigation of NNS’s perceptions, and establishing what factors influence
NSs’ as well as NNSs’ perceptions of L2 speech, are becoming more and more important for
both theoretical and applied SLA (Girard & Sionis, 2004). We need to find out what behaviour
is perceived as marked silence, and how such silence (and what kind of silence) is noted as de-
viant, or taken for granted, by participants in intercultural communication. Therefore, in this
study, I explored silence from a number of perspectives including NS vs. NNS, intra-cultural vs.
intercultural, and speaker vs. listener. Once I had the participants reflect on their silence use, I
used their audio to do a Listen and Reflect task with a native speaker of English and another
person from the participant’s cultural background. Then, I compared and contrasted all three
perspectives on silence usage, and thus, I was able to pinpoint the silences that were most harsh-
ly judged and considered most deviant (and therefore, most likely to cause miscommunication)
by these particular participants. These potential sites of miscommunication can be quite enlight-
ening and useful for practising teachers and curriculum planners, who can find ways to address
these potentially dangerous silences in L2 classrooms.
Chapter Three: Methodology

The following chapter explains this study’s research methodology. It begins with a description of participants, data collection and recruitment procedure, followed by a delineation of the data collection instrument (and its limitations), and the breakdown of criteria used for choosing which silences to study. Then, the data analysis procedure is laid out. This chapter concludes with an important note about the role of the researcher in this study.

Participants

Twenty-six (26) adults, 10 male and 16 female, participated in this study (see Figure 1 in Appendix A). Among these 26, there were two groups of participants: silence producers and listeners. Silence producers were made up of two types of participants: mentees and interviewees (see Table 1). The mentee participants were two consenting adults whom I mentored as part of the City Center for Newcomers language mentoring program. Through networking, I also recruited six interviewee participants, for a one-time interview/conversation. The eight silence producers (both mentees and interviewees) consisted of three males and five females (average age 39, age ranging from 29 to 51 years old). They were all internationally educated professionals, representing a variety of professions in microbiology, biology, chemistry, engineering, teaching, pharmacy, and social science.

The second group, the 18 listener\textsuperscript{11} participants, were recruited to listen to data from the mentee and interviewee participants. Of these 18 listeners, six were native speakers of English, while the other 12 were non-native speakers of English\textsuperscript{12} from the same cultural background as the silence producers to whom they listened during the Listen and Reflect task.

\textsuperscript{11} In this study, the participants taking part in the Listen and Reflect task are referred to as listeners.

\textsuperscript{12} These were also internationally educated professionals, representing professions such as engineering, teaching, social science, journalism and pharmacy.
The participants were of varying English proficiency, ranging from beginner\(^{13}\) to fluent, representing six cultural backgrounds (Chinese, Korean, Russian, Colombian, Iranian, and Canadian, see Table 2). The date of arrival in Canada for NNS participants ranged from 1999 to August 2011.

Finally, the researcher, interviewer, and mentor was a 23-24 year old female graduate student of Eastern European background.

Table 1

*Distribution of participants by phase*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Mean Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Silence Producers: 1) Mentees</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>37-51</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2) Interviewees</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>29-51</td>
<td>37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Listeners:</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>21-53</td>
<td>35</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2

*Distribution of participants by country*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Total No.</th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Age Range</th>
<th>Mean Age</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>23-40</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>31-51</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33-46</td>
<td>39</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>29-39</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>41-53</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Canada</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>21-49</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>21-53</td>
<td>36</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Recruitment and Data Collection Procedures**

This study had two phases. During the first phase, I collected data from the silence producers in the context of two types of speech events: interviews and language mentoring.

\(^{13}\) All participants spoke enough English to be able to interact with me in English.
sessions. With cooperation of an immigrant settlement organization (pseudonym City Center for Newcomers or CCN) (Kerekes et al., in press), I became a language mentor for their mentoring program. The program required a four-month commitment for one-and-a-half hour sessions every week. The CCN program coordinator matched the mentor\textsuperscript{14} and the mentee based on the mentee's needs and mentor's skills. I took on two mentees (Keivan and Boomie) and used the audio recordings (and notes) of our mentoring sessions as the data for this study. The purpose of the mentoring sessions was to improve the mentees' language skills for job-seeking purposes. Ultimately, it was the mentee who decided what to focus on during a particular session, but generally, these language-mentoring sessions focused on fluency, grammar, pronunciation and vocabulary. In addition, the mentee and I also worked on his/her resumes, cover letters, and language class assignments, we scripted and practiced interview questions, and did any other activities that could help the mentee with his/her language skills and/or job search.

In order for participants to represent a more diverse sample of cultures, and to increase the variety of silence usage in the study, I also recruited seven\textsuperscript{15} more participants through my own network of internationally educated professionals, to participate in a one-time meeting with me for a casual interview about their immigration and job searching experiences in Canada.\textsuperscript{16}

The second phase of the project involved getting others' perspectives on participants' silence usage. I used the audio-recordings from the aforementioned sessions (I obtained consent first, see Appendix B) to do a Listen and Reflect task with a native speaker of English, and another person from the silence producer's cultural and linguistic background, to compare their judgments and attributions of silence and to identify any similarities or differences.

\textsuperscript{14} Qualifications to become a mentor required teaching certification and ESL teaching experience.

\textsuperscript{15} One participant’s data were discarded because she came from a Romanian cultural background, and recruitment of other Romanians for the second phase of the study proved to be difficult.

\textsuperscript{16} This casual conversation/interview was fashioned after an unstructured oral proficiency interview, involved asking open-ended questions, and was designed to allow the interviewee to speak as much as possible.
The mentoring sessions were generally divided into two parts (I tried to make them approximately equal in length -- roughly 45 minutes each -- but my success depended on the topic of the session and the circumstances, with mentee's needs having top priority and guiding the activities during the mentoring session). Part One was the conversational portion of the session, during which we talked with each other in spontaneous conversation. In this part of the session, I let the participant use language freely, with very little to no error correction. I took notes about any particularly interesting instances of silence, which I wished to discuss with the mentee later.

Whether or not a real conversation was achieved is up for debate. Keivan (one of the mentees) vacillated back and forth on what exactly our sessions were. A number of times he said that our interaction was “different” from when he talked to others.17 For example, he frequently interrupted me, and, while he said he knew that this behaviour might not be appropriate in other situations, in a learning setting such as this one, it was appropriate. He explained that since our interaction was “an exception” because it had a language-learning purpose, “I think I have to wait and have a halt, and if anything is any question, I have to ask you.” However, on another day, he described our behaviour as “having a conversation” and explained that he had fallen silent because it was not English-language class, and, in this context, he did not have an opportunity to think or correct what he had said, therefore, it was better to stop. Interestingly enough, Homa also sensed that he felt pressured by the situation, and that our interaction was not a “regular conversation.” So, was it a conversation or English class? Even though there were occasional similarities to an English class, overall, spontaneous conversation did take place, but not always.

17 Research shows that an institutional context (in this case, a mentorship setting) allows for a change in the norm, because it provides an institutional warrant for the adaptation of a more general conversational machinery to the interactional and the institutional contingencies (Whalen & Zimmerman, 1987).
Part Two of the mentoring sessions consisted of a stimulated recall activity (either immediate or delayed, or both, but with the mentees, it was mostly delayed). During this portion of the session I played back the audio from Part One of the current or previous session(s) and asked the participant to comment on his or her thought processes.

The procedure for the stimulated recall task was as follows. After completing the conversational section of the session (Part One), I asked the participant to fill out a biographical information form\(^\text{18}\) (See Appendix C) as I set up the computer for stimulated recall. Then, I turned on the tape recorder again, and, in accordance with Mackey and Gass’ (2005) suggestion, I trained the participant minimally so he or she could do the procedure, but I did not cue him or her into any aspects that were extra or unnecessary knowledge. I explained to the participant how the procedure worked by showing and describing what I wanted him or her to do (Mackey and Gass (2005) advocate simple instructions and a direct model). Then, as I played our conversational excerpts to him or her, the participant was asked to report what s/he was thinking during those particular silences, and to explain his or her thought processes and motivations behind the pauses. I stopped the tape myself and prompted the participant's responses with questions, being careful to make sure they were not biased or leading questions. Examples of questions that I asked included: "Can you tell me what was going through your mind here?" "What is going on here?" "What happened here?" "Why did you use this tense/article/word here?" "Can you explain why you used this expression here?" and "Why did you say it like that?" It is evident from these questions that I disguised my interest in silence by asking about other mistakes, such as grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation errors. At this point in the study, I did not want to give away my research focus because it might have influenced the participant's behaviour and skewed future results.

\(^{18}\) All participants, regardless of their task or phase, were asked to fill out a biographical information form.
If, after a few segments, I noticed that the participant was not aware of the various functions of silence, and although s/he knew the reasons intuitively, s/he could not articulate them properly, then I suggested some possible silence functions, or tried to elicit this information with questions. The pros and cons of such action reflect a common predicament facing researchers: There are always trade-offs we have to consider and concessions we have to make. On the one hand, if the participants are not led or focused, their recall will be less susceptible to researcher influence. On the other hand, unstructured situations do not always result in useful data (Mackey & Gass, 2005). The entire simulated recall procedure was audiotaped.

During the one-time sessions with interviewee silence producers, I implemented the same procedure as described above. Only this time, during stimulated recall, I did not have to hide the fact that I was looking for silences (since it was a one-time data collection session), and I asked participants directly about their silence usage. As with the mentee participants, I obtained consent to audiotape both the interview and the simulated recall procedure (see Appendix B).

The Listen and Reflect Task was very similar to the stimulated recall procedure. However, this time, when the participant was listening to the tape, he or she was not reflecting on his or her own speech. Instead, the participant was giving me his or her judgments, thoughts, and ideas about someone else's silence use. What did they attribute these particular silences to? How did these attributions affect their evaluations of the speaker? How did they explain these silences? What message was communicated to them? I was interested in eliciting answers to all these questions. The Listen and Reflect procedure was audiotaped.

Upon finishing listening to a silence producer, the participants were presented with a
Character Questionnaire (see Appendix D) and asked to rate the silence producer that they had just listened to on a variety of traits. Some participants listened to more than one silence producer in a session, in which case they filled out the questionnaire for the preceding silence producer before moving on to the next producer.

The questionnaire was designed based on personality traits (found in existing literature) that have been frequently mentioned when people determined character based on silence use. Therefore, it included traits such as honesty, talkativeness, language proficiency, engagement, coherence, elaboration, respectfulness, tediousness and communicative competence. Synonyms were used in an attempt to get a reliable rating from a participant. Also, if s/he did not understand one of the traits, s/he would likely know one of its synonyms. Moreover, the questionnaire used a four-point Likert scale (intentionally done to force participants to make a choice rather than assign a neutral value for every question (Mackey & Gass, 2005), ranging from not at all to a little bit to usually to completely, or from never to rarely to sometimes to always, depending on the trait.

Before data collection began, the experimental procedure was piloted on one person to make sure it worked and elicited the desired information.

**Instrument**

Stimulated Recall is an introspective technique for gathering data that can yield insights into learners’ thought processes during an experience (Mackey & Gass, 2005), and to understand the reasons for their actions (Kennedy, 2012). In this procedure, people are “asked to introspect while viewing or hearing a stimulus to prompt their recollection” (Mackey & Gass, 2005, p. 366). In other words, participants are asked to watch a video of their recorded activity (or listen to an audio-recording) and comment on their motivations and thought processes along
the way. All in all, it is a good instrument to get participants’ perspective. Moreover, when stimulated recalls are collected and coded, they can provide a rich source of information that can elucidate a trend, exemplify any variation in the data, or provide insights into results that turn out to be different from what was predicted (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

However, this instrument, like any elicitation device, has its limitations. Many of the potential problems relate to issues of memory and retrieval, timing and instructions (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Also, the procedure is based on an assumption that human consciousness can be observed in much the same way that one can observe events in the external world (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Thus, the procedure is as valid as the validity of this assumption. Furthermore, the accuracy of introspective data should always be questioned. First of all, are the participants aware of their real motivations, and even if they are, are they willing to report them? Second, if participants have to rely on memory, there is always potential for inaccuracies, since retrieval from long-term memory is heavily influenced by recall interference (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

Still, research indicates that if the time between the event and the reporting is short, the report is more likely to be accurate because the structure being assessed will be coming from short-term memory, and not long-term memory (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Thereby, data should be collected as soon as possible after the event.

In this study, the interviews and the stimulated recall were conceptualized as social practice. Accordingly, the focus was on both the what and the how of data generation, thus overcoming potential weaknesses of using interviews or stimulated recall as research instruments. These weaknesses include: 1) treating data as “reports,” thus decontextualizing it and ignoring the role of the researcher/interviewer and how interviewee’s answers are shaped by the interactional context; 2) obscuring complex relations of power and its imbalances (in both
the interview process and data analysis; 3) using an unproblematized notion of voice (with a
dangerous underlying assumption of trying to represent a single truth and a single, stable voice);
and 4) not attending to weaknesses related to content or thematic analysis (Talmy, 2010).

Therefore, I operated under the assumption that knowledge production and data
generation were collaborative activities, and, in my analysis, I accounted for not only content,
but also the interactional and interpersonal circumstances of data production. Instead of direct
reports, I considered “conceptualized data as accounts of phenomena, jointly produced by
interviewer and interviewee” (Talmy, 2010, p. 139-140). Likewise, I did not assume that the
stimulated recall was a flawless and completely accurate representation of what participants
were truly thinking.

Finally, this research was conducted with an acknowledgement that the relationship
between talk, its sequence, its setting, and its occurrence, as reflexively tied (Whalen &
Zimmerman, 1987). Since both mentoring sessions and interviews are institutional discourse,
and institutional interaction involves a special configuration of the conversational machinery
(Whalen & Zimmerman, 1987), the language learning aspect of the mentoring sessions may
have impacted the type and sequence of silence usage.

**Choosing the Silences Criteria**

**Mentoring Sessions**

There were two important considerations when choosing which silences I focused the
mentees’ attention on during stimulated recall.

The first consideration was the relevance of a particular silence to the research
questions. More specifically, I had two goals when selecting which silences to address during
stimulated recall. First, because this was an explorative study, and because the mentoring
sessions were longer than the one-time interview meetings, I used this opportunity to get the mentees' perspectives on a variety of silence functions outlined in the literature. Thus, I selected some silences which were representative of the various silence function categories, and then attempted to confirm that they, indeed, served the functions that I interpreted them to serve (for example, thinking silence and word search silence, or turn-transition silence, etc.). I also tried to find some examples of silences which were used for emphasis, politeness, or other purposes. The second goal (which was my main criterion for selecting silences) was choosing silences that created tension, confusion or could have been easily misunderstood/led to miscommunication19 (for example, pausing in a middle of a phrase or an explanation, slowing down, trailing off, not answering questions, not acknowledging, interrupting etc.).

The second consideration in selecting silences for stimulated recall was practical. Because of time constraints, I was unable to ask the mentees to reflect on all their silences. Moreover, because of the longitudinal nature of this portion of the study, I needed to keep the main focus of the study hidden from the mentees so as not to influence their responses. Thus, I had to make sure that the silences that I chose would not give too much away. As a consequence, some silences had to be eliminated from consideration (or moved to the last mentoring session when I could reveal my real purpose to the mentees) because I could not couch the questions about them in a way that did not reveal the purpose of the study. In addition, to help disguise my purpose, I shifted participants' attention to other language features, by asking stimulated recall questions about grammar mistakes, stalling tactics, repetitions, and avoidance of silence (e.g., reading or writing out loud and using fillers).

Then, after each session, I listened to the recordings and wrote down the silences that

19 I acknowledge that these criteria are somewhat subjective, and this subjectivity is one of the limitations of this study.
met the first consideration criterion. Subsequently, based on the practical considerations outlined above, I narrowed them down to just a few silences, which I could address in later session(s) during delayed stimulated recall.

Concerning the sessions in which immediate stimulated recall was used, I noted the instances of particularly tense, or confusing, or easily misinterpreted silences as the mentee and I conversed. Then, I played the tape back from the beginning, and directed the mentee's attention to these silences during playback, addressing as many of them as we had time for.

One-time Interviews

Because interviews entailed only one meeting, stimulated recall with interviewees was always immediate. Furthermore, I did not have to disguise my purpose from the interviewee, which removed some of the restrictions on the silences that I could use. Thus, during the conversational portion of the interview, I noted the silences that created tension, were confusing, or could have been easily misinterpreted. Then, I played back the tape from the beginning, focusing on these silences and getting through as much of the tape as time allowed. I did not have any problem addressing all the pauses about which I wanted to ask participants.

Data Analysis

My notes, the audio recordings of the mentoring sessions and/or interviews, and the audio recordings of the simulated recall and the Listen and Reflect task, constituted the data that was used for further analysis. Parts of the audio were transcribed, and, in total, 69.5 hours of recorded data were analyzed.

Walters (2007) has been advocating for the use of interactional sociolinguistic analysis when conducting micro-analysis of interaction, in order to provide a richer and more accurate account of language behaviour, and Golato (2003) argued that it is useful in isolating and
describing pragmatic failure, which is the focus of this study. Hence, I conducted interactional sociolinguistic analysis on the data in accordance with the following procedure.

Once the data were transcribed, I coded the data, identified emergent themes, quantified matches and mismatches between the silence producers' and listeners' interpretations of silence, and calculated their agreement percentages to determine patterns in the results.

First, I created databases for each silence producer, where his or her own reasons for using silence were compared to the explanations and interpretations of the same silences by other listeners. For each segment, I looked at the explanation given by the silence producer (for example, that she paused because she was looking for the right word) and then examined what others had to say. For instance, one listener surmised that the reason for the aforementioned silence was because the speaker was nervous. This was considered as a disagreement with the silence producer and that cell of the database was left blank. The second listener said that this silence was due to the fact that the silence producer was hiding something and paused to concoct a lie. This, again, was coded as a disagreement. The next listener said that the reason she paused was because she was looking for a good word to express what she had wanted to say. This was considered an agreement, and the cell was marked with a circle. At the end of each listener's analysis, all circles were counted, and by dividing the number of agreements by the number of segments examined, an agreement percentage was calculated.

Next, I went over the data again, examining all the mismatches and disagreements in interpretation that occurred, looking for patterns and motifs. Reflecting on the themes that emerged in past research (see Chapter Two), and grounding my focus in the research questions

---

20 I want to make it clear that, whenever the listener's interpretation of a particular instance of silence disagreed with the silence producer's interpretation, I did not assume that the silence producer's interpretation was always the correct one. Retrospection, lack of awareness, and other face-saving factors, may have influenced the accuracy of the silence producers' self reports (Mackey & Gass, 2005). This issue is discussed in more detail in the Instrument and Limitations sections.
(see Introduction), I first made a list of all of the various silence functions and purposes that were inferred by all my participants, and then narrowed this list down to a range of silences that were mentioned most frequently, and/or were most salient, in this context. I also examined what new silence causes and functions patterns emerged. Moreover, while analyzing longitudinal data from the mentoring sessions, I looked at how the relationship between the mentor and the mentee evolved in terms of silence usage. Did increasing familiarity of the interlocutor (or the intersubjectivity between interlocutors) reduce silence? Was silence addressed explicitly by the mentor? Why or why not? Did the number and length of silences decrease with time? I paid particularly close attention to the meaning attributed to within-turn silences and their interactional function, because, as already mentioned, these areas appear to be neglected in the existing literature (Zuo, 2002).

Furthermore, grounding my categorization in the literature, instead of creating a taxonomy and delineating all of silences' causes and functions, as construed by the participants, I decided to demonstrate the diversity of their perceptions about silence use by presenting findings as a range. That is why, while initially compiling an exhaustive list of all silence causes and functions, I then narrowed it down to a few examples from the data in which silence was used as a politeness strategy (positive or negative politeness), or it was used to indicate status, or it served a cognitive (lexical or syntactic planning), communicative/interactive, prosodic or stylistic function. I scrutinized the data to see if any new categories would emerge. Furthermore, I looked at the breaking of silence (including interruptions and use of fillers), especially instances when it should not have been broken, as well as gender differences in silence use. Also, since Nakane (2007) asserted that the role of identity in silence was rarely addressed, I tried to see if (and how) silence was used in the data to position interlocutors and to
construct their identities.

Finally, I carefully examined silences where the listener’s explanation or interpretation did not match the producer’s. Which of these were benign mismatches, and which resulted in harsh evaluations of the speaker? Beyond that, I tried to find any patterns in NNS and NS participants' misinterpretations of silence.

**Researcher’s Role**

It is important to recognize the motivations of the researcher, both in collection and analysis of the data. Everything is motivated in some way and no record is ever neutral (Sarangi & Candlin, 2003). Thus, motivated reading of empirical data is unavoidable. In fact, “reporting on an observed event is most likely to reveal as much about the object of inquiry as about the perspective the participant-observer adopts” (Coupland, Sarangi & Candlin, 2001, p. 373). Thus, I acknowledge that this research resulted in motivated readings, which offer only one of potentially many perspectives on the subject being studied, and the role and motivations of the researcher in the production of data were recognized in my analysis (Talmy, 2010).

In this study, as both a researcher and a participant, I played a number of roles: researcher as resource, researcher as befriender and, in some cases, researcher as an evaluator and assessor of performance, and researcher as expert/consultant. The latter two roles, which manifested themselves much more during the mentoring sessions, may have influenced the participant to display good practice, provide the right answer, or tell me what I wanted to hear (Sarangi & Candlin, 2003). Accordingly, it may have resulted in face-saving and politically correct responses. On the other hand, I also tried to build rapport with silence producers and listeners, and attempted to put them at ease. In order to do this, I often played along with them (by laughing at their more controversial statements or encouraging them when they expressed
uncertainty), which might have pushed them to reveal more than they usually would. Furthermore, with different participants, my roles changed in context-sensitive ways, and different participants responded differently to the same research paradigm (Sarangi & Candlin, 2003).

Not to mention, my speaking and conversational style also had an impact of the data. Interviewers/mentors typically do not respond to each utterance given by an interviewee. Instead, they remain silent in order to permit the interviewee to speak again, even if the interviewee has just contributed the last comment (Matarazzo, 1962). Previous research has demonstrated clearly that the interviewer’s/mentor’s speech and silence durations have a strong impact on the speech and silence durations of their interlocutor (Matarazzo, 1962), and thus, different interviewers/mentors are decidedly very different stimulus objects.

Moreover, as the researcher, I had a great deal of power, and my silence norms set the tone and established the norms in our conversation. While I tried to let the participant take the lead as much as possible (for example, when I interacted with slow-speaking people, I spoke more slowly than usual and did not say “mhm” all the time), ultimately, as listener Homa noted, I was in charge, and I was generally the one who decided when to move on to the next topic, and what we would talk about next. This was especially true during sessions for which the time frame was short. Furthermore, all the descriptive estimates of the participants’ silence use (such as whether or not they were a fast-, slow-, or medium-speaker and whether they had a high, medium or low tolerance towards silence) were made relative to the researcher’s silence norms and silence use.
Chapter Four: Findings of Participants’ Perspectives on Silence Causes and Functions

Chapters Four, Five, and Six of this thesis report the results of the data analysis portion of the study: Chapters Four and Five lay out the findings, and Chapter Six contains the discussion.

In order to begin to unravel the pedagogical quandaries outlined in the Introduction and the Study Rationale and Theoretical Framework section, we need to better understand why students are using silence. Although there is a body of research on the functions and purposes of silence, most of it is from the researchers’ perspective. As stated earlier, the present study attempts to reverse this trend by putting participants’ viewpoints at the forefront. Chapter Four begins this undertaking, and attempts to add to the existing body of work by getting the participants’ perspectives on the various silence uses and functions proposed by the researchers, and seeing how these classifications correspond or differ.

More specifically, to answer the first research question (How do participants explain their use of silence in the context of an intercultural mentoring/interview speech event?), in this chapter, I present the diversity of silence functions that have been elicited in my data. I do this by taking each of the categories laid out in previous research, and showing how they are present in the data. In other words, Chapter Four demonstrates what the participants said were their reasons for using silence in their speech, presented under the categories used in the existing research.

As follows, this chapter begins with silence function categories which frequently come up in the existing literature: prosodic, cognitive, stylistic, social/interactive/communicative, politeness strategy, ideological, and identity functions of silence. Then, it moves on to some other causes and functions categories, which, although rarely mentioned in the literature, were
oftentimes brought up by the participants in this study, such as falling silent because the speaker felt rattled, unattributable silences, and silences resulting from dishonesty.

**Prosodic**

In analyzing the silences in their speech, participants occasionally made recourse to prosodic explanations, and talked about using silence for punctuation, pronunciation, and emphasis. For example, Maria said that pauses were important for making sense of speech: “I think that sometimes it had to be, like, break between two people talking.... You can’t talk, talk, talk all the time, so it has to be some time of silence.” Another example of a silence that served a prosodic function was when Keivan said that he had difficulty with pronunciation and intonation of a phrase, and that created an interruption in the rhythm and flow of his thought and speech. He explained that when he could not pronounce *before we move on*, and tried to force himself to say it correctly, thus, over-riding an instinct to say it incorrectly, “it takes a few seconds,” and that created a pause. Yet another silence was perceived to alter the stress and rhythm of a sentence intentionally: When Svetlana said, “then it was, like, getting better [pause] and got used to it,” Brian believed that it was a “kind of a pause for....emphasis.”

**Cognitive**

Participants also believed that many of the silences had a cognitive function.\(^\text{21}\) In fact, a variety of silences were perceived to be cognitive, such as analyzing, changing one’s mind mid-sentence, comparing, hypothesizing (trying to figure out what to say and planning it on the fly), processing, phrasing (reportedly, some such pauses were simultaneously voluntary and involuntary), recalling/remembering, jargon reduction (voluntary silence), between-turn and within-turn pauses, and searching (either for ideas, examples, or a better/another/pecific word),

\(^{21}\) As a reminder, cognitive silences refer to within-turn silence in speech, which reflect lexical decision-making process and choice of individual words, as well as syntactic and semantic planning operations (Zuo, 2002). Cognitive pauses also encompass difficulties in articulating what one has in mind (Nakamura, 2004), organizational considerations, and memory retrieval (Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985).
or how to say something (involuntary word search, grammar search or translation).

Many of the cognitive pauses were language-related. Such silences were indications of cognitive activity and mobilization of mental resources when the speaker was confronted with languistic difficulties. In these situations, the pause (reportedly not under the speaker's control) meant “I forget” or “I don't know how to use [say] it, how to continue.” Keivan explained that, as an L2 English speaker, “I am a special case, some of my pauses are because I can't find the words, how to phrase, connect, transfer it.” Another type of language-related cognitive pause resulted from translation: NNS participants said that because they did not think in English, and consequently, were constantly engaged in translation, that took extra time and created silences.

Throughout the mentoring sessions, analyzing silences were common, because the mentees attempted to deconstruct their own language use. For example, Keivan said that he was often thinking about why he used a particular expression a certain way: He noticed that he was using it incorrectly even though he knew it was incorrect. Hence, he was silent because he was analyzing this expression, sometimes repeating it to himself, in an attempt to figure out why he used it the way he did. In fact, Keivan revealed that he was “a deeper learner” who liked to analyze things in his mind, and because of this, most of his interruptions or repetitions resulted from his thinking about various language expressions. Moreover, he reported that, sometimes, instead of language, he analyzed the subject about which he was thinking. He explained, “There is something that comes through your mind and you want to tell and you are distracted because you are thinking about that.”

An alternative use of cognitive silence was an organizational/focusing-of-ideas pause: When an explanation took too much time, and s/he wanted to explain it in detail, the speaker paused in the middle of his or her speech to organize it, and focused/targeted his or her ideas in
order “to transfer it to the audience.”

There was also an abundance of thinking pauses (such as thinking about the subject/situation, or choosing what to say), particularly when the person did not have a prepared answer (as Bahman put it, “So he was with you, AND with his stuff in his head”).

**Stylistic**

Another type of function that participants attributed to silence was stylistic. Some participants believed that silences were used to highlight a point, or were practised for dramatic effect or dramatic emphasis. For example, Keivan said that, whenever he wanted to describe something, he started with a pause, thinking, “okay [pause] I went to the Sheraton centre [pause] and I got....” In this case, he described the pauses as stylistic “halts,” which are often used in descriptive narratives. In other instances, participants talked about confirmation silences that speechmakers make, when the speaker voluntarily pauses, as if asking, “Do you understand?” Keivan added that one used such silences to “transfer that your meaning,” to show the audience where the explanation was, and to allow time for the listener to catch-up. A related stylistic silence was a story-telling pause: As one participant said, when telling a story, “If you want to transfer your meaning or opinion, it’s better sometimes to pause.” Finally, Keivan said that when posing a rhetorical question, “maybe you have some seconds for a pause too.” He saw that silence as a stylistic choice as well.

**Social, Interactive, and Communicative**

Other silences were attributed social, interactive and communicative functions. In fact, this was the most frequently-mentioned silence function in the present study. Many of the silences were assumed to have resulted from emotions in social interactions: Some participants

---

22 Stylistic silences are less influenced by context, and reflect personal conversational style (Scollon, 1985). In addition, they are involved in story-telling (Scollon, 1985) and speech-making, with a purpose to impress an audience (Jaworski, 1993).
believed that there were pauses because the speaker was burdened by emotions, could not express his or her emotions or feelings, was plagued by a negative memory related to what s/he was saying, or had too many emotions (but not enough information to argue his/her case) on a subject.

Different silences were perceived as interactive, such as pausing for clarification, confirmation/showing acceptance/making sure the listener understood, or a topic-transition pause. In addition, a great deal of the interactive explanations involved pausing for turn-exchange, such as marking a turn as one's own (end of topic within-turn pause signalled that the speaker was not done yet), or relinquishing it with an end-of-turn or finished-and-waiting-for-the-interlocutor-to-say-something silence, or using silence as an opportunity to take over a turn. Alternative interactive interpretations envisioned silence as a characteristic of a dying conversation (which resulted in longer pauses), silence as a signal to move on, or silence as a strategy to allow the audience the time to process incoming information or let-the-phrase-sink-in.

Moreover, many silences were believed to communicate a particular message. E.g., they functioned as a sign of misinterpretation, indicated agreement or disagreement, or conveyed emotion and sincerity, such as when a break in a stream of conversation was used to reveal the speaker’s feelings, and, as Keivan put it, show that “this idea comes through my heart.”

An interesting variant of communicative silence was when a pause was used to indicate that the silence producer did not want to talk about a topic, or that s/he had negative feelings about a subject. In other words, it was a please-wrap-it-up kind of silence. Regrettably, most of the time the interlocutor failed to recognize that this was what the speaker was trying to

---

23 In such cases, thinking pauses were utilized to add something/ask a question/make an error correction/interrupt/take over a turn. For instance, Keivan kept taking over my segment-search pauses with his questions and comments.
communicate. For example, during the stimulated recall procedure, I became aware that a Russian silence producer Svetlana was pausing because she did not want to talk about a painful subject. She said:

I think people\textsuperscript{24} sometimes don’t want to say anything. It’s very painful to say something. I don’t want to think about it and you asking me about it. Of course, I am not looking for words, I just didn’t want to say anything [laughs].

Unfortunately, I was unaware that this was what she was trying to communicate with her silences, and thus, I failed to recognize her intended message, and continued to ask her questions about her immigration experience.

However, on rare occasions, the speaker was able to use a please-wrap-it-up silence to relay the appropriate message. For example, once Boomie started talking about how her ESL teacher told her that, in an interview, it was better not to say “ummm” or “ahhh,” and, instead, it was better to stay silent and think. Because I did not want to reveal the focus of my study to her and teach her anything about silence quite yet, I was uncomfortable with this topic and did not want to continue with it. So, I responded with “interesting,” and then grew silent, indicating that I would not say more on this topic, and it was up to my interlocutor if she wanted to proceed.

After she said a few sentences without any response from me, my conversation partner realized this, and the topic was quickly changed.

Another type of communicative silence was used to signal a lack of understanding. Quite often in our sessions with Boomie, when either of us did not understand what the other had said, we grew silent. Whenever she got quiet, did not respond, or did not take over her conversational turn, that was my cue to elaborate on what I had just said, and clarify my

\textsuperscript{24} Note the depersonalization in this quotation: Svetlana found the subject so painful that she tried to remove herself from the situation even when she was explaining why she did not want to talk about it.
comment. Moreover, such pauses not only served as signals to alert the speaker that a clarification needed to be made, but they were also an opportunity to do so.

Silence was also used to communicate uncertainty, usually while expressing an opinion. Silence producers Chengjiang and Keivan used these types of silences most frequently: They paused to think and clarify if what they had said was correct and, simultaneously, indicated that they were not very sure about what they were saying, showing that their statement was simply an opinion.

Furthermore, sometimes silence was used to show agreement. Keivan said that he did not respond when I was telling him something because he accepted what I had said as the truth, and used silence to show this acceptance. However, a pause could also mean disagreement. Every now and then, when he or I fell silent during a discussion, that indicated that, although we refused to argue, we did not agree with whatever the other was saying.

Finally, sometimes participants went as far as inferring an answer to a question from silence. For example, when Stepan responded to my question with silence, Steven presumed that his silence indicated that whatever I had asked about was completely absent in Stepan’s native culture.

**Politeness strategy**

This study’s participants also believed that silences functioned as a politeness strategy. In some cases, positive politeness silence was used to avoid difficult subjects, or served as an opportunity for the listener to fill-in-the-blanks him/herself, while the speaker implied something negative, but did not verbalize it. For example, to a Korean listener Tae-Hwan, one pause “implies that she [the speaker] considered these changes kind uh not desirable,” whereas to a NS Carol, the same pause suggested unsaid disagreement: “I think she was just trying to
say, maybe without saying, that she kind of disagrees with her parents.” Similarly, Carol interpreted one of Svetlana's pauses as a fill-in-the-silence-yourself kind of pause. She said, “I think maybe, yeah, more filling in the blanks. You don’t ever want to speak directly ill, maybe, but I think she was leading you to that point by giving that pause.” She intimated that Svetlana did this to be polite. Likewise, NS Maris also used silence to communicate what she did not want to verbalize. She was talking about racist attitudes towards L2 accents and said, “I don't want to say there is a hierarchy, but [4 second pause],” pausing to allow me fill-in-the-blanks. She waited in silence until I said, “there is a difference,” and she emphatically confirmed, “I think there is!”

Furthermore, participants frequently attributed an impression-management function to silence. Many believed that silence was used to make the speaker appear more objective, or to create a certain impression (positive politeness). An example of this was when Qing purposefully hesitated for face-management/positive politeness reasons. I asked her if she thought something was fair, and she paused before answering. During stimulated recall, she explained that if she had responded immediately, if she had simply said yes, then she would have come off as critical. Instead, she wanted to be understanding, or at least appear to be understanding; she explained that she did not want to come off as “so upset,” and wanted to be seen as more balanced. Thus, she hesitated. Jing gave a similar type of silence explanation when she thought that Chengjiang paused because he was hesitant to speak badly about the Chinese teaching market in Toronto. She observed, “Sometimes people are not willing to talk too much about negative experience and that’s why keep silence and, yeah, just pause.”

In other instances, silence functioned as a sign of deference for the interlocutor (negative politeness). Some participants said that they were silent because they did not want to distract
me, or did not want to interrupt my thinking. Others used silence to minimize the emotional impact on the interlocutor. An example of this occurred when Boomie and I were working on a paragraph she wrote about her brother’s death. She was obviously upset, so I tried hard to focus on the grammar and not the content of her writing. As I was reading and correcting her errors aloud, to avoid upsetting her further, I unconsciously (I did not realize that I was doing this until I listened back to the recording) avoided reading the sentence about her brother’s death out loud. I just corrected the grammar and moved on, reading the next sentence aloud.

**Identity and Ideological**

Another interesting type of function brought up by the participants was the identity function of silence. This category included distancing (to separate the self from Canadian culture) as well as self-discovery pauses (discovering for oneself something about herself as she talked). Still, even an indirect suggestion of this type of silence function was rarely mentioned by the participants.

A more popular inference was when silences were attributed an ideological function. Such silences included holding off for a better deal during negotiations, trying to create a power shift, or resisting something that I said.

One example of an ideological silence was when a female Iranian listener Homa interpreted silences following Keivan’s questions (which he characterized as rhetorical) as indicative of him wanting the interviewer role and trying to create a framework and power shift. In other words, she considered these silences too long to be rhetorical, and inferred that he was actually trying to push me into giving him an answer. There might be some truth to this suggestion because there were many instances, over the course of our sessions, when I had said “I don't know” and wanted to move on, but Keivan pushed me to give an opinion. For example,

---

25 As a reminder, these silences are used to perpetuate status and gender roles (Watts, 1997).
one time he was talking about work experience being more valuable than a university degree. I disagreed with that, but did not want to make this about me and my opinions, so I gave a very neutral response. However, Keivan was not satisfied with my non-committal answer: He prodded, “Don’t you believe?” and I hedged, “Well, I don’t know I-,” but he interrupted me, “No. What do you think?” and kept pushing me. Not reading my cues, he did not allow me to finish my sentence, and was fairly demanding when he pressured me with “do you agree?” I was put on the spot and, against my will, pushed into answering his barrage of questions. Because I resisted this change in framework (from a one-sided question and answer format to a two-sided one), this created significant tension in our sessions. Whether he did this because he genuinely wanted my answer, or because he wanted more power, or for some other reason, is unknown.

An analogous case of an ideological silence was when a topic-ending pause was used to assert power. For example, with time, Boomie began to say “okay [pause]” or “so [pause]” to move on to the next topic, after the current topic was coming to an end. This was a change from the usual way we transitioned topics during stimulated recall. Generally, we followed a question and answer format where I asked most of the questions and changed topics (thus, wielding all the power). Perhaps Boomie's use of an ideological topic-ending pause indicated a change in the power dynamics between us.

Since ideological silence can mark both authority and subordination (Scollon, 1985; Nakane, 2007), another instance of an ideological silence occurred when Keivan did not respond because he accepted what I had said as the truth, and used silence to show this acceptance. Hence, silence was still being used to perpetuate status, but this time, it was implemented to show his subordination to me, and his acceptance of what I (as a language
It is noteworthy, that Boomie’s “okay [pause]” or “so [pause]” silence mentioned above, illustrates an interesting phenomenon that emerged from the participants' categorizations of silence's causes and functions. From their perspective, it appeared that one silence could belong to more than one category. In this case, the pause was both cognitive and ideological: She paused to collect her ideas for a new topic, and the fact that she paused and put an end to an old topic asserted her power in our interaction. There were other silences that spanned two function categories, such as a communicative (opinion) and, concurrently, grammatical silences; or a jointly communicative and politeness silence; or a stylistic “do you understand?” pause that was also interactive and communicative; or when a participant could not say everything s/he wanted to (because of language), but was hoping I would understand it from his/her silence, creating a simultaneously communicative and cognitive pause.

**Feeling Rattled**

Whereas many of the silence functions mentioned above are consistently cited in the existing literature, other silence causes and functions, which are rarely mentioned (or even completely overlooked!) in the literature, were frequently brought up by the participants in this study. One such silence category subsumed silences that resulted from the silence producer feeling rattled. Sometimes his/her discombobulation was caused by the situation, such as an unexpected question or occurrence, or suddenly realizing that s/he had gotten off the subject. In other instances, it was something s/he did, ranging from doubting that what one said was grammatically correct, to feeling like s/he said something incorrectly, to realizing s/he made a grammatical mistake, to dwelling on the answer s/he gave for a previous question by focusing on the gap between the question and one’s answer. Alternatively, the speaker sometimes paused
because he or she was fazed by something s/he was about to do (anticipatory pauses, or hesitations due to a question and answer mismatch/strange answer one was about to give).

One silence that is representative of this category was a pause that occurred when the speaker realized that s/he made a mistake. For example, Keivan said that he often paused when he became aware that he had said something incorrectly. He said that whenever he misses a word, or had a feeling that he had made a mistake (such as using grammar incorrectly by applied the wrong tense), he immediately felt “disconnected”, and it influenced his ability to go on fluently. This caused an “interruption” and created silence.

Another reason for pauses in this category was encountering something unexpected or out of the ordinary. For example, I noticed that whenever I was reading something written by the mentees, I paused and stumbled before (or on) their obvious grammatical errors.

Unattributable

Another group of silences frequently brought up by the participants, can be classified under the unattributable\textsuperscript{26} silence category, which explains silence as just-a-break-in-a-stream-of-conversation, or as caused by a distraction or a mechanical problem (such as losing a place in a newspaper, looking for the right page or paragraph, searching through notes, or writing-things-down pauses). For example, Keivan admitted that he slowed down and paused more when he was not concentrating, or was burdened by emotions related to the subject, because this caused him to forget (or become unable to verbalize) what he had planned to say. Similarly, when I showed Keivan that he over-used the expression “and/but uh...”, he said that this happened because he was always thinking about what I was saying and what we were talking about. He wanted to move on to something else, but because his mind was occupied with these

\textsuperscript{26} Silence that carries meaning is called “attributable silence” (Cutting, 2008 p. 29), thus silence with no meaning is called unattributable silences.
words and ideas, he lost his train of thought. He added that, often, he could not continue because the interruption was “too much” and it distracted him.

One interesting silence explanation was when Svetlana said that when she is “too nervous,” her mind simply goes blank. She explained:

Maybe five, six seconds, honestly, I cannot think, I cannot find the right words. In Russian, yes, I always have something to say. But in English, sometimes my mind going blank and I don’t know what to say next. It’s not because I didn’t know what to say, it happens to me.

She added that, when she speaks English, her brain works differently than when she speaks her native language. She cannot “speak and speak and speak” in English; she needs to stop, take a breath and pause/rest. She insisted that this phenomenon was not related to word search or the subject matter. The idea of a mind going blank was echoed by Maria, who interpreted a pause as “losing, losing track of what she was saying, I think here. She just, she was talking about and then suddenly, you know, sometimes, suddenly it happens. Phewt, you just lost whatever, like, okay.” Likewise, Boomie mentioned that, sometimes, when she talked, “the words disappear,” and this resulted in a pause.

By the same token, another intriguing reason given for pausing was when participants said that a silence “just happened,” and that there was nothing that they wanted to say but could not, or did not get a chance to. It was simply an interruption, a pause. It appears that, according to participants, sometimes a pause is just a pause!

Dishonesty

The final silence function category elicited from the participants in this study was (both intentional and unintentional) silence indicating dishonesty. From the participants' perspective,
silences that fell under this category were caused by evasion, making things up, covering-up real feelings or wanting to give socially acceptable (non-pessimistic) reason for something, having to say something nice about something unpleasant, and an inability to say what s/he actually wanted (either because there was no proof or on principle).

In addition, some silences were caused by blatant lying. Silence producer Svetlana admitted sheepishly, “probably I just lied.” She continued, “Sometimes you want to say something nice, or at least you don’t want to say something bad about someone, and it’s quite kind of good lie, but you always make this lie pause.” In another example, she admitted to lying again, saying, “again, when I said, ‘I don’t remember’ it means ‘I don’t want to say’. Sometimes you talk about something unpleasant, but you have to talk to be nice, and you have this entire pause.” She noted, “You see how many pauses when I don’t want to say, don’t want to say about that, but I have to say something? So yeah.”

Listeners also equated silences with dishonesty. For instance, when comparing Svetlana and Stepan, Alla said, “he-, he not as honest as her. And that’s why it would-, it would be more silences, in his speech.” Likewise, when explaining why she believed that Qing was not very honest, Becky said, “she probably had more pauses than she should have....If she was giving straight, clear answers, they should have been faster, and they weren’t, they were slower.”

To summarize this chapter, in order to answer the first research question (How do participants explain their use of silence in the context of an intercultural mentoring/interview speech event?), participants' reasons for using silence in their speech, and the functions they attributed to others' silences were presented under the categories used in the existing research. Data revealed that many silences were explained in line with existing literature, and were attributed prosodic, cognitive, stylistic, social/interactive/communicative, politeness strategy,
identity, and ideological functions. Notably, according to participants, some silences could belong to more than one function category. Moreover, foregrounding of the participants' viewpoints (rather than typically relying on the researchers' analytical perspectives) highlighted some functions that may not have been attended to as much. Namely, the causes and functions categories which were rarely mentioned in the literature, yet were oftentimes brought up by the participants in this study. These included falling silent because the speaker felt rattled, unattributable silences, and silences resulting from dishonesty.

All in all, putting participant's viewpoints to the forefront allowed me to shine light on some silence causes and functions that may not have otherwise gotten the attention they may warrant. Even though they may not have captured and captivated the attention of researchers, it is clearly important to take these categories into account because the participants brought them up themselves, which means that they find them relevant. Therefore, these silence causes and functions should not be ignored or pushed to the background, and should be taken into account in future research.

In the next chapter, I shift from examining participants' perspectives on silence's causes and functions, to analyzing participants’ perceptions of cultural silence norms and conducting an inter/intracultural comparison of silence interpretation.
Chapter Five: Findings of Participants’ Perceptions of Silence Norms and Inter/Intracultural Comparison

Now that I have outlined the participants' perspectives on silence's causes and functions, in this chapter, I will answer research questions two, three, four, and five. As a reminder, question two examines *To what extent are the participants aware of silence's pragmatic value or function?*; question three explores *What reasons do silence producers give for their own instances of silence, compared to what reasons do listeners (from the same or different cultural background) attribute to their silences?*; question four investigates *What are the similarities and differences between the interpretations of these silences by native speakers of English (NS) and non-native speakers of English (NNS)?*; and question five inquires *Which silences do the listeners consider deviant (and thus, judge negatively)?*

These questions examine participants' perceptions of cultural silence norms, and involve making inter/intracultural comparisons of silence attributions and interpretations. For that reason, in this chapter, I compare participants' own interpretations of their silence usage with the functions others attribute to these silences. I do this both qualitatively and quantitatively, and the results of the quantitative comparison appear as percentages at the beginning of each culture's case study (see Tables 4, 6, 8, 10, 12).

This chapter consists of five case studies of inter/intracultural perceptions of silence, representing five different cultures: Chinese, Korean, Russian, Colombian, and Iranian.\(^{27}\) Instead of propagating the East vs. West generalizations (as is customary in the majority of literature on silence), I go beyond that, and in addition to intercultural differences, I show intracultural variation in silence perception and interpretation. Moreover, instead of replicating

---

\(^{27}\) A reminder, the case studies are presented with interviewee silence producers coming first, and mentee silence producers coming second (in alphabetical order within each subgroup).
summaries and sweeping statements found in the existing literature, I attempt to provide a richer and more accurate account of language behaviour by using participants' own words to illustrate my findings.

I begin each case study by describing participants' perceptions and attitudes towards silence norms in their own cultures, and examining how these norms compare to their perceptions of English silence norms. Then, to answer the third research question (the question about inter/intracultural silence interpretation comparisons), I review each silence producer from that culture, and show how NNS and NS listeners evaluated his/her silence and character. My analysis revealed that silence interpretation (and the evaluation of silence producers’ disposition) was affected not only by culture, but also speaking style and gender of the listener, and I attempt to demonstrate this interplay within the data. Therefore, to help make sense of the listeners' perceptions, in each “Evaluations of” section I indicate all participants' gender, and offer a brief description of the silence producer's, and his/her listeners', speaking styles, before I proceed to describe how he or she was evaluated.

Moreover, in order to answer research question number five (the question regarding negatively-judged silences), I pay particular attention to the silences for which the listener’s explanation or interpretation did not match the producer’s. Namely, I analyze which mismatches are benign, and which silences are judged harshly? Finally, to answer research question number four (the question regarding similarities and differences in NSs' and NNSs' interpretations), I look for any patterns in NNS and NS participants’ misinterpretations of silence. I conclude this chapter by inspecting silence attitudes of the last (sixth) cultural group of participants (the native speakers of English), and then I provide an analysis of the researcher’s (my own) silence use in this study.
**Chinese Case Study**

Of the eight Chinese case study participants, two were silence producers, Chengjiang (male) and Qing (female), and six were listeners (all female), including three native speakers of English and three Chinese speakers (See Table 3 and Table 4)

Table 3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silence producers</th>
<th>Chinese Speaker Listeners</th>
<th>Native Speaker Listeners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qing (F*)</td>
<td>Yuyuan (F); Fei (F)</td>
<td>Becky (F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chengjiang (M)</td>
<td>Jing (F)</td>
<td>Maris (F); Carol (F)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Indicates the gender of the participant

Table 4

**Chinese silence interpretation average agreement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chinese Speakers</th>
<th>Native English Speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>39%</td>
<td>44%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Perceptions of Chinese vs. Canadian English Silence Norms.** Qing said that, in terms of silence use, Chinese and English languages were similar. In fact, sometimes, she had difficulty interpreting silences in both cultures. She explained that, in Chinese, silence could mean that a person did not want to say something. For this reason, she experienced moments when, as she was talking in Chinese and the interlocutor suddenly stopped, it seemed to her as though s/he did not finish. Qing remembered, “She just stopped. And I want to know what is you’re hiding. But I can’t ask.” Similarly, she explained that when she first went to a job interview in Canada, “I worry what it means when he stop. What it mean? I should leave? Or

---

28 Agreement percentage refers to the (mis)match between listener's and silence producers' interpretations of particular silences. Please refer to section on Data Analysis for a detailed description on how agreement was calculated.
can I leave? How do you know, you know?” She admitted to being confused about what was happening: “I try to figure out what are the words, the meaning, I don’t want misunderstanding, you know.” She recalled that she was always tempted to ask if she could go now, because maybe the silence meant “you can leave now.” Or maybe the supervisor was waiting for her to ask something; she was uncertain because “maybe the thinking way is different.” Overall, her preconceived notions (influenced by her Chinese background, where silence could indicate refusal to communicate or abscondence) seemed to suggest to her that ambiguous silence did not have any positive, and instead, mostly neutral or negative implications. More importantly, Qing’s account emphasizes the important role silence plays in our lives, and the fact that its meaning is not always obvious, and needs to be clarified.

Like Qing, Fei said that if a conversational partner grew silent, the first thought that would go through her mind was, “You forgot your line? [laughs] They forgot what they [were going to say].” That would be her initial response. She added that it depended on whether the silence came after her response, “Maybe interviewer is just thinking about something, my respond. Maybe my response, um like, mmmm, was offensive or something. Maybe.” Overall, Fei saw silence as a breakdown in communication and an indication of something negative (forgotten words or embarrassment), but not too much so.

Yuyuan had a slightly more positive perception of silence. She said:

I don’t think it be a bad thing, though. Sometimes it can be, just, people want to digress, or don’t want to answer a particular question. Or sometimes they just don’t know the answer to that question. Yeah, kind of neutral.

She added that, in general, silence interpretation depended on the situation, and “sometimes people just take some time to think.” In addition, she said that, in a business setting, during
negotiations, people chose to stay silent on purpose: “If the deal is not okay, the other party maybe, like, stop for a while, and, I don’t know, just to make a better deal, I guess.” Therefore, according to Yuyuan, in Chinese business, silence could be used to hold off for a better deal.

I asked Yuyuan, if an interviewer grew silent in an interview, how she would react? She said that, again, it would depend on what the topic was. If the topic was embarrassing and no one wanted to carry on the conversation, then she would need to switch topics and ask about the weather, or about Christmas plans, just to avoid the embarrassment. By and large, her response indicated that she would take measures to avoid silence.

Nevertheless, Yuyuan declared that she felt that members of Chinese culture were more tolerant of silence than Canadians, because:

...North America people are, of course there are some stereotypes, I’m sure. In general, when I came here I heard that people here in general are outgoing, always want to carry on the conversation, if there is some pause or, they- they’re just say something, they don’t like silence. But for the East culture, I think, yeah, people are more, like, more like not showing off, more not-I don’t want to say the word ‘humble’ but them kind of shy.... more reserved.

She explained that, because she was a very outgoing person, “it didn’t make a huge difference for me,” since she did not encounter much silence when talking to people. Again, part of the reason for this may have been her reported avoidance of it: She said that whenever she anticipated silence, she immediately thought of the next topic in her head “just to keep the conversation going on.”

She added that she had friends from China, and almost all of them encountered some cultural differences or culture shock, whereas she did not because she had a “talkative”
personality. In fact, when asked if she felt pushed to speak more in English, she said “no,” because (for her, personally) in China things were similar to the way things were in Canada. Furthermore, she said that she could not remember an instance of people in Canada reacting negatively to her silence.

On the whole, Yuyuan’s experience suggests that having a certain personality type, such as being outgoing and talkative, minimized silence-related cultural complications, whereas other personality types encountered more difficulties adjusting to Canadian norms. Her story was what first drew my attention to the importance of individual differences in both, the use, and the experience, of silence.

Chengjiang spoke about his perception of the differences in silence norms between China and Canada from a perspective of a classroom teacher. He noticed that, in Canada, students immediately answered questions, not caring whether their answer was correct or incorrect. It did not come as a surprise, then, when class participation did not equate with high test marks: The relationship between verbal participation and test marks was actually inversed. Chengjiang observed that, in general, students from Eastern countries took notes in silence, while Europeans and Latin Americans were the ones doing all the talking and answering all the questions. He added that in Canada, “In conversation, I feel a little bit maybe pressure. Just a little, not too much, just pressure” to talk more and be less silent. Thus, it seems that, at least for him, the impact of culture on silence use was noticeable.

Ironically, while cognizant of this, he still interpreted silence as a sign of a malfunction. He said that whenever his students were silent, he took that as a sign that they did not understand him, and in such situations, he tried to make them substantiate that they understood and acquired the information. He said that this was his immediate interpretation,29 but, upon

---

29 It is interesting that both Chengjiang’s and Fei’s initial interpretations of silence were always negative: she saw
reflection, it was possible that learners were silent [in conversation] because the question or the subject matter was not interesting or engaging enough. Or they were neutral on this topic, or indecisive, and hence, did not have an answer. Overall, Chengjiang demonstrated a tendency for a neutral to slightly negative interpretation of silence.

Jing corroborated many of Chengjiang’s perceptions. She said that the traditional manner of teaching and learning in China was “very boring”: The teacher talked and taught, and the student always listened and took notes. As a result, there was not much conversation or dialogue going on in the classroom. Therefore, at least in a classroom setting, silence was seen as a positive occurrence.

Speaking more generally, Jing explained that how Chinese people interpreted silence depended on context, “Sometimes if you like to doubt or you disagree with interlocutor, maybe you keep silence for a while.... Sometimes hesitate to response, sometimes refuse to do something, sometimes disagree with the interlocutor, try to find politer way to express that.” She added that, in her family, there was not much silence in conversation. She elaborated, “If I keep silence that means I’m not very happy.” Hence, if she felt “so angry and so dissatisfied,” but did not want to be “cranky,” she became silent, “which means I’m really, really upset.”

I asked how she felt silence was treated in English (in North America). She answered, “it’s very neutral to me...in English, more about language misuse [laughs].” However, she said that sometimes, if the interlocutor was silent, she sensed that “he or she is hesitating to agree with me, or to offer the help, those sort of things.” Furthermore, when she talked about communicating and controlling emotions using silence in her family life, she opined that “I think maybe the same; it’s the same in Western family.”

---

silence as a breakdown in communication and he saw it as a lack of understanding or interest. More neutral explanations (such as thinking, or not having an answer because the speaker had a neutral attitude towards the subject) came later, after they both contemplated the silence for a while.
Finally, like Yuyuan, Jing emphasized that personality plays an important role in silence use. Specifically, she said that because she had an open personality, she rarely kept silent during dialogue or conversation, in any language.

All in all, Jing's views on silence ranged mostly from negative to neutral.

**Listeners' Evaluations of Qing.** Qing was a reserved woman, who, once we got started, revealed herself to be soft-spoken, yet talkative. She spoke and answered questions quickly, without much hesitation, which was consistent with her slightly negative attitude towards silence. In fact, she seemed to have a low tolerance for it, and as her NS listener pointed out, most of the time she spoke “pretty quickly” and had few pauses or silences, filling whatever silences there were with “ummm”s, “uh”s or repetitions. Moreover, throughout our interaction, she showed a low level of awareness of silence and its meanings, as evidenced by the fact that, initially, she had a difficult time articulating her ideas about silence norms, and twice, I had to prompt her with possible functions of silence.

Qing was evaluated by three people: Yuyuan, Fei, and Becky. The first one, Yuyuan (a NNS listener), was much more silent than Qing and spoke at medium speed.\(^\text{30}\) In general, their speaking styles were a good match, with Qing showing a more negative attitude towards silence than Yuyuan. Therefore, it was not unexpected that Yuyuan judged Qing on the Character Questionnaire (see Appendix D) as ‘usually’ trustworthy, honest, respectful and silent, ‘a little bit’ genuine, tedious, engaged in conversation, sincere, and forthcoming, ‘not at all’ talkative or elaborative in her answers, and she saw Qing's language proficiency as medium. Moreover,

\(^{30}\) Because this is a qualitative study, the “fast/medium/slow-speaker” label is a relative measure. Using the researcher as a benchmark, and having labelled the researchers' speaking style as “fast,” other participants' speaking speed was classified relative to the researcher. Is the speaker speaking in a more measured style than the researcher? Are there more within-turn pauses? Is the researcher consistently interrupting the speaker? All of these aspects were considered in determining the appropriate categorization. Because the purpose of this undertaking was to compare participants' speaking styles relative to each other, in order to examine how they related to silence interpretation, absolute or quantitative values are inconsequential, and relative categorization will suffice.
Qing and Yuyuan had 33% silence interpretation agreement.

The second listener who evaluated Qing, Fei (another NNS), was a laid-back, medium-speed talker, similar to Yuyuan. When she spoke, she took her time, but did not produce any tense or uncomfortable silences. She and Qing demonstrated 44% interpretation agreement (likely due to much less projecting on Fei’s part, as compared to Yuyuan). On the questionnaire, Fei evaluated Qing as ‘completely’ talkative and respectful, ‘usually’ honest, forthcoming, genuine, engaged in conversation, elaborative in her answers, sincere and trustworthy, and fluent in English.

Becky, a NS listener, spoke quickly and abundantly, as evidenced by an enormous amount of chit-chat31 during her session. Her style matched with Qing's quite closely, and accordingly, they had 44% silence interpretation agreement. Furthermore, she judged Qing as ‘a little bit’ tedious, but proficient in terms of language, predicting that if Qing were speaking in Mandarin, she would probably have fewer pauses, thus attributing most of her pauses to language.

In Qing's case study, there was no cross-gender comparison because the silence producer and the listeners were all women. Generally, personal speaking style, and not culture, appeared to be the main factor influencing silence interpretation agreement scores. However, cultural differences did produce some negative assessments. The English native speaker was more likely to assume that Qing's silence was due to a language deficiency or a struggle with translation. Consequently, she misinterpreted voluntary pauses for involuntary ones (all listeners did, but the NS did so more prevalently). Alternatively, NNSs sometimes gave voluntary

---

31 In this study, chit-chat was defined as off-topic, superficial conversation about unimportant or uncontroversial matters. One example of chit-chat was when, during the Listen and Reflect task, Becky initiated a conversation about my laptop and how scary it felt when one's computer crashed. Another example was when, as I played a segment labelled 'August' to Sofia, she said that her birthday was in August, and when I said that mine was in August as well, she got very excited over the fact that we were both Leos.
interpretations[^32] (often projecting) to involuntary language problems. Incidentally, they also provided a bigger variety of explanations for silence: memory, thinking about the topic, embarrassment, uncertainty, not wanting to say anything, inner conflict, and losing track of what she had wanted to say.

**Listeners' Evaluations of Chengjiang.** Chengjiang could be described as a quiet, thoughtful, somewhat silent man, and a slow-speaker. Although he made acknowledgements and “hm” sounds as I talked, his silences were still relatively long, as evidenced by the fact that I misinterpreted his within-turn pauses and interrupted him.

Chengjiang was evaluated by three people: Jing, Carol, and Maris. Jing, a NNS female listener, was enthusiastic, outgoing and talkative[^33], with mostly negative to neutral views on silence. Jing's assessment of Chengjiang on the questionnaire represented him as ‘completely’ trustworthy, honest, sincere, forthcoming and respectful, ‘usually’ coherent and talkative, elaborative in his answers, ‘completely’ engaged in conversation, and proficient in English. She strongly believed that if he spoke Chinese, he would have no silences or interruptions. Although they expressed similar levels of tolerance for silence (in the medium to high range), their speaking styles were fairly mismatched, so Jing and Chengjiang had a 39% silence interpretation agreement.

The second listener, Carol, a native speaker of English who spoke quickly but quietly, revealed a medium tolerance for silence, as evidenced by her responses, and some initiated chitchat during the long pauses when I had trouble fast-forwarding the audio. She evaluated Chengjiang as ‘usually’ trustworthy, honest, forthcoming, and engaged in conversation, ‘completely’ genuine and sincere, and ‘a little bit’ coherent, talkative, tedious, and elaborative.

[^32]: In other words, they interpreted silence as resulting from a conscious decision to stay silent, as opposed to an involuntary silence (such as losing track of one’s thoughts, or not knowing a word to describe something).

[^33]: As evidenced by a lot of chit-chat in our session, and that she kept interrupting me and asking questions about my study.
in his answers. She saw his language proficiency as medium. Unlike Jing, she did not blame all his silences on problems with language proficiency, and guessed that if he spoke his native language he would probably have the same amount of pauses. Carol explained, “I think the language held him back, but it didn’t really sound like he was, kind of, really going out on a limb to, like, add more to the conversation.” Overall, she rated him as moderately honest, and she and Chengjiang achieved a silence interpretation agreement of 39% (same as Jing and Chengjiang).

The final person who evaluated Chengjiang was a NS named Maris. Despite being a chatterbox in contrast to a measured and quiet Chengjiang, the two of them had the highest silence interpretation agreement of 50%. On the Character Questionnaire, she rated him as ‘completely’ sincere and respectful, ‘usually’ trustworthy, honest, genuine, coherent and silent, and said he elaborated his answers ‘a little bit,’ and that he was ‘a little bit’ engaged in conversation. Moreover, she saw his language proficiency as medium.

In general, Maris attributed his silences to nerves and wrote a note about him, saying:

I feel the man in the study was very self-conscious about his English skills/language skills. While he spoke with a noticeable Chinese accent, I felt he came off very concerned about both that and his style of speaking. A lot of the “uhhs” and “umms” sounded like he was trying to avoid saying something negative or embarrassing about the subject- he did not seem 100%, completely relaxed- maybe he was nervous about being in the study/interview, but it came across as self-conscious plus my immediate assumption, personally, rightly or wrongly, was that he seemed concerned about his own English skills. He does not sound confident.

34 As evidenced by the fact that she frequently introduced chit-chat, with variable relevance to the topic being discussed.
Overall, she demonstrated that she had a mostly favourable impression of him when she commented, “That man is lovely. Letting me listen to his conversation and judge it” and referred to him as “this gentleman.”

Unlike Qing (a woman evaluated by women), the evaluation of Chengjiang is an interesting case to consider because he was a man being evaluated by women. Accordingly, cross-gender differences may have influenced the listeners' interpretations, and cannot be ruled out as a moderating variable. Chengjiang's thinking pauses were the only ones judged negatively (and mildly so) when one NS thought that one of them was an indication of him being calculating to sound more impressive, and the other NS believed that he was fabricating an answer because he did not actually have one. Moreover, NS listeners were the only ones to judge his silences as resulting from impression management: careful phrasing because he did not want to offend, or being calculating to impress, and, thus, making things up. They also provided an overwhelming number of emotional/embarrassed/nervous explanations for simple word search or looking-for-a-better-word silences, and mistook emphasis or distraction pauses for symptoms of language deficiency. Furthermore, the majority of interpretive disagreements between NSs and Chengjiang involved too much emphasis on involuntary language difficulties and translation (by the former), interpreting both voluntary actions (like changing his mind or looking-for-the-best-word) and involuntary actions (like distraction) as language weakness, whereas looking-for-examples silences were interpreted to signal a lack of understanding.

On average, in the Chinese case study, NS and NNS listeners were rather close in their agreement percentage scores, with NSs even outscoring NNSs by five percent, which may indicate that (consistent with participants' reports) the norms of silence usage in Canadian English and Chinese are indeed quite similar, and individual differences influenced the
aforementioned interpretations and evaluations much more than culture did.

**Korean Case Study**

Taking part in the Korean case study, there were two female silence producers (Jamie and Stellar), and five listeners: Two of them were Korean speakers, and three of them were native speakers of English (See Table 5 and Table 6).

Table 5

*Distribution of Korean participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silence producers</th>
<th>Korean Speaker Listeners</th>
<th>Native Speaker Listeners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jamie (F*)</td>
<td>Tae-Hwan (M)</td>
<td>Carol (F); Steven (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stellar (F)</td>
<td>Lisa (F)</td>
<td>Brian (M); Steven (M)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates the gender of the participant

Table 6

*Korean silence interpretation average agreement totals*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Korean Speakers</th>
<th>Native English Speaker</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>63%</td>
<td>46%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Perceptions of Korean vs. Canadian English Silence Norms.** Jamie (a female silence producer) said that North American people were not very patient, and they did not take the time to listen to her. Her perception was that Canadian people were constantly competing for speaking turns. As a result, she did not get many opportunities to say something, and usually, had to remain silent. She explained that people here talked very quickly, constantly initiated other topics, and she “cannot follow the flow” because “they talk fast, I kind of lost what they are talking about” because, in North America, everything happened “too quickly.”

Accordingly, Jamie concluded that North American people did not appreciate silence,
whereas in other cultures, silence could be quite meaningful. She said that as a result of this cultural mismatch, when she spoke English (while relying on her Korean norms) she felt rushed “all the time” and that...

...it makes me more nervous, because people don’t give us pauses, and especially English is really advanced in terms of fillers. When we are thinking [in Korean], we don’t have those kind of expressions. So when we need a time, we just say or look different ways and think and other people usually takes time and give us a time.

What complicated the situation even more was that, for her, silence was “a very powerful strategy to convey expression. If I want to make my point more powerful then I just stop, and then I start it again. And people focus more on what I am talking about.” She elaborated:

I emphasize by silence. But here [in Canada], I have some kind of pressure to produce any languages to get to fill the gaps in conversation. If I don’t find words to fill the gap, I feel nervous, I should make something, I should make a comment.

She added that people judged her negatively when she used Korean norms when speaking in English: “It’s usually regarded as conversation breakdown because of my lack of English. They try to help me [laughs]. And most of the time I really appreciate their help. But some of the times, I want to finish my sentence! [laughs]”

Tae-Hwan, a Korean listener, agreed with Jamie’s assessment of the situation:

“Impression I got, is Westerners are more self-centred, I mean, not in a bad way.” He thought that this was a result of upbringing: Western children had been raised to have high self-esteem and to be proud of who they were and what they were doing. Hence, it came as no surprise that they were not shy about expressing themselves. In contrast, he said that the Koreans and the Japanese (“that’s the extreme case,” he said35):

35 This comment was interesting. In Jenkins' (2000) study, Chinese participants had the same reaction when
... are very, very careful in that kind of situation, like, not to interrupt people. So in classroom settings, that’s one of the things I didn’t like, at first. I mean, like, I always wonder, I mean, what they are talking about is not important, why, like, taking up other people’s time by saying all those stupid things, and I mean, uh, somewhat private and personal things! They, like, overshare [laughs]!

Tae-Hwan explained that, for Koreans, bothering someone by taking a longer turn was considered very bad manners. However, in North America:

There are contexts where silence is not valued (like in classroom setting or a discussion), and when you’re silent, it can give impression that you are not interested in what’s going on in the classroom and stuff.... When it comes to academic setting, silence is a bad thing. Something to avoid. Because you don’t say anything, people might think you are stupid. You have nothing to share... But it’s not the case. Simply because you are silent, you are not, like, dumb, or you don’t think or-, it’s nothing like that. But here, like, silence’s treated as something, I don’t know, lack of interest, or lack of knowledge to brag about [laughs].

Tae-Hwan added that, in contrast to Westerners or people from other cultures, when they were in a situation in which they were afraid that what they were going to say would hurt others' feelings, Koreans simply remained silent, out of politeness.

While acknowledging the importance of context, another Korean listener (Lisa) said that, in Korea, “I can say that we have more tolerance in terms of silence.” She said that some Koreans definitely believed that being silent was better than talking too much. Moreover, Korean culture did not encourage people “to talk frankly or talk much.” She recalled that in

______________________________
| confronted with evidence of their collectivist behaviours, saying that it was a myth that the Chinese behaved in a collectivist manner, and it was actually the Japanese who behaved like that. |

84
school it was “very natural” to just sit there and listen to what the teachers were saying, “and that works really well. I didn’t feel the pressure to talk much. Especially here, if you are not really participate in classroom discourse-, discussions… people here tend to regard you as not knowledgeable enough to talk.” In fact, Lisa echoed Tae-Hwan's comments and said that, during academic discussions in Canada, people talked too much about their personal stuff, and “they interrupt all the time what other people are saying.” She also corroborated Jamie's experience of feeling pressured, saying, “I have some pressure to say something less meaningful, and contribute to discussion in classroom. It’s different from what Korean students are doing.” She also said that she could totally relate to other participants' inability to get a speaking turn in Canada; in fact, she said that she was taking a class where they taught her how to take part in classroom discussions, “and we spent almost two weeks [learning] how to interrupt.”

In contrast to the other Korean participants, Stellar (a female silence producer) saw silence as a reflection of one's disposition, not context. She said that she felt “slow” when she spoke, not only in English, but also in Korean, “because of my character. I think a lot of things when someone asks something. I cannot act immediate action.” However, she acknowledged the cultural differences in silence norms as well. She said, “very smart or older, most leaders, they speaks just a little. They speak just simple sentence but it has a lot of meaning.” She added, “English speakers seems doesn’t like silence. Any kind of response, English speakers like [laughs]. Just thinking or hesitation is not a response.” Hence, reiterating what all the other Korean participants had said, her perception was that, in English, silence did not count as a legitimate reply or communicative response, while in Korea, it did.

Listeners' Evaluations of Jamie. Jamie was a medium-speed talker with high tolerance
for silence. Even though she had pauses in her speech, they were relatively brief, and she used gestures to fill them. Furthermore, she acknowledged my comments when I talked, and I never felt tense or uncomfortable when talking to her. On the contrary, she came across as very genuine, sincere and real.

Jamie was evaluated by three people: Tae-Hwan, Carol, and Steven. Her first listener, Tae-Hwan, presented a withdrawn and quiet demeanour. He took long pauses before every answer, so long that they often felt awkward to me. In fact, his communicative manner engendered many situations in which I misinterpreted his within-turn pauses, and ended up rushing him with my questions, while his answers lagged behind. As a result, I got impatient with his delayed responses and silences, and frequently interrupted him. Overall, he was a slow-speaker who possessed a very high tolerance for silence.

Tae-Hwan and Jamie displayed 54% silence interpretation agreement, and on the Character Questionnaire he evaluated her as ‘usually’ trustworthy, honest, genuine, sincere, respectful, elaborate and engaged in conversation. He also assessed her as ‘not at all’ talkative (but not tedious!), and ‘a little bit’ silent, but ‘always’ a competent communicator, and fluent in English language. Based on these evaluations, not being talkative, for him, did not impede her ability to be a competent, highly proficient communicator. This, again, emphasized his high tolerance for silence.

The second listener, Carol (as previously indicated, a native speaker of English who spoke quickly and had a medium tolerance for silence), and Jamie had the highest silence interpretation agreement score of 58%. On the questionnaire, she assessed her as ‘completely’ respectful and ‘usually’ trustworthy, honest, engaged in conversation, sincere and forthcoming. However, she also thought that Jamie was ‘a little bit’ tedious, and insufficiently elaborate in
her answers. She believed that Jamie was ‘sometimes’ a competent communicator and rated her language proficiency as medium. I asked if Carol felt like Jamie had difficulty with language (before Jamie brought it up herself as part of the interview) and she responded that “Actually no, not really. Sounded fine.” As a matter of fact, Carol predicted that Jamie would likely have “about the same” number of pauses if she were speaking Korean, and explained that “she seemed a little bit more withdrawn. I don’t know if that was ‘cause of the language or just maybe how she is. Maybe about the same if she was speaking Korean.” Regardless, she chose Jamie as most honest out of three silence producers that she had listened to.

In that case, to what did Carol attribute Jamie's silences? In general, Carol saw her pauses as a sign that Jamie had nothing important to say. When she paused to think, Carol said it sounded like she was “making something up. Doesn’t really sound like she had a distinct answer. There is no, like, urgency in her response to your question.” She added that it sounded like Jamie was stalling a little bit as well. In general, Carol felt like Jamie did not have anything meaningful to say when she hesitated before saying it. Moreover, because of this assumption, Carol felt it was okay to interrupt her: When I played her a section of the audio where I interrupted Jamie, Carol shrugged it off and said “it didn’t sound like she had anything important that she wanted to get out.” So, she had no problem with my interruption (and breaking of Jamie’s silence), because she saw silence (which she interpreted as a lack of urgency on Jamie's part) as an indication that there was nothing meaningful or significant to communicate.

Another NS who evaluated Jamie, was a man named Steven. When we interacted, I interrupted and rushed him occasionally, but that could have been influenced by the fact that we were limited in time. Also, his speech was measured, but with enough repetitions and fillers to
eliminate any long or tedious pauses. Hence, he would be considered a medium-speed talker with a slightly higher tolerance for silence than I. Even though Steven and Jamie had the worst silence interpretation agreement score (only 33%), on the questionnaire, he rated her as ‘completely’ genuine, respectful, engaged and talkative. He said that she was ‘usually’ trustworthy, sincere and elaborative, ‘a little bit’ tedious and silent, but ‘always’ a competent conversation partner. Steven also assessed Jamie’s English language ability as proficient.

By and large Steven was convinced that Jamie’s silences and pauses were due to her personality. He said, “really, she’s the type of person says-, she likes to think about what she’s actually going to process, and then actually say it. As opposed to just saying something for useless saying, right?” He added, “Her personality is collective. It’s uh- maybe even concise. It initially comes across as being uncertain, but I think that’s what I am getting more, her-, her personality is like that.” Similarly, he said that if she were speaking Korean, she would have the same amount of silence and pausing “because she is more of a thinker, I think.” In fact, he reiterated that Jamie was proficient in English, so she paused not because she was struggling, but because she was thinking about what she was saying and processing it, and also because she wanted to be concise. Therefore, according to Steven, all Jamie’s silences and hesitations were a reflection of her personality. It is also important to note that, due to what he saw as her “concise” and controlled personality, Steven rated Jamie as “so-so” in terms of honesty.

Overall, the listener's interpretations of Jamie's silences were quite nuanced, and gender played an important role: The male NS had a much lower interpretation agreement score with her than either a male Korean speaker, or a female NS. In addition, both NSs perceived her as having a withdrawn and guarded personality, whereas Jamie explained that she saw herself not as withdrawn, but as more of a listener. Also, NSs believed more silences were intentional than
they actually were. Moreover, they saw silence as a sign of a problem more often than was warranted: They frequently mistook thinking for confusion and uncertainty, and when she simply finished her point, or did not have anything more to add, these silences were misinterpreted as a sign of language deficiency, or worse, a sign that she was hiding her initial offensive and prejudiced thoughts. Furthermore, silences that resulted from her struggle with language were given much deeper meaning, such as an expression of guilt, calculated emphasis, or an attempt to distance herself from Canadian culture. Finally, falling silent in order to choose the best example she could use to explain something was interpreted as a refusal to talk about a particular subject.

In turn, the male Korean speaker, projected often, and over-interpreted many of her silences as calculating and intentional: He incorrectly identified a thinking pause as calculated impression management, a grammar-related pause as checking for understanding, and end-of-turn silence as hesitation before uttering something offensive. He also thought that the choosing-the-best-example-to-use silence was a sign of embarrassment, and when she struggled to express herself properly in English, he perceived those silences as negative feelings about the subject.

**Listeners' Evaluations of Stellar.** Stellar was an introverted, shy and subdued woman, who spoke very slowly, and took very long pauses. While speaking English did pose a challenge for her, her husband and best friend told me that she spoke in the same manner even when speaking Korean, and that when she communicated in English, her actual speaking style remained intact. I noticed that I spoke very slowly (for me!) when interacting with her, with much longer pauses than usual.\(^{36}\) However, even though I tried to make an effort not to interrupt her, her silences were so long that, sometimes, I could not tolerate them because they were

\(^{36}\) It seems that I was mimicking her style, just as, I noticed, I started to mimic Keivan's overuse of “for example.”
making me anxious. So, I filled them: by offering her possible responses, by trying to push her and speed up her speech rate, and by frequently interrupting her. In fact, during immediate recall she confirmed that she was interrupted, saying, “Maybe I couldn’t finish my answer completely.” Likewise, Lisa, a Korean listener, also noticed that I interrupted Stellar, saying, “She didn’t finish her sentence and then you interrupt a bit, so you finish instead of her.” Therefore, it is evident that my adherence to Canadian silence norms, which were incompatible with Stellar’s norms, rushed her.

Both NS listeners (Steven and Brian) remarked how slowly she spoke, and that generally, she did not acknowledge my comments. However, there was evidence of purposeful silence avoidance on her part (which indicated that she was aware of her slowness): at one point, she used “mrmrmrm” before trying to answer. She said she did that “because my silence was too long, [laughs] I started something ‘mrmrm’.”

Stellar was evaluated by three people: Lisa, Steven, and Brian. Lisa (a female Korean listener), was an open and friendly woman, who spoke at medium-speed, and, based on her own speech and her reactions to Stellar’s speech, demonstrated a medium to high tolerance of silence. She still made pauses, although not as much as Tae-Hwan and Stellar, yet she was slow enough that I occasionally pushed her, and took over her turns. She and Stellar had the best silence interpretation agreement, 71%, and Lisa rated Stellar as ‘usually’ trustworthy, honest, sincere, forthcoming, respectful, engaged and silent, ‘a little bit’ genuine and coherent, and ‘not at all’ talkative or elaborative. However, Lisa also perceived Stellar as an incompetent communicator, and saw her language proficiency as beginner. As Lisa listened to a few of Stellar’s thinking or looking-for-examples silences, she commented: “long pause...” She added that she herself paused, when faced with these questions, because she never thought about them,
but “English is also an issue here too, because her pause it’s kind of longer than mine, definitely.”

Lisa interpreted some of Stellar’s pauses as awkwardness due to a mismatch between the question and the answer (Stellar acknowledged this too). As a second language speaker, Lisa projected more, and was also more empathetic to Stellar. She commented, “It’s really sad!” when Stellar was talking about feeling foolish about her English, and sympathized with her, saying, “it’s very hard for us [Koreans] to use prepositions.” She added, “I am pretty sure when she speaks in Korean, she might not use a lot of pause or [fillers].” Overall, she attributed most of Stellar's silences to language difficulty, but did allow for a possibility that these silences may be a “personal trait.”

Steven, one of the NS listeners who evaluated Stellar (who, as already mentioned, was a medium-speed speaker, with medium tolerance for silence), had a silence interpretation agreement score of 48%, and rated Stellar very positively on the Character Questionnaire: ‘completely’ honest, trustworthy, sincere and respectful, ‘usually’ coherent, forthcoming, engaged, ‘a little bit’ talkative, ‘not at all’ tedious, but also ‘usually’ silent, ‘rarely’ a competent communicator, and a beginner in terms of language proficiency. Likewise, Steven said that Stellar seemed very honest, and overall, she made a good impression. In fact, he chose her as “definitely the most honest” among the three silence producers that he listened to.

Another NS listener, Brian, while talkative and open in general, seemed nervous during the experimental procedure, and as a result, he appeared very formal in his interaction with me. He used fillers like “okay” and “so” often, demonstrating a medium tolerance for silence, and he spoke at medium speed. Brian and Stellar had a silence interpretation agreement score of 43%, and on the questionnaire, he rated her as ‘completely’ genuine and sincere, ‘usually’
trustworthy, honest, competent, silent and tedious, ‘a little bit’ coherent and engaged, ‘not at all’ elaborate, and as a beginner in terms of language proficiency.

Markedly, both NSs had an overall positive impression of Stellar, and both of them blamed all her silences on English language deficiency. Steven believed she lacked vocabulary. Brian said: “Her English isn’t fantastic” and thought she had considerable problems with her English grammar. When I asked if she would make the same number of pauses while speaking Korean, Steven answered with an emphatic “No, no, not at all!” He explained that Stellar’s problem was “definitely a language barrier.” Brian agreed, “It was more language based. Yeah. She would speak a lot faster. Much less pauses.” On the contrary, Steven predicted, “I think in her own language she would be extremely talkative and probably fairly smart and knowledgeable.” He justified this prediction by saying that, when Stellar did process something, it came across as knowledgeable.

Incidentally, all three of Stellar’s listeners did not realize that Stellar was aware of her slowness. In fact, NS participants consistently mistook her thinking pauses for lack of understanding and language barrier. They often assumed that a silence was unintentional, when it was actually purposeful (such as when she paused because she was choosing her words carefully), and they frequently over-emphasized her language struggles. What is more, even when they perceived a silence as stemming from language difficulty correctly, they were wrong about its underlying cause: They saw it as a vocabulary/word search problem even though her reported language limitation was grammar. Moreover, sometimes NSs mistook simple word search silences for indicators of strong negative emotions or embarrassment (e.g., Brian misinterpreted her word search pause as a sign that this was a sensitive subject for her, all because she spoke quietly. He said, “It’s even the way she answered, is very quiet. So it’s a
sensitive topic.”). Similarly, a Korean listener mistook word search for shyness, embarrassment and unpleasant emotions. However, in contrast to the NS participants, she sometimes misinterpreted Stellar’s word search for thinking (possibly because Korean culture allows for longer thinking pauses in conversation than Canadian culture does).

As was the case for Jamie's listeners, both gender and culture seemed to have an important influence on participants' silence interpretation agreement scores with Stellar. The Korean listener, a woman, had the highest agreement score (71%), while the two NSs, both men, had 43% and 48% agreement scores, respectively.

Lastly, when comparing how the two Korean silence producers were evaluated and how their silences were interpreted, an interesting pattern emerged: NS participants entertained the idea that silences were due to personality or personal style only when the speaker had short to medium-length pauses. Clearly, they could not imagine long pauses like Stellar's resulting from her speaking style or personality (when in reality they did!), and thus, interpreted her silences as arising from her English-language deficiencies.

**Russian Case Study**

As part of the Russian case study, there were two silence producers, a male (Stepan) and a female (Svetlana), and seven listeners: four females and three males, of whom four were NSs, and three were Russian speakers (See Table 7 and Table 8).

**Table 7**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silence producers</th>
<th>Russian Speaker Listeners</th>
<th>Native Speaker Listeners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Svetlana (F*)</td>
<td>Maria (F); Alla (F)</td>
<td>Carol (F); Brian (M)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepan (M)</td>
<td>Maria (F); Alexei (M)</td>
<td>Maris (F); Steven (M)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates the gender of the participant
Table 8

*Russian silence interpretation average agreement totals*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Russian Speakers</th>
<th>Native English Speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>42%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Perceptions of Russian vs. Canadian English Silence Norms.** Stepan expressed a general absence of awareness regarding silence, and said that he did not perceive any differences between English and Russian silence norms; Maria corroborated his claim. She explained that, in Russia, attitude towards silence depended on context. For example, sometimes, silence was necessary: “I think that sometimes, it had to be, like, break between two people talking.... You can’t talk, talk, talk all the time, so it has to be some time of silence.” Hence, in this context, silence served as an indicator that one was tired of talking about the same subject, and signalled that it was time for a change. In such situations, the speaker needed to pause to think of a new topic. In other contexts, it signified a problem: “You know, it’s a bad thing, it’s probably, you know, it’s time that you don’t know what-, what to talk about. So, so it’s like you-, you just maybe lost, how it say, track of your thought?” Moreover, she said that the interpretation of silence depended on how well the interlocutors knew each other and how close they were.

Meanwhile, when asked what silence meant to him, a male Russian listener Alexei said, “Nothing. Absolutely not[hing]. I never pay attention to this, I have no idea.” He added, “My understanding, it’s not important in Russian culture. The silences. Maybe in some other cultures, yes, but in Russia I don’t think so.” Later, he reiterated: “I understand in our culture it’s nothing. But again, it depends on the situation.” He clarified (agreeing with Maria's take), that in some situations it was appropriate to pause more than in others: If a police officer asked
him a question, he needed to take a moment to think of an appropriate answer; as follows, this context had different silence norms than a situation where he was casually talking with a person he knew.

However, in contrast to the perceptions of her country(wo)men, Alla said that silence tolerance norms in Canada (as compared to Russia) were “much more, much more” different. She expounded that silence back home would not be accepted, whereas, “in general, people much tolerant, much more tolerant in here than back home.”

Overall, the Russian participants in this study displayed a general lack of awareness of silence and its use, and did not endow it with much (if any) meaning.

**Listeners’ Evaluations of Svetlana.** Female silence producer Svetlana came off quite nervous and high-strung, and she spoke quickly during the interview. She showed a medium tolerance for silence, definitely higher than mine, as evidenced by the fact that I interrupted her quite often (although not nearly as much as I interrupted the Koreans), and filled many of her between- and within-turn silences with “mmhm”s or other kinds of acknowledgement.

Although Svetlana admitted that she never paid much attention to silence, she said that, without question, she had more silences in her English speech than when she spoke Russian: She had to search for the right words, worry about her accent, plus, she got more nervous when she was not speaking her native language. She explained, “most of pauses I have here are just find-, to find the right English word.... All this pauses, they caused by my bad English [laughing].” She expounded, “I have a poor vocabulary, that’s my problem. I think it’s main cause of all this pauses.” She added that another major reason for her silences was the personal nature of the questions I was asking her, and occasionally, she paused because she did not want to answer them. In fact, she estimated that 80% of her pauses during our conversation were due
to her English struggles, and 20% were because she “didn’t want to say something personal.” Overall, she did not view her silence favourably, and commented that her speech was “horrible” because she was occasionally slow with her words.

Svetlana was evaluated by four people: Carol, Brian, Maria, and Alla. The first listener, Carol, was, as previously mentioned, a fast-speaker with medium tolerance for silence, and accordingly, the two women's speaking styles were quite compatible. Carol had the highest silence interpretation agreement score with Svetlana (50%), and she rated her as ‘usually’ trustworthy, genuine, respectful, competent, and engaged, ‘a little bit’ honest, tedious, and elaborative, and proficient in English. She surmised that if Svetlana spoke Russian, “I think she would have had less [pauses]. She seemed pretty positive what she wanted to say. Like she seemed like she had a lot to say.” It may seem surprising that, despite the high agreement percentage and thus, presumably, being on the same wavelength with Svetlana, Carol evaluated her as definitively least honest (out of the three people she had listened to). However, considering the fact that during stimulated recall Svetlana admitted to lying in the interview, this only affirmed Carol's perceptiveness.

Incidentally, Carol's explanation for why she found Svetlana dishonest was quite interesting. She said, “she seemed maybe a little [pauses] I don’t know, abrasive? Yeah, I think she was-, was kind of very strong in what she wanted to say.” I asked why that made her seem dishonest, and Carol said:

She seemed really angry about everything [laughs]. She always had a very like certain response to everything.... I think just because she had her own particular ideas... I think she just kind of emphasizes herself or like her point more to a point where it might be a little bit excessive or a little bit exaggerating. Yeah.
Therefore, while some of Carol’s dislike of Svetlana was based on the content of what she was saying, it was intriguing that her having a certain and unwavering response to questions made Carol question her honesty as well. Thus, on the one hand, whereas too many pauses tended to be seen as a negative, not hesitating at all did not leave a good impression either.

A male NS listener named Brian (who, as already mentioned, was a medium-speed speaker with a medium level of silence tolerance) had, by far, the lowest silence interpretation agreement score with Svetlana (25%). On the Character Questionnaire, he evaluated her as ‘completely’ honest, genuine, and respectful, ‘usually’ forthcoming, elaborative, coherent, talkative and competent, ‘a little bit’ silent and ‘not at all’ tedious. He also rated her language ability as proficient. In fact, Brian did not think that Svetlana’s silences were a result of a language deficiency. He said, “In general, her silences were just the silences that we all have. It’s more like thinking about content, waiting for confirmation of understanding, things like that.... There might be a few that were language based, right?” Accordingly, he predicted that if she spoke in Russian, her silences would be “generally, about the same, yeah.”

Meanwhile, Svetlana’s NNS listener, Maria, spoke very quickly (almost non-stop), and gave very long and elaborate answers to my questions. She talked so much that she interrupted me, would not let me complete my sentences, and often finished my questions for me. In addition, she reacted to some of Svetlana’s (who was a fast-talker herself) pauses by exclaiming, “It was such a long pause!” Thus, her tolerance for silence was quite low. Due to their similar speaking styles, perhaps it was understandable that, when filling out the Character Questionnaire, Maria evaluated Svetlana as either ‘usually’ or ‘completely’ on most values (such as honesty, sincerity, respect, talkativeness, elaboration and being engaged in conversation). She also rated her as ‘not at all’ tedious and silent, saw her language proficiency
as fluent, and remarked that Svetlana’s English was “almost fluent, definitely better than me,” adding that “her conversation was very smooth, actually.” She considered Svetlana a “definitely pretty fast-talker,” and a willing participant in conversation, who was engaged, and tried to help me to the best of her ability, and who faithfully answered all my questions. She also evaluated her as honest, saying, “I honestly, I didn’t see anything that went wrong. She seemed to be honest.... I would say that she was more honest [as compared to Stepan], and maybe again, you know, it’s based on her English abilities.” She explained that as a proficient L2 speaker, Svetlana could understand the questions better, and could answer them better because they were easier for her to answer. She said that Svetlana gave me fuller, more open answers, and she even talked about her depression, so “I would say she was, yeah, more honest.”

Moreover, Maria believed many of the pauses were “just natural” for a NNS of English. She said, “don’t forget, English is our second language, and you can’t answer right away like you could in Russian.... It doesn’t matter if English is pretty good, but it’s not your own language.” When asked if Svetlana would have silences if she were speaking Russian, Maria said “I would say she would have probably the same. Because it’s her style.” By and large, she used language-limitations and personal speaking style to explain most of Svetlana’s pauses.

Overall, Maria appeared to be quite trusting and naive, and not well-versed in various nuances of pauses and silences. When interpreting a silence that, as Svetlana admitted, was caused by her lying in order to avoid the subject (she said that she could not remember), Maria accepted Svetlana’s words at face value, and even provided an excuse for her, saying that “this has been like ten years,” so it makes sense that she honestly does not remember.37 In fact, Maria surmised that if it had happened yesterday, Svetlana would have replied right away, “But it was,

37 It was particularly interesting that Maria accepted the excuse of time and faulty memory from Svetlana, a woman, yet when Stepan, a man, said this, she implied that he was fudging the truth. In reality, it was Svetlana who lied, and Stepan who was genuinely remembering.
like, back there, so it was too far! So that’s why she just-, she paused and then ‘okay, honestly, I don’t remember.’ Nothing else.”

In contrast to her countrywomen, Alla, another female Russian listener, spoke in a very calm and measured way, at medium-speed, and demonstrated a medium to high tolerance of silence. On the one hand, as I talked (or we listened to the audio), she kept saying “mmmmmm” to fill in pauses, but she also gave short and to the point responses to questions, did not fill any lulls in conversation with fillers and, in fact, appeared comfortable sitting in silence. She definitely showed a higher tolerance for silence than other listeners of Svetlana because, while listening to excerpts, she often commented, “it’s not big, that’s not big pause,” or “it’s-, it’s look like, it’s almost no pause,” or “there was no pause.” Most other listeners did not agree with her at all. All in all, she and Svetlana had a silence interpretation agreement of 40%, and on the questionnaire, Alla evaluated Svetlana as ‘usually’ trustworthy, honest, sincere, forthcoming, respectful, talkative, ‘not at all’ silent or tedious, ‘always’ competent and ‘completely’ engaged in conversation. She also rated her language skills as proficient. Moreover, Alla predicted that if Svetlana were speaking Russian, she would have “less silences, less silences. For her, it would-, would be almost nothing. No silence. And she-, her speech is very quick.”

In general, Alla had a very positive impression of Svetlana, saying that she “has a lot of information to say, and she seems like honest person, and when she knows for how to-, to say, she speaks very fast.” This comment conveyed that speaking very quickly was an honesty indicator for her. She also liked that Svetlana elaborated her problems; that was another honesty indicator. However, the most important honesty barometer was silence: When asked to explain why she found Svetlana more honest than Stepan, she said, “It was less pauses before the answer. She starts answering just after the question most-most of times.”
Overall, NNS listeners overlooked the negative emotions in Svetlana's pauses, and accepted her lies at face value. When Svetlana paused because she did not want to talk about some topic, they consistently perceived that as either thinking or simply remembering what had happened. Projecting was also helpful for them; in fact, only when Maria projected her own experiences onto Svetlana, did she interpret some of her silences correctly. Unlike NSs, Russians frequently emphasized style, and considered some silences as insignificant or “nothing special.” They also incorrectly assumed that voluntary impression management pauses, avoiding-the-subject hesitations, or emotional silences were merely silences caused by English language deficiency.

On the other hand, NS listeners tapped into the emotion of Svetlana's pauses more than the NNS listeners did, and picked up on the fact that she did not want sympathy (which was why she told white lies about what had happened), and that she was hesitant to talk about certain subjects. They also projected a lot (especially Carol), but were mostly accurate in their projections. Also, although they assumed that many silences were voluntary when they were not, they also confused does-not-want-to-talk-about-it pauses with does-not-know silences. Interestingly enough, even though they both agreed with Svetlana when she was criticizing the Canadian education system, both interpreted the word search pauses she made, as she was saying this, as a sign that she did not know what she was talking about, having had only surface knowledge of this subject. Furthermore, NSs mistook a lot of the language-related pauses for confirmation, or checking-of-understanding/reaction silences, and letting-her-words-sink-in pauses. Hence, they mistakenly believed that a considerable number of these silences were done for the sake of Svetlana's interlocutor. Likewise, word search was given more meaning than warranted, like stalling, or paying lip service to something she had heard but never experienced.
NSs also frequently saw uncertainty where there was none, and blamed memory for many of the pauses where she simply did not want to talk about the subject. More importantly, they gave sinister meaning to language-struggle pauses by interpreting some of them as not saying (but strongly implying) something negative out of politeness. Ironically, for a silence producer who actually admitted to plenty of lying and evasion, most negatively judged pauses were not her actual lying silences, but word search and language struggle pauses.

Finally, not just culture, but also gender played an important role in the listeners' silence interpretation agreement scores: The best agreement score was between Svetlana and a female NS, while the male NS got, by far, the lowest score.

**Listeners' Evaluations of Stepan.** Stepan was a quiet and introverted man who did not elaborate his answers, and allowed for a lot of long silences in his speech. He was definitely a slow-speaker, as evidenced by the fact that (although I made a conscious effort not to) I frequently misinterpreted his within-turn pauses (as he answered my questions) because they were too long, and as a result, I often interrupted him. Moreover, because of his lack of elaboration and very short responses, our interview was the shortest one out of them all. Therefore, he could be categorized as a person with a high tolerance for silence. Incidentally, in contrast to another slow-speaker like Stellar, Stepan appeared quite unaware of silence norms, other people's reactions to his speech, and his own slowness. All the same, he was not completely oblivious, as he did indicate that he occasionally felt pushed to speak more, or to use fillers in his speech.

Stepan was evaluated by four people: Maris, Steven, Alexei, and Maria. The first listener, female NS Maris, was (as already mentioned) a fast-speaker with a low tolerance for silence. Thus, her speaking style was completely mismatched with Stepan's. Maris and Stepan
had the worst silence interpretation agreement score of only 14%. By the same token, on the Character Questionnaire, she evaluated him as ‘completely’ respectful, ‘usually’ coherent, sincere, and silent, ‘sometimes’ a competent conversation partner, ‘not at all’ forthcoming, ‘a little bit’ honest, genuine and trustworthy, ‘not at all’ engaged and elaborative, and somewhere between beginner and medium in terms of English language proficiency.

As a rule, the more segments I played, the worse her evaluation of him became. At the start of the task she said:

I think he sounds like, or seems like, the type of person who needs a lot of time to warm up to somebody. So in an interview situation, that means the first few questions, until he’s kind of relaxed, had his liquid courage, or whatever, he’s a bit more reserved. But I think as you kind of peel back the layers, or you got onto a topic that really interested him, he’d never shut up. In a positive way.

A few segments later, when he grew silent as he was trying to remember the date when he came to Canada, she interpreted that as “I don’t think it sounds like he had positive reasons to come to Canada. It sounds more like being forced, rather than a choice.” Next, when he hesitated while looking for ideas to describe his job search during his initial adjustment period, she took his silence as a sign that nepotism was involved in his eventual success. Then, she said that he paused because “I think he’s fudging the truth.” Later, as Stepan blanked on a word 'shrimp', which created a very long pause, she said that it “sounds like illegal activity. I was like, ‘we grow some-’ I’m like, he’s about to say grow-op or something, or you know, some plants. That was my first thought. Yeah. God, I can’t be the only one who thinks that!”

After a while, Maris started to wonder if these silences and pauses were a habit of his. She exclaimed:
He’s pausing a lot! He pauses, like, after every question! I think it’s just habit for him, almost like customary to pause and really think through rather than something else. So I think he was just really thinking. Yeah. I know that kind of sounds a bit silly, but to me, he’s pausing so very much that I’m like, maybe it’s a customary thing with him.

While this comment was one of her most charitable interpretations of Stepan's silences, it still indicated that she clearly did not consider habitual frequent pausing as a positive quality, since she implied that it was silly, odd or weird.

Often, when Stepan grew silent so he could think, she assumed he did not understand what I had asked him, saying, “He might have been completely lost by your question.”

Likewise, when he paused because he was looking for good ideas for his answer, Maris thought he was hiding something: “I think he might have had an answer, I think he might just not have wanted to give it. I think HE was sugar-coating his own answer this time.” After we had finished listening to Stepan, she said that, although she did not want to say something bad, mean or judgmental, Stepan “creeped her out,” because he “was sketchy.” In fact, she wrote a note about him, which said:

The man does not seem forthcoming, very honest, talkative, nor does he elaborate much on what his experiences are like. I didn’t think his language skills were that bad - but unlike person #1[Chengjiang], this man does not seem self-conscious at all, but he seems disinterested. He also seemed several times like he was hiding something, he seemed to act suspicious.

Unfortunately, Maris was not alone in her harsh assessment of Stepan. Steven (as previously indicated, a medium-speed talker with medium tolerance of silence) and Stepan had a silence interpretation agreement score of only 21%. On the questionnaire, he evaluated Stepan
as ‘completely’ respectful, ‘usually’ trustworthy, engaged and sincere, but ‘a little bit’ honest, genuine, forthcoming, coherent, talkative and elaborative, and as ‘rarely’ a competent communicator. In addition, he saw Stepan's English proficiency as medium. Steven's slightly higher agreement score, and a kinder (compared to Maris) overall impression of Stepan, may have been due, in part, to a better match between his and Stepan's personal speaking styles.

Nonetheless, Steven repeatedly indicated that he considered Stepan's silences to be too long.38 He said that his first impression of Stepan was that “he’s totally confused” and incoherent. As we listened some more, he interpreted Stepan's thinking silences as him refusing to admit a flaw, or hiding something. Furthermore, Steven deciphered Stepan's memory or searching-for-ideas pauses as evidence of Stepan's poor language skills. He was also emphatic that, in his native language, Stepan would not have had this many pauses. He explained, “I think he would not. I think he would be very fluent. And just non-stop.” Hence, he construed Stepan’s silences as “language barrier, in general. He was really struggling for language.” However, this rationale did not stop him from letting these silences tarnish his impression of Stepan: Steven said Stepan seemed the least honest of the three people he had listened to. He frank: “I would say no. Not honest.”

How did NNS participants evaluate Stepan? A confident and blunt male Russian listener Alexei was a medium- to slow-speed speaker, and demonstrated a fairly high tolerance for silence, as evidenced by the fact that he did not acknowledge my comments when I talked, and there were times when I rushed to move on while he still had not finished speaking. In general, when answering questions, he took his time and talked at temperate pace. Alexei and Stephan had the highest silence interpretation agreement score of 57%, and on the Character Questionnaire he evaluated Stepan as ‘completely’ honest, trustworthy, genuine, sincere,

---

38 At one point, he made a “hmph” noise in the middle of a very long silence.
forthcoming, engaged, and competent, and as ‘usually’ coherent, respectful, talkative and elaborative. He also rated Stepan's English ability as proficient. Overall, in contrast to other listeners of Stepan, Alexei had a mostly positive impression of him, in part because of their similar speaking styles and mutual high tolerance for silence.39

At the start of the Listen and Reflect task, Alexei said, “My immediate reaction would be, probably, that he’s not feel comfortable speaking English.” Later, while listening to the silence that Maris perceived as “fudging the truth” he said, “I don’t see like-, to me, this, like, pauses, as you pausing it, it’s not a pause to me, it’s just, like, a manner of speech [laughs].... it’s normal to me.” When Stepan blanked on a word 'shrimp', Alexei said, “My immediate reaction would be: Why so slow? Why you’re pausing that long? What the problem?” However, he said that, if faced with this kind of silence in conversation, he would not pay much attention to it: “I would just skip it probably, so it was something insignificant. But definitely, this, THIS pause was too long.” He added that, if this kind of pausing happened often in conversation, it “might become irritating;” while one could accept and excuse short pauses, long pauses would become tedious. Nonetheless, it was apparent that what counted as “long” for him was much longer than what counted as “long” for the majority of the participants.

Accordingly, on the whole, Alexei saw Stepan's silences and pausing as harmless, saying, “maybe [it's] his just manner, I don’t-, I don’t see any, that he poses any threat.” As he was doing the Character Questionnaire, he justified his answers, “I didn’t hear him lie.... I don’t see him hiding something....I don’t think he was unwilling to talk.” He added, “Individuals, they have different temperament, so-, and someone people talk more slowly, some talk more fast, same with their thinking: Some people think slow, response slow, some people quick

39 But even Alexei's tolerance had its limits. He said that there were indeed some “annoying” people out there who Alexei considered too slow and too silent, and he said that he preferred not to talk to them because they spoke “so slow,” “irritate” him, and “drive me nuts.” However, Alexei made it clear that he did not consider Stepan to be one of those people at all.
responder and they respond immediately.” Moreover, Alexei said that he did not see Stepan as someone who was unwilling to talk or refusing to reveal information. In fact, he added that silence not only depended on the situation, but was also subject-dependent: Some subjects touched a person deeply, some did not. If I had asked Stepan about marriage or his personal life, maybe I would have gotten a completely different response. For these reasons, Alexei evaluated Stepan as honest.

Part of the reason why Alexei was so empathetic towards Stepan was that Alexei identified with him. He repeated throughout our session that Stepan was “like ourself,” and when I told him Stepan's age, he said, “so basically my category.” He repeatedly said that Stepan was “just like me.” He added:

To me he is honest, and okay, just a little bit of prepa-, preparation if you give him like-, mind you, if you start talking to me the same subject I will probably pausing myself as I start remembering what was before.

He continued, “Maybe it’s again, maybe language, like translating from English to Russian. Remember it, uh we all went through this.” In another instance he remarked, “You put him in the same corner like myself, when you started that way. Same like with me, he just probably never thought about it. [laughs] That’s all.”

Furthermore, because he identified with him, Alexei called me out on the fact that I frequently did not give Stepan enough time to answer questions. He accused, “Maybe YOU were a little bit impatient,” adding that “it is his manner, he doesn’t respond immediately.” Thus, Alexei insinuated that the problem was not Stepan, but me (the interviewer), because a few seconds after asking a question, I would start pushing and rushing him, by giving him

---

40 This was a completely fair observation. Listening back to the recordings, I cringed frequently, as I realized how little silence tolerance I had, and how much I interrupted people. I did this to many, many, participants (if not all!) and only Alexei was brave enough to call me out on this.
suggestions how to answer the question.

Based the findings above, it is easy to make an assumption that, in contrast to the NS listeners like Maris and Steven, other NNS listeners of Stepan sided with Alexei’s interpretation of his silences because of their shared cultural background. However, that was not the case. Data from another NNS listener, Maria, showed that it was not an issue of NS versus NNS that underlay the differences in judgments of Stepan; whether a listener saw him in a positive or negative light was a much more nuanced phenomenon, where gender, culture, and personal speaking style all played an important role.

Maria was a female speaker of Russian, and, as previously stated, a fast-speaker with a medium to low tolerance of silence, which meant that her and Stepan’s speaking styles were quite dissimilar. As she was listening to him, she projected quite a bit, which resulted in a 29% silence interpretation agreement score. Whereas projecting improved her agreement score when she listened to Svetlana (a woman), it did not help when she listened to Stepan (a man). Maria’s impression of Stepan was not very positive either: On the Character Questionnaire she rated him as ‘completely’ tedious, and silent, ‘a little bit’ honest, genuine, sincere, trustworthy and forthcoming, and ‘not at all’ coherent, talkative, engaged or elaborative. Moreover, she said that Stepan was ‘rarely’ a competent conversation partner, and as for his English proficiency, she evaluated him as a beginner. She explained, “I would say beginner, but I know that he’s not. [It’s] The way he-, he presents himself.” She added that he made others look smooth by comparison, and that she had trouble evaluating him on the questionnaire because “he’s not an open guy.”

At first, Maria thought Stepan was “shy” and “too modest,” but as we listened more she called him incoherent, uneducated and simple: “He doesn’t sound like he’s an intelligent, he’s-,
or like, really educated, or something. Like, you know, like, very simple.” When he fell silent to remember when he first came to Canada, she thought it was due to both, language deficiency and dishonesty. She said that it seemed as though he did not know why he came: Everyone was going and he went, too. She explained, “there is no reason, you know, like, serious reason… everyone was coming and I came as well.” Hence, Maria believed that he was being misleading by trying to represent his decision-making in a more responsible way, and he was lying that he discussed it with his colleagues, etc. So, it appears that, because he paused and did not answer with a concrete reason right away, she assumed that he was trying to hide the fact that he was an impulsive, one-of-the-herd follower. In a similar situation, when he hesitated to remember any language problems he had experienced when he first came to Canada, Maria saw his hesitation as an indicator of dishonesty. She said that if it were her, she would have said, “yes I had these issues” right away, but he paused, as if he could not remember, and that was not a question, for which one needed to do that.41 Thus, she thought he paused because he was being calculating and insincere in his answer again.

In fact, Maria seemed baffled by Stepan’s supposed lack of sincerity. When she (incorrectly) interpreted his thinking silence as a sign that he did not understand the question, she got exasperated with him and said that, if he did not understand the question, he could have just asked me to re-word or explain what I had meant! She continued, “but even THIS he didn’t tell you.” Thus, again, she implied he was refusing to admit weakness, hiding his limitations, and not being sincere. However, although she rated him as the least honest of all silence producers she had listened to, she later tempered her harsh assessment: “With him, maybe we can say he wasn’t dishonest, but he couldn’t represent himself.” So, in contrast to the NS participants, who, like she, had judged him harshly, she did not say it was necessarily a

41 Alexei disagreed with her on this point.
reflection of his character, but only of how he presented himself. Moreover, when asked if she
felt like he was lying, she waffled, “Maybe not. My impression was, just, he was not getting all
the questions.” Ultimately, she was hesitant to accuse him of outright dishonesty.

In addition, while she saw the aforementioned silences as symptoms of insincerity and
deceit, when she felt that Stepan did not provide elaborated or full answers (by her loquacious
standards), she attributed this behaviour to laziness, saying, “sometimes you feel like laziness,
‘okay I don’t wanna, you know.’ So it’s possible as well.”

How did Maria interpret some of Stepan's frequently maligned silences? As she listened
to the silence where he blanked on a word 'shrimp', she said:

Like, [laughs] he’s too tired of talking or he, I don’t know, he doesn’t know what he’s
talking about-. ...And again, you know, maybe it’s his style. Some people are too slow in
everything, and slow talkers. You can fall asleep.

Although she did not accuse him of harbouring a marijuana grow-op like Maris did, she did
interpret this particular silence as tiredness, ignorance or a boring speaking style and
personality.

By and large, Maria blamed Stepan's pauses primarily on personality, speaking style,
and language. She said that if Stepan were speaking Russian, maybe his pausing would be “a
little better”:

But again, I would say it’s-, it’s his style. I don’t know, maybe this is the way he talks
even in Russian. This is the way he is, and looks like he slow talk-talk-talker,
definitely-, definitely not a nice talker, not a smooth talker.

However, she conceded:

I am sure that maybe talking in his own language, even if, even-, even if it’s his style, it
would be smoother.... It would be better for sure, and he would understand the questions it would be better for sure, and he would understand the questions making some pauses.

She concluded that, “He’s not like err good con-con-con-conversation partner. So you have to just, like, you know, playing into one gate.”

Overall, NS listeners misinterpreted many of Stepan's thinking pauses for something negative or sinister: They usually thought he was hiding something, or refusing to admit a flaw, or did not understand what I had said or what was happening. They even inferred answers from his thinking pauses (assuming something negative when he paused to remember), and believed that a long thinking pause was either due to outside interference (because it could not have possibly been that long naturally), or a sign of discomfort. NS participants also frequently mistook thinking and remembering silences for incoherence, language problems, confusion, and content uncertainty. In fact, in all instances of memory and looking-for-ideas silences that they failed to correctly identify, NSs blamed language deficiency. All in all, the majority of negative judgments (such as thinking that Stepan was hiding something or engaging in illegal activity) by NSs came mostly during thinking silences, a few during looking for ideas pauses, and one during blanking-on-a-word silence.

In turn, NNS listeners (who projected a great deal) incorrectly blamed silences on personal style and shyness, and they also over-inferred problems with language. However, only the blanked-on-a-word silence was judged harshly (as a sign that he did not know what he was talking about). Moreover, among the Russian listeners there were some interesting gender differences: Whereas Maria thought Stepan’s pauses indicated a lack of understanding or an attempt to deceive, Alexei saw many of his pauses as insignificant and meaningless.
Finally, all listeners (regardless of their country of origin) thought that Stepan interrupted me when he was actually interrupted by me. In general, all listeners blamed poor language much more than was warranted (this was especially true for Russian speakers when he was thinking, and for NSs when he was remembering). The most harshly-judged silence among all listeners was the blanked-on-a-word-'shrimp' silence. It was perceived as either an indication of illegal activity, language deficiency, laziness, or ignorance.

---

42 I misinterpreted his within-turn pause and interrupted him.
The following Colombian and Iranian case studies come from the longitudinal data obtained during the mentoring sessions. They include all of the components of the previous three case studies (thus, answering research questions two, three, four and five), but due to the special features of this data set, these two case studies also explore the following longitudinal silence issues: In a mentorship setting, how does the mentor/mentee relationship evolve in terms of silence usage? Does increasing familiarity of the interlocutor (or the intersubjectivity between interlocutors) reduce silence? Do the number and length of silences decrease with time? As a consequence, the Colombian and Iranian case studies include an additional section that describes the mentee’s speaking style, silence use, and his or her level of silence awareness. Moreover, the nature of the intercultural language mentoring sessions also created an opportunity to investigate the breaking of silence in some detail, as well as to describe any progress the mentees made over five months of mentorship.

Finally, in each “Evaluation of” section, before I proceed to report how each silence producer was evaluated by others, since (as previously stated), it appears that these evaluations stemmed from an interplay of gender, personal speaking style, and culture, to help make sense of the listeners' perceptions, I indicate their gender and offer a brief description of their speaking styles.

**Colombian Case Study**

As part of the Colombian case study, there was one Spanish-speaking silence producer mentee Boomie, two Spanish-speaking listeners Rafael and Sofia, and one NS listener Becky (See Table 9 and Table 10).
Table 9

**Distribution of Colombian participants**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silence producers</th>
<th>Colombian Speaker Listeners</th>
<th>Native Speaker Listeners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Boemie (F*)</td>
<td>Sofia (F); Rafael (M)</td>
<td>Becky (F)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates the gender of the participant

Table 10

**Colombian silence interpretation average agreement totals**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spanish Speakers</th>
<th>Native English Speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Perceptions of Colombian vs. Canadian English Silence Norms.** Boemie said that silence and its significance was very context-dependent. After all, silence could mean that a person did not want to talk with someone, or that s/he was angry with them, and when s/he got silent, that indicated that s/he preferred to say nothing, rather than fight. Also when a person was preoccupied or focused on something, s/he was usually silent. In addition, one stayed silent when s/he was thinking, and one was silent when s/he was distracted, and one's mind was “somewhere else.” She added that sometimes people were silent because they did not have the words to express themselves. On the other hand, sometimes silence could be comfortable, when one would rather sit quietly and “enjoy the view”.

When I, the mentor, told Boemie that, in North America, people generally did not like silence, she responded that maybe in North America they did not, but this was definitely not true for Canada, because “in Canada, all the people are quiet... people don't talk. It's very quiet in the office.” She explained that, in Colombia, people worked and talked at the same time, whereas in Canada, people just stared at the computer, like robots, “like a machine quiet, quiet [laughs] too much silence for me. I need music.” Incidentally, in Colombia, it was never
completely silent: Even when people remained silent, the background noise, like music, was always on. In fact, Boomie said that she listened to music all day long. Upon waking up, before she did anything else, she turned on the radio; she listened to nature sounds or new age music when she slept.

A Colombian male listener Rafael agreed with Boomie’s perceptions. When asked to compare silence norms between Spanish and English, Rafael replied:

I’d think it all depends on the situation, the-, the type of conversation that you’re having. But I would say, in the Anglo-culture, it is much more, like, permissible to have, like, pauses, like, longer pauses, because that’s the way that people, like-, in a way that people interact, that Anglo culture is much more, like, individually oriented. Whereas we, like, Spanish speakers are much more of a group culture. Like, that space bubble for us is very tight. So pauses, like long pauses in Spanish would probably tell the other person that you’re not that interested in the conversation, that you might not want to talk to this person, or that you’ve done something inappropriate in terms of what you’ve said or- [trails off].

Moreover, Rafael clearly indicated that silence was regarded more negatively in Spanish than in English:

If somebody is asking a question and you have a long pause, it might be that you don’t know the answer to that question, which might look bad if it’s a question, related to, you know, knowledge you’re expected to have. Or in other situation it could just might mean you’re trying to make up an answer and lying.

Similarly, Sofia, a female Colombian listener, said “I think in any language it [silence] has meaning, it depends on situation you are...I think it’s relative.” She said that if her conversational interlocutor fell silent, her first impression would be that “maybe that person is
thinking what I am saying. Or maybe that person is not agree with what I am saying. Could be many different things.” She explained that people in Latin America were very expressive, so “we talk a lot, we’re very expressive, so we don’t stay too much time on silence [laughs].” In contrast, the Canadian culture (although she said that there were so many different cultures in Canada, that she did not know what “Canadian” actually was) was more silent, “the rules for here is like you’re a little bit more quiet on different things.” She explained that, in English, people did not express themselves in the same way as they did in Spanish. For example, for Colombians, it was customary to” hug people a lot” and get their “noses into other people’s business,” but here in Canada, this kind of behaviour was frowned upon. She mused, “You have to be careful with that [in Canada]. Maybe you be-be more silence.”

The impact of cultural silence norms was clearly felt in my interaction with Colombian participants. For example, when I asked Boomie about chit-chat, in particular why she asked me an irrelevant question about myself as we were working on her resume in silence, Boomie said, “too much silence is no good.” I asked her why, and she said that, when interacting someone, people are supposed to share things with them, and if things get too quiet, “you have to do something, even a stupid thing,” because silence, “it's uncomfortable.” Rafael agreed that by starting random chit-chat, “she wants to start some conversation to break the awkward silence.” Sofia added that silence increased the formality of the situation: Silence made the interaction feel too formal, and Boomie wanted to get to know me better, so she started talking,

...just to make a conversation with you, to broke the ice, it’s too formal sometimes. But sometimes when you get too long, too silent, maybe you say, okay, okay so let’s talk about something. Especially when that is something manual, you know? You can still keep talking.

---

43 Throughout our whole conversation, she was very aware of stereotypes, and was cautious not to make any stereotypical generalizations.
On the whole, it was clear that all three Colombians in this study agreed that using “too much silence” was not regarded favourably in Colombian culture.

**Boomie's Description and Progress.** Boomie was a warm, genuine and sincere woman in her early fifties. While at first glance she seemed quiet and reserved since she generally did not initiate conversation, once I got to know her, I realized that, although not a chatterbox, she was a very open individual who shared her views, feelings and emotions freely. Out of all the participants, she was the most genuine and sincere, as evidenced by the fact that she was not afraid to cry in front of me, talk about controversial topics with me, or reveal a lot of personal or intimate information to me.

In general, Boomie was a medium- to fast-speaker with low tolerance for silence (listening back to herself during stimulated recall, she remarked a couple of times that she talked “like a parrot” and did not think before speaking). From the start of our time together, she had shown no aversion to fillers, especially those used to avoid silence. Accordingly, she used utterances like “ummmm,” “uuuuhhh,” “aaaah,” “eeeh,” and “mmmm” as fillers, to avoid pauses whenever she searched for words or tried to phrase something. She also used “sooooo,” “theeeeeeeyyy,” and “theeeeee” as a stalling tactic, stretching words to fill up time. As our sessions progressed, her silence avoidance became a little more sophisticated, she used “eehh” to fill in her thinking silences and, occasionally, she used it as a stand-in for words that she could not quite think of.

With time, Boomie also became aware of the importance of acknowledgement, and that fillers were important for active listening in English. Even though, at the beginning of our sessions together, she did not acknowledge my explanations, by September, she was using within-turn acknowledgements appropriately, and whenever I asked her “...right?” (something she used to ignore) she verbally recognized my comment. In fact, towards the end of data
collection in October, even when she was distracted, she still acknowledged my remarks with an “mmmm.”

It seems that Boomie and I had similar silence norms, with my tolerance being a little bit lower than hers. This was evidenced by the fact that she often acted in a way that indicated a lack of silence tolerance, just as I did. For example, whenever she asked me a question and I did not respond, when confronted with my silence, instead of waiting for my reply, she elaborated. Also, she filled searches through her notes with narration or talk (just as I talked through my searches for the next segment\[^{44}\] to play for her). Furthermore, when I hesitated on a word search and resorted to gestures to explain myself, she tried to help me out with words (thus, filling in my silence), just like I often did for her.

As we got more comfortable with each other (and developed intersubjectivity), our tolerance for silence increased. For instance, when we were writing or editing something, I noticed that I started writing silently much more than before. In fact, with time, most of the silence between us became comfortable. By September, I stopped trying to fill all the segment-search silences, and only initiated talking when they were truly too long.

Whereas, in practice, she appeared to attribute only a moderate degree of significance to silence,\[^{45}\] in theory, Boomie was aware of the various meanings of silence. She explained, “silence depends on the situation, depends on many things: what you are doing, what I am doing. If I am chatting, having a beer, I avoid silence. You have to talk because you need to share.” She said that, in this context, silence was uncomfortable: Whenever she was with a group of people and no one was talking, she felt “oh no, somebody has to talk, we can't stay in silence.” However, things were different when she was with her husband: Sometimes they just

\[^{44}\] Segment-search silences refer to the time I needed to find the right place on the audio-recording.

\[^{45}\] On the one hand, as I was working in silence, she said, “excuse me,” because she felt like she was interrupting something that had meaning. On the other hand, on a different occasion, as we were working in silence, she did not excuse herself to take a phone call, treating silence as meaningless.
sat in silence, because they simply had nothing to say, and that was okay. Besides, she added, the subject of the discussion mattered too: “It depends on the topics. Some topics I like, and I talk and talk and talk.” Finally, language was also an obstacle: In Colombia, she talked all the time, but in English, she was unable to talk like she wanted to.

Nevertheless, despite her awareness of the various meanings of silences, she was unaware about the cultural differences in silence norms. When I informed her about the disparity between North American and various other cultures’ silence usage norms, explaining how in Korea, for example, “the wisest man is the most silent,” she kept asking “really?” She made it clear that this was something that she had never considered before.

**Listeners’ Evaluations of Boomie.** Boomie was evaluated by three people: Rafael, Sofia, and Becky. The first, a male Colombian listener named Rafael, was a quiet, reserved, and very thoughtful man, who could be classified as a slow-speaker, with medium to high tolerance of silence. He spoke quite deliberately, with many pauses, and as a result, I talked over him, tried to rush him, and we often interrupted each other because he took so long to formulate his answers. Moreover, he gave short responses and did not elaborate them much. In fact, my interaction with him was one of my harder interviews, awkward at times because of the long pauses and silences.

Rafael and Boomie had a silence interpretation agreement of 45%. On the questionnaire, he evaluated Boomie between ‘usually’ and ‘completely’ in all categories, and rated her as high beginner in language proficiency. His positive evaluation of her likely resulted from their compatibility, in both culture and personal speaking style. His slightly lower silence interpretation agreement score was largely due to his projecting of his own motivations onto her: Because he was a very analytical man who thought about his answers carefully, he often assumed that she was also analyzing, reflecting, and possibly even resisting, what I was telling
Even though Rafael's personal speaking style was relatively silent, when interpreting Boomie’s actions, he was still influenced by his generally talkative native culture. For example, when asked why (as I was writing silently) she read my words aloud, he responded: “Cause she wants to know what you’re writing and she wants to, like, become more involved in the process of writing the resume.” In other words, he implied that saying something, and not staying silent, was an indication of being engaged and involved in what she was doing. In fact, all Colombian listeners indicated that by saying things aloud (instead of staying silent) it showed that she was focused. Likewise, Rafael interpreted Boomie's silence (which was actually meant to indicate that she was finished with her turn) as a sign of nerves and insecurity. He explained:

Cause many times, uh, second language-speakers feel insecure about their language abilities, and they have a lot to say, but then, in the end, they just say, like, one of two sentences they consider correct to avoid embarrassment. So that could be the reason.

In another instance, he thought a pause indicated her dissatisfaction. He mused:

When you are learning the language, and your abilities, as in her case, are somewhat limited, you may sacrifice accuracy just for getting your message across. Like, she might be thinking, ‘that’s not what I wanted to say but it works.’

He substantiated his reasoning with an example from his teaching experience, recalling that, sometimes, a student (who was initially labelled as a “very quiet”) met someone from their own cultural and language background, and “you can see how chatty they might get.” Thus, he interpreted Boomie's silences in a negative light, by adhering to an assumption that loquaciousness was a positive and natural state. Based on this premise, if someone was not talkative, there must have been a barrier preventing him or her from revealing his or her true self.
Speaking more generally about her silence usage, Rafael gave two major reasons why he thought Boomie tended to stay silent as we worked together on various mentoring tasks:

First of all, there’s that linguistic, like, barrier. Uh, in a sense that, like, she does have a lot to say, but she feels like she doesn’t have enough words, and she cannot find the proper way of saying it. And second, there is the-, like, you know, cultural differences, and she might not know, like, if this is appropriate, like, should I ask, like, what are, like, socially acceptable topics to engage in conversation? Like, is it okay if I ask about your family? Should we just talk about the weather?

He added that she might have had preconceived notions about how Canadians behaved, what was considered as (in)appropriate, and what topics people did not like to discuss. Hence, for the most part, Rafael believed that the majority of her silences were a combination of struggles with language, and wariness about cultural differences.

Nonetheless, despite his copious projection, and occasional incorrect assumption, there were a number of instances when he made astute observations. For example, he accurately explained one tense silence (which I initially misinterpreted as her ignoring me) as “that was an answer, like a very indirect answer. It’s just a way to cope with the-, like, the inability to express herself as well as she can in her first language.” Furthermore, he showed a lot of compassion and empathy for second language speakers, something that was not expressed or acknowledged by the NS participants in this study: “These people, they-, they tell you, they feel like children. Like, and they’re highly qualified professionals, and they have lots of wonderful stories to tell and knowledge to share, but they don’t have the means to do so.”

The second listener, a Colombian woman named Sofia, was a prototypical chatterbox. Very social, confident and extroverted, when she talked, she often did not even come up for breath, ignoring punctuation and periods in her sentences. She sometimes acknowledged my
comments (saying “mhm”), built rapport with me by finding small things to compliment me on (for example, she said, “you type good”), and chit-chatted with me during my segment-search pauses.

Sofia and Boomie had a silence interpretation agreement score of 48%, and, on the Character Questionnaire, she evaluated Boomie as 'completely' genuine and tedious, 'usually' honest, sincere, respectful, 'a little bit' forthcoming and silent, 'not at all' trustworthy, coherent, elaborative, engaged in conversation, and talkative, as well as an ‘incompetent’ communicator with very low language proficiency. In fact, Sofia made fun of Boomie’s English, asking sarcastically if “finally she learned English with you?” and when I told her that we were almost finished with our Listen and Reflect session, she joked, “poor woman, finally she's free! [laughs].” Then, she commented that it would be interesting to study Boomie “until she learns little English,” to see “if it's really the problem of the language, or it's really the problem of personality [laughs].” She concluded, emphatically, “for sure she doesn’t handle the English side well.”

While Sofia articulated a balanced and neutral stance on silence (see section on Perceptions of Colombian vs. Canadian English Silence Norms), in practice, she showed a very low tolerance for it, by virtue of her very negative (and judgmental) interpretations of Boomie's pauses and silences. For example, when Boomie whispered something (because she believed she should not have been saying it), Sofia thought that indicated negative experiences or emotions. Then, as we were discussing her resume, Boomie fell silent because she was searching for a word. While accurately noting that the issue was most likely language, by saying “I don't know how much and how secure she feels that to translate whatever she did in Spanish to English,” Sofia also suggested that her silence might have meant that Boomie was inventing and embellishing things on her resume.
Moreover, while she did acknowledge Boomie's language difficulties (Sofia said that, it seemed to her, most of the silences were of the “let me think, I translate, I compose, and then I give you back” variety), she interpreted another word search pause as “a big lake of confusion,” and a sign that Boomie did not understand (or was offended). She said, “in this case, I don’t think she even understand what you said. She’s no logic.” Furthermore, Sofia added that, based on what she heard from Boomie, “she’s very confused, she doesn’t get it too much. It’s a delay, too much delay, all the time.” She asserted that Boomie was “clear in nothing”, and added, laughing, “I think she was lost.”

Similarly, when I played her a pause where Boomie was finished speaking, and was simply waiting for my prompt, Sofia said that if she had to put her interpretation into one word, “it’s insecure. It’s more the personality too. More than language. But she’s-, she’s shy to tell you, ‘look, I don’t get it.’” She also guessed that Boomie must be an “older” woman...

...who is very afraid of something, that, who doesn’t feel that feet here. That is not somebody who just can give too much details. I know people that they have less English, but they need to express ourselves, so they do something. She continued, “I don’t know what is her level of education, or something like that, that is also part of it.” Ergo, she interpreted Boomie's silence as a manifestation of her insecure personality and low educational level. In fact, throughout the Listen and Reflect task, Sofia continued to associate lower voice and silences with insecurity and low confidence. She said, “Most of interview she's very stressful with you. Poor woman. Because actually, her personality not very, it's- for me- it's very insecure. And I see her very, very, like, where I am?... What is this?” She added, “she is in your hands, and you push her and she's stressed.” She claimed that this was quite obvious, since I talked loudly, while Boomie responded very softly, which (to Sofia) indicated low confidence.
By the same token, when asked why Boomie did not acknowledge my comments, Sofia attributed it to her passive and disinterested personality: “No, I see that her personality, not like that. She doesn’t have the idea to do that.” She elaborated:

Because a person who even doesn't get too much understanding of English. If you're interested in your resume, because it's what you're focused now, or at least the way your express, you want to-, to be a little bit more active. And I see her, very passive...I don't see very committed with that.

Likewise, she perceived a lack-of-understanding pause as tiredness and frustration: “Sometimes I feel her tired. Like [exaggerated sigh] like she doesn’t want how express, and she’s block. She feels the frustration immediately. And-, and you can see that. This is a pause.”

When talking about Boomie's silence more generally, Sofia remarked, “She gives you all the power. You do with me whatever you want, I'm just watch.” She went on, “I don't know how professional she is. But believe me, a professional, who gets, uh, part of us, we have kind of English. She doesn't have anything, anything!” She exclaimed:

What is she doing here? She doesn’t know what she has to do, treats the resume as your duty, not her duty.... She is not commit. She is not-, she is not here. I don't see that she realize she is living here.

Sofia's reaction suggests that Boomie's silences created an impression that she did not care about what we were doing, was absent from the situation, and thus, wanted to move on: “She doesn't want to, to get that on that process, or to understand about bursary, and, and she say, okay, okay let's talk about the routine.” Sofia believed that Boomie paused frequently because she did not want to try, thereby assuming that these pauses were voluntary, and not caused by an involuntary distraction or word search, as Boomie reported.

Boomie's third listener was Becky (a female NS), who, as previously described, may be
classified as a fast-speaker, that oftentimes rambled, and initiated a copious amount of irrelevant chit-chat. Moreover, she frequently said “um,” interrupted me with her answers, and made countless aside comments and criticisms regarding various aspects of my procedure. In addition, she was fidgety, distracted, and, overall, she demonstrated a medium tolerance for silence.

So how did the NS participant evaluate Boomie? Becky had the highest silence interpretation agreement score with Boomie (53%), and on the Character Questionnaire she evaluated her as 'completely' trustworthy, honest, genuine, respectful, talkative and engaged, 'usually' forthcoming, tedious and coherent, and 'a little bit' silent and elaborative. In terms of language, she rated her as proficient in English, which was a much higher language level than what Spanish speakers afforded her.

In general, Becky attributed Boomie's silence to language, honesty and effort. Like Sofia, Becky presented a fairly negative view of silence and lowered voice. When Boomie whispered about Colombian mafia, Becky said: “Maybe she has something to do with the mafia. I am guessing it probably was a pretty shady area. Put it that way.” Then, as Boomie and I talked about her resume, Becky interpreted a word search as a sign of dishonesty:

She’s probably double-checking herself to make sure wh-wh-, that she actually did those things. If you’re like most people, you’ve added a little extra padding to your resume. I mean I’ve done it too.... She’s probably double-checking her answers. Because whenever you look at your resume, you’re trying to make sure that you actually did these things.

Later on, she implied that another word search was also “double-checking,” with its associated “shadiness.”

As a NS, Becky was puzzled by Boomie's grammar-related hesitations when we were
practicing conditionals, because she did not realize that conditionals were difficult for L2 speakers. Similarly, she interpreted unintentional silences as intentional occurrences, such as when Boomie asked and answered a question on her own, Becky thought she was intentionally “double checking,” and thus, initially lying when she had said that she did not know the answer. In addition, when Boomie and I interrupted each other and came in at same time, Becky did not see it for a coincidence that it was, and instead, interpreted it as Boomie's fault, and an indication of her lack of familiarity with English-language pragmatics.

Despite all this, in contrast to Sofia, Becky did not generalize her negative assessments of Boomie's silences to her personality. In fact, her impression of Boomie and her English was quite favourable. She said, “I mean, her English sounds [brief pause] reasonably good.” She added, “She seemed trustworthy. She seemed nice.” I asked what gave her that impression, and she explained:

Because she was trying to always respond to you in, I think, the best way possible. It never seemed like she was just trying to ignore you. Like, she was [brief pause] compliant. She was willing to improve herself and whatnot, she was actually trying.46

When asked if Boomie would have the same amount of silences and pauses if she were speaking Spanish, Becky answered “No” very definitively, and later elaborated: “Um, because I don’t think she’s completely fluent in English. That’s why.... I think she probably had to pause more than she would have, if she was writing it in Spanish. Because of the language.”

On the whole, NNS listeners interpreted Boomie's silences to mean confusion or lack of understanding much more frequently than was the case. Furthermore, they saw involuntary distractions as a voluntary lack of effort. Moreover, both Spanish listeners interpreted a silence,

46 Power issues seemed to come into play for the interpretation of this particular silence. Spanish speakers saw compliance in a negative light and praised resistance, while Becky praised Boomie's obedient behavior. This difference in perception may have resulted from a NS assumption that NNSs should be deferential to those who speak English better than them, especially in a language-mentoring context.
which was supposed to indicate that Boomie was simply finished speaking, to mean embarrassment and insecurity. This begs a question: Can a Spanish speaker ever be truly finished talking and done expressing him/herself? Likewise, NNSs interpreted Boomie's lack of acknowledgment (usually because she did not understand me) as a sign of dissatisfaction with what I was telling her, or a sign of an insecure disposition.

Unfortunately, these were some of their more benevolent misinterpretations. More markedly, a thinking pause was perceived as a sign of low professionalism, and a word search, as an indication that Boomie was offended by what I had said. One NNS expressed a belief that if a speaker was too slow, she deserved to be interrupted. What was particularly disturbing, they interpreted silences that were meant to be polite and considerate as lack of commitment.

In turn, the female NS listener also made some unflattering attributions. She perceived a mere coincidence, or an end-of-turn silence, as an indicator of language deficiency, and called an L2 coping strategy a “weird Spanish language thing.” In addition, she misconstrued Boomie's whisper as an indication of her involvement in the mafia, and she tended to see silences as an indicator that Boomie was upset.

Moreover, the NS projected some dishonest practices in her own resume-writing on Boomie, and tended to view word search negatively: as a lack of something to say, or lying. She also attributed Boomie's lack of acknowledgment silences to a lack of understanding, and confusion, much more than was warranted.

While the NS assumed that all miscommunications were Boomie's fault, she was not alone in this: None of the listeners acknowledged that what I had said could have been confusing, and all of them blamed communication breakdowns on Boomie and her deficiencies. This phenomenon is consistent with Wiley and Kukos’ (1996) finding that although communication is a jointly constructed process, and anyone can contribute to a communication
breakdown, L1 speakers are never blamed for miscommunication. While NSs' strategy use might, in fact, hinder communication (Lindemann, 2002), the NNSs are still blamed for all problems. In fact, Rubin (1992) found that simply looking like a foreigner made language appear more incomprehensible to raters.

In the meantime, the closeness between NS's and NNSs' silence interpretation agreement scores in this case study indicated that gender played an important role in the perception of silence, even more so than culture, since the lowest agreement with Boomie (a woman) was achieved by a Colombian man, and the highest was obtained by a NS woman. Finally, this proximity in values also suggested that Colombian silence norms may be similar to English silence norms.

**Iranian Case Study**

Of the four Iranian case study participants, there was one Farsi-speaking silence producer mentee Keivan, two Farsi-speaking listeners Homa and Bahman, and one NS listener Clay (See Table 11 and Table 12).

Table 11

*Distribution of Iranian participants*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Silence producers</th>
<th>Farsi Speaker Listeners</th>
<th>Native Speaker Listeners</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Keivan (M*)</td>
<td>Homa (F); Bahman (M)</td>
<td>Clay (M)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Indicates the gender of the participant

Table 12

*Iranian silence interpretation average agreement totals*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Farsi Speakers</th>
<th>Native English Speakers</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>45%</td>
<td>56%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Perceptions of Farsi vs. Canadian English Silence Norms.** When I told Keivan that
there was a Korean proverb, which asserted that “the wisest man is the most silent,” he replied, “No. In my culture this is not true.” I told him that some cultures could tolerate a lot of silence, but in North America people did not like it as much. He responded that Iranian culture leaned more towards the North American way, not the Korean way. In fact, in terms of silence, he said that he had not noticed any differences between his culture and North American culture.

Homa, an Iranian female listener, agreed that silence norms in Farsi and English were quite similar. In addition, she explained that, in Iranian culture, the meaning of silence depended on the situation: “Sometimes, for example, if it happened between kid and parents, it means the kid doing something and the parents are not happy. They get silence because to show we are not happy.” So in this kind of situation, silence had a negative connotation, showing the child that he had done something inappropriate. Likewise, if silence happened between two adults, “for example between a wife and husband, it means they are not happy, and they need to be silence because to get settle down co-, eh, um the other partner, you know.” Here too, the connotation was negative. However, Homa said that if silence happened between two men, “it means they are hesitate, they are-, you have to THINK about it. So I get silence to think about it. It means I am not SURE, to be agree or not.” In this case, the connotation was neutral and almost positive.

In contrast to Keivan and Homa, Bahman (a male NNS listener) said that:

Compared with Western culture or Canadian culture, I guess silence is more appreciated in, in my culture. First of all, Farsi is a little bit slower than the spoken English here. Also, in our culture it’s not really good to sell yourself, or speak loud, or say I’m this, I’m that, I-I can do this, I can do that.

He added that, in Canada, people were more expressive, and were expected to reveal much more than he was used to in his own culture, where “being too expressive is not good.”
Furthermore, people here used “many expressive voices and even facial expressions than we use in our culture.” However, Bahman did agree with his country(wo)men that, in terms of talkativeness, “it should be quite like here.”

Overall, the Iranian participants in expressed a positive attitude towards talk. For example, Homa saw talking as cathartic. She explained:

He wants to say that, then he will be okay and continue. This guy is the that kind of the man, who they want to think about themself, they want, they are, they feel comfortable when they express themselves, talking about their things that make them unhappy upset.

Then, the regular talking.

All in all, it appeared that Iranian culture, at least from the perspectives of these Iranian participants, favored talk over silence; they saw talking as a healthy and desirable, and expression of negative emotions preferable to holding things in silently, and thus, potentially hurting oneself more.

**Keivan’s Description and Progress.** Keivan was an opinionated and ambitious man in his late thirties. While soft-spoken, he was also quite energetic and headstrong. In general, he was a medium-speed talker, never rambling, and pacing himself whenever he spoke. He was also predominantly silent when I was talking to him and, at least in the beginning, and he did not acknowledge my comments when I explained things to him, preferring to stay quiet.

Additionally, Keivan demonstrated a medium to high tolerance for silence (indubitably higher than mine). To illustrate, when I focused his attention on some awkward (by my standards) pauses during stimulated recall, he did not see them as a problem. He acquiesced that there were “gaps,” but he did not give them much significance. In other segments, when the silences were shorter, he did not even notice them, saying that there was no silence. Moreover, in another example, when I asked what had happened to make him pause, he replied, “that was
only silence,” and indicated that the hesitation did not seem odd or uncomfortable for him at all, saying “no, in that case, no.”

In fact, during our mentoring sessions, his relatively high tolerance for silence often clashed with my low tolerance for silence, which led to tension and awkwardness. He acknowledged that he sometimes felt like I was pushing him to speak, and, occasionally, he even said, “yes, I'm thinking” to indicate to me “hold on, let me think!” In addition, I frequently tried to move on before he was finished with a topic, which resulted in him interrupting me to finish his point. Because of this, early into our mentoring relationship, he often talked over me, would not let me talk, did not seem to be listening to me, and, occasionally, sounded like he was lecturing me. The main reason for this tension and communication breakdown was the misinterpretation of within-turn pauses; this happened often on my part and occasionally on his. Ultimately, it was an issue of silence norms, and how long the interlocutors assumed a within-turn pause should have been, before they interpreted the conversation partner as finished with his or her comment, and then tried to take over the floor. Because Keivan's within-turn pauses stretched too long by my standards, I frequently interrupted him mid-idea. In turn, he ignored me and went on, and that created awkwardness, and made me feel as if he were not listening to me. This problem was exacerbated by Keivan's lack of acknowledgement. Most of our within-turn pauses were less than two seconds long, but if Keivan did not acknowledge my within-turn pauses, they became longer, making the conversation more awkward and tense. However, after I explained to him the importance of active listening, by October, he was acknowledging almost all of my comments and interrupting me by saying “excuse me.” Ironically, as his inappropriate (for English norms) silences decreased with time, the occurrence of suitable silences increased (especially as we got to know each other more and developed intersubjectivity), and the pauses that did occur between us became more comfortable.
From the very first session, I was able to establish that he had some ambivalent views on silence and its use. He said that he knew that “interruptions” were bad, and he used a lot of repetitions and fillers (such as “for example”48) to fill and avoid his silences. When we talked about silence explicitly, he said that he tried to reduce interruptions, but when I asked him if he considered silence a negative occurrence, he said no.

Keivan was also aware of the different functions of silence. He explained that, sometimes, silence meant agreement: When someone asked a question and there was no answer, it meant that the interlocutor agreed with him or her. Conversely, sometimes silence meant “I disagree;” it could also indicate misunderstanding, or that one did not wish to continue the conversation. All in all, Keivan believed that the meaning of silence depended on the situation, and this ambiguity made silence “special.”

When, at the end of October, I asked him directly about silence, unlike most of the other participants, he indicated some awareness of different cultural silence norms. He said that if the speaker was a foreigner, his/her silence usage might be indicative of his/her native language or culture. Hence, he noticed that Koreans, Filipinos, and the Japanese paused more than people from other cultures, because they had a different “culture in the conversation.” He added that, as an L2 speaker, when he spoke English, he learned to do quite a few things that were not part of his Iranian culture.

Listeners’ Evaluations of Keivan. Keivan was evaluated by three people: Homa, Bahman, and Clay. The first, NNS listener Homa, was an open and enthusiastic woman, and a medium to high-speed speaker,49 as evidenced by the fact that I spoke faster than she did only occasionally, and even that may have been due to her language proficiency, not her speaking style. Also, she did not always acknowledge my comments (again, this may have been due to

48 He admitted that his overuse of “for example,” and stretching of sounds like “sssss” were stalling tactics. He also filled my word search silences with “yes I know.”

49 When she took a call in her language, she spoke a little faster, but still similar to her speaking style in English.
the fact that she had trouble understanding me), but whenever I provided contextual information about a particular segment for her, she uttered “aha” or “mhm,” as needed. Overall, she displayed a medium to high tolerance for silence.

Despite their moderate compatibility in speaking styles and silence tolerance, Homa and Keivan's silence interpretation agreement score was only 32%. One of the reasons for her low score was that she projected a lot. This narrowed her perspective, and did not allow her to consider other possibilities, as she became overconfident about her responses (at one point she said “I am sure about this” and was wrong). On the questionnaire, Homa evaluated Keivan as ‘always’ a competent communicator, ‘usually’ trustworthy, honest, sincere, forthcoming, respectful, coherent, elaborative, and engaged in conversation, and as ‘a little bit’ tedious conversation partner. In addition, she assessed his English language proficiency as medium. Equally important, she mostly attributed his silences to either 1) uncertainty: “He, he’s not sure for how to express and what DO you want from him,” and “He doesn’t know which way he has to go and wh-, what he has to answer,” or 2) impression management: “He wants to show himself, he’s important one. Exactly!”

In fact, Homa was almost fixated on the impression management function of silence. She thought that Keivan's word search pause was due to the fact that “he wants to express he's a good man, why he's here, he has, he has to have good opportunity, better than right now he has.” Likewise, she interpreted a thinking pause as:

He doesn't want to show you, for example, Iran is a very the third world, you know. It's not very low. He wants to show himself, I am Iranian, you know, very proud of it. Iran is something that it's different, don't think about wrong things about Iran.

Related to considerations of image and face, she was also adamant that his gender (and its associated issues of power and gender-appropriate behaviour) played a role in his silence usage.
For example, as she was listening to a thinking pause, she said:

You know what? The men are like that [laughs], you know. Because he-, when they are talking with a lady, they don't like to show they have weak language. Whenever you want to help them, he wants to bring another word the same mean. He doesn't want to show you he has weakness [laughs].

Similarly, during another thinking pause she said:

This guy is from those group that wants to be first. First sentence, and you don't have any choice, you have to accept it [laugh]. You know? Strange man! He doesn't want to show you he, he has THAT much weakness. That's why sometimes he is stop talking. He is worried you found out more weakness. So the man is different, I told you. He find out-, he found out you know better than him. You have lots of experience so he cannot say everything that YOU accept.

In essence, Homa was convinced that he was silent because he was upset that I (a woman) had corrected him (a man), and he did not want to reveal his weakness to me.

Another interesting recurring reason Homa gave for Keivan's silences and hesitations, was that she believed that Keivan felt pressured because we were limited in time. She interpreted his phrasing pause as “he doesn’t have that time. He’s not sure, maybe you have, you give him the time to talk but he's-, he knows that relation is only for short-timed conversation.” Likewise, she described his thinking pause as:

He doesn't have enough time to talk about. He has good examples, but he knows he doesn't have time, and you didn't give him to talk...But he wants to have a regular conversation. To make comfortable and to gi-, to show you he KNOWS a lot, you know.

In sum, she believed that the time limitation on our conversations made him pause more because “he has lots of a stress.”
Furthermore, although Homa explained most of Keivan’s silence as either uncertainty, impression management, or stress, she also, on occasion, blamed some of his pauses on disengagement. For example, she interpreted his I-did-not-understand silence as boredom, saying, “Yeah. He's tired and he, he’s not interested to continue.”

In contrast to Homa, Bahman, a male Iranian listener, was very quiet, and quite closed off. In general, he was a slow-speaker, because he answered questions carefully and paused often. Since he talked slowly, and occasionally made long thinking pauses, I frequently interrupted him and tried to move on when he was not yet finished; sometimes (mostly when he struggled with English), I finished his sentences for him. Thus, overall, he showed a high tolerance for silence. However, his tolerance was not infinite. For instance, although Bahman did not acknowledge my comments, whenever there was a long thinking pause, he inserted an “umm” or “I don't know” in the middle of it, and then kept thinking in silence. Bahman also explicitly stated that he tried to avoid having big gaps in his speech: “I myself don't know how to continue the previous conversation due to the language, and I don't want to make i-, make a big gap here, so I may come up with something different.” Hence, he displayed a high enough silence tolerance for medium-sized pauses, but not “big gaps.” Furthermore, while tolerant towards silence, Bahman still appeared to subscribe to the idea that loud and expressive was good, whereas quiet was bad. For example, he noted Keivan's lowered voice, and even though I told him it was partly due to the fact that we were in a library, he still let it influence his perception, and as a result, interpreted a pause (that Keivan said meant nothing) as “a mix of looking for the right words, and maybe also a little, a little bit of disappointment or worriness.”

Bahman and Keivan (who were a much better match in speaking styles than Keivan and Homa) had silence interpretation agreement score of 57%, and on the Character Questionnaire, Bahman rated Keivan as ‘completely’ forthcoming, engaged and respectful, ‘usually’

Clay noticed this too: “he wasn't talking very loudly there.”
trustworthy, honest, talkative, ‘a little bit’ silent and ‘not at all’ elaborative. He also thought his language proficiency was at a beginner level.

When asked about his general impression of Keivan, Bahman said that Keivan was not very genuine, because he stayed on topic during the conversation, and did not discuss personal topics (interesting, that staying on topic was seen as a negative occurrence). He added that he found him to be “a little bit conservative a person.” Moreover, Bahman said that, in general, he would label Keivan as talkative. In fact, he was a competent communicator, but not in English, and Bahman sympathized with him because of that, saying “I would say he is, he's basically a talkative person, an expressive person.” So for him, it should be really hard to limit himself inside the walls of the language.” Accordingly, when asked if he thought Keivan's silences reflected his speaking style, Bahman said no, his perception was that:

He wouldn't speak that slow in Farsi. Because he speak quite fast whenever he was comfortable in-in-in speaking English. So those, THOSE extra pauses are not a part of Farsi language, probably. However, Farsi is a little bit slower than English. Slower than the spoken English here. That could be a part for pauses, but those big ones, are-, are just-, in my mind they're just related to thinking somewhere else.

On the one hand, Bahman’s knowledge of Farsi helped him accurately interpret Keivan's silences. For example, while listening to Keivan's word search pause, he immediately noted that a word like 'stupid' was a very confusing word for Iranians. He explained:

He just compared the meaning with what it could mean in Farsi, and then he thought, 'oh, it's too extreme, I don't mean that. So he tried to find something lighter, he didn't find it, so end-, ended up with hesitation.

---

51 Again, Bahman implied here that being expressive was a positive characteristic, while the quiet alternative was not as desirable.

52 He was describing how limited his vocabulary base was, even compared to a seven year old native speaker of English, and he trailed off saying, “I was thinking about that, that I’m so….“ The implication was that he believed that he was very incompetent in English.
However, sometimes his Persian background led Bahman astray: Keivan had said a particular pause was a result of him simply waiting for my response, whereas Bahman said, “I guess he was not sure whether-, he felt that he hasn't transferred what he-, what he wanted to say.” He added that, as a Persian, hearing those words, “it just reminds me an-, of an incomplete sentence.” Moreover, Bahman incorrectly emphasized translation as a significant reason for Keivan’s pauses, because he felt that whatever Keivan was trying to express was “beyond his [language] ability.” He elaborated:

My perception is, whenever he has the set up vocabulary and phrases to come up with, he is like someone who is standing like this, inclining forward, so he's just saying, saying, saying, and there is no pauses, because the words can accompany what he want to say.

However, in other instances:

When he has to think, he's like inclining backward, he has to pause, because as far as he comes vertical, then he has to think...For those parts, where he speaks more fluently, I guess, there are few mistakes. But on the other sides, whenever he's thinking, he makes more mistakes, in terms of grammatical, and yeah.

Lastly, Bahman attributed some of Keivan's silences to cultural differences and impression management. He said that, at times, he hesitated because he was careful to say something properly, so as not to offend me. He explained, “Basically, showing disagreement in our culture is less permitted than here.” He added:

We speak differently with the people of different ages. And one of our challenges here, is that we don't know that those small nuances, that changes the meaning when speaking with different levels of people.... It takes us too much time to try and think, and find the right words with that different nuance which fits this situation.
There was some support for this idea in the data, since Keivan's reluctance to contradict me was evident. The few times Keivan disagreed with me, he essentially whispered “I don't think so,” and when we talked openly about disagreement, he kept trying to downplay it, as if it was something deeply offensive to me. Incidentally, Bahman clarified that, in terms of Iranian culture, it would not have been rude for him to have disagreed with me, however, “it doesn't mean that he was not looking for the right words to disagree with you.”

In contrast to the NNS listeners, NS Clay acknowledged all my comments as I talked, saying “right” and “yeah” and “okay” and “yep,” but he also did not rush. He was a soft-spoken, kind man, who answered questions carefully, and did not ramble. In general, he was a medium-speed speaker with a medium tolerance for silence, as evidenced by the fact that I tried to move on a few times, but he was not yet finished; consequently, we came into the conversation at the same time and overlapped each.

Clay and Keivan had a silence interpretation agreement score of 56%, and he evaluated Keivan on the questionnaire as ‘completely’ coherent, ‘usually’ trustworthy, honest, sincere, respectful, silent, and engaged in conversation. He also rated him as ‘a little bit’ elaborative, talkative and forthcoming, ‘not at all’ tedious, and as a beginner in terms of English proficiency.

In a number of instances Clay made some perceptive interpretations. Likely because his and Keivan's speaking styles were similar, he took his side whenever I played him an ambiguous interruption, saying, “I think YOU were interrupting him. Cause he was on a roll.” By the same token, Clay correctly identified a pause that was cause by cultural differences in pragmatic norms. When Keivan paused for confirmation, Clay said, “To me, that’s a thing that you’d have to know the language to know that if, someone says ‘right?’ that it’s actually you’re trying to make sure they are still engaged in the conversation, and he obviously doesn’t know
At other times, however, Clay's and Keivan's silence perceptions did not match. Clay associated Keivan’s silences with negative emotions. For example, he misinterpreted silences that either had no significance, or were meant to confirm that I had understood a comment, as resulting from frustration and emotional distress. For example, when Keivan made an unattributed pause, Clay said that Keivan “definitely doesn’t sounds positive…. he’s not happy with something,” and that “he’s possibly frustrated with, you know, being able t-t-to get his message across in his job.” Then, he interpreted a phrasing pause as “See, in there I-I-I-I feel he’s trying to describe something, and he’s not finding the words to-, to get it across, the emotion. Right?” Furthermore, a pause that meant to convey acceptance of what I was saying, and a silence that was intended to be polite, was perceived as embarrassment:

I think he was embarrassed that he was wrong. And so the first thing is just to be quiet. 'Cause you don’t want to keep speaking when they’re wrong. Right? And you may be thinking about it, or reviewing it, but first and foremost, you’ve just been shown to be wrong, and so you’re going to be quiet and listen, as opposed to speak.

In addition, Clay blamed Keivan’s silences on his poor language skills. For example, he mistook a distracted silence for language struggle, and an I-just-realized-that-I-got-off-subject pause, or an unattributed silence, as a sign of language deficiency. In general, he often confused problems of what-to-say with problems of how-to-say something.

More dangerously, Clay also tended to interpret silence as a sign that Keivan was being calculating and manipulative. For instance, a simple word search pause was perceived as “Yeah, so it’s a negative, and he’s trying to find a politically correct way of describing it.” He clarified:

When it’s a negative, he struggles more with the words, than when it’s not. Cause I think he doesn’t want to use words that over-emphasize the negative.... So when it comes to
something where he wants to be careful about the words, there is lots of pauses, because he doesn’t want to over-emphasize the negative. There is a conscious effort to try and control his bitterness. Right? [chuckles].

Similarly, when Keivan had paused because he realized his mistake, Clay saw that as careful crafting of what to say, and evading the truth, with intended (positive) consequences for his image.

In fact, there was a recurring theme of Clay interpreting unintentional silences as intentional. For instance, when Keivan fell silent because he did not understand what I had said, Clay noted, “You’re talking away and not getting anything from him. Cuz, cause, once again, he’s-, he’s done something wrong, and his response when he’s done something wrong is to clam up.” Clay added that this kind of reaction was very common for Keivan, so he mused, “it’s funny, he doesn’t try and explain or justify, or anything, he’s just like yeah, I did something wrong, I’m frustrated. I’m clamming up.” Thereby, Clay misinterpreted an unintentional I-do-not-understand silence as Keivan intentionally clamming up because he did something wrong. In fact, similar to many other participants, Clay struggled with interpretation of intentionality in general. For example, he also saw an intentional word search as an indication of English proficiency weakness. Likewise, he interpreted an unintentional thinking pause as a conscious stalling tactic, saying, “It’s also a stalling tactic. Right? So by, by re-iterating it, he’s getting you to stop.”

To summarize, the NS listener mostly saw silences as a problem with language, or associated pauses with negative emotions. He also consistently mistook word search pauses for manipulation, evasion, not-wanting-to-admit-own-flaws, and being politically correct, thus, misinterpreting the unintentional for intentional.

Meanwhile, NNSs often explained the intentional as unintentional. For example, an
intentional pause to focus ideas was seen as word search or language proficiency weakness; intentional emphasis silence was blamed on time shortage or lack of language skills. Furthermore, for some reason, NNSs had difficulty interpreting emotions: Emotional sighs were deciphered either as a sign of nerves, or a stalling strategy; emotional silences were misconstrued for either a sign that he did not know what he was talking about, or that he was struggling with language. Similarly, when Keivan paused because he got off subject, a female Iranian listener thought that he was upset because he did not want to show weakness. Finally, pauses for confirmation tended to be misinterpreted as confusion, and unattributed silences were perceived as word search, holding something back pauses, did-not-want-to-talk-about-it silences, distraction, or thinking.

As a matter of fact, in contrast to the NS perspective, the NNSs tended to interpret silence as an indication of confusion and uncertainty more often than warranted. They also (incorrectly) believed that Keivan's uncertainty was over content (it was actually over grammar). Even more dangerously, a courteous checking of understanding silence was interpreted as a sign of distraction, or lack of interest.

On the other hand, NS and NNS listeners shared some similar interpretations. Both groups misinterpreted Keivan’s politeness silences for arrogance (such as refusing to show weakness in front of a woman, and being upset that he had been shown to be wrong). They also read negative emotions\(^{53}\) into simple distraction pauses or waiting-for-a-response silences, inferred ESL problems more often than was the case, and downplayed Keivan’s awareness of his errors by mistaking his just-realized-my-mistake silences for emphasis or word search. Moreover, both NS and NNSs perceived thinking pauses in a negative light: The NNSs saw them either as a sign of stress, language struggle, or an attempt to one-up me, whereas the NS

---

\(^{53}\) Incidentally, an interesting cultural difference emerged: In general, Iranians saw Keivan's silences as a sign of unhappiness with himself, whereas the NSs interpreted them as embarrassment.
interpreted them as a sign of confusion and stalling.

Lastly, in the Iranian case study gender had a powerful impact on the silence 
interpretation agreement scores. When evaluating Keivan (a male), the NNS woman had (by 
far) the lowest agreement score, whereas both (NNS and NS) men had much better agreement 
scores than she did.
Native Speakers’ Attitudes

As a group, the NS participants had a predominantly negative attitude towards silence. To begin with, they did not consider it as meaningful as participants from Korean or Iranian cultures did; instead, they frequently regarded silence as a void that needed to be filled. Accordingly, while some of the participants saw silence as an opportunity not only to convey agreement, but also confirm and check understanding, NSs needed a verbal confirmation (such as an “okay” or “mhm”) to feel that their message had been conveyed.

Second, many NS participants were quite open about their aversion to silence. For example, Steven was surprised to learn that Stepan and Stellar spoke slowly not just in English, but also in their first language, and admitted sheepishly: “I look at slow as not proficient, but that’s not necessarily the case.” He added, “When I hear pausing, I think bad language or proficiency, bad vocabulary, slow.” He explained that his bias was due to the fact that he was raised in Colorado, USA, where it was “quite isolating,” and he was not exposed to other cultures.

Third, the majority of NS participants made it very obvious that they considered non-stop talking and being chatty as a benchmark of fluency, and hence, used it as a universal compliment. For example, in an attempt to appear magnanimous towards a listener, Steven said, “I think in her own language she would be extremely talkative, and probably fairly smart and knowledgeable”; the implied connection between talkativeness and intelligence in that statement is evident. Accordingly, NS participants felt they were being kind to someone when they said that he or she was very talkative by nature (a positive characteristic), but unfortunately, s/he was simply shy or struggling with English.\footnote{Some Russians and Chinese speakers made this assumption, too.} All in all, taciturnity was not valued by most (if not all) NSs.

Keeping all this in mind, perhaps it was not surprising that such negative attitudes
towards silence resulted in frequent miscommunication. In fact, most NSs in this study, misinterpreted a variety of silences (serving a variety of functions) for language weakness. For instance, Becky's perception of Qing’s silent signal that she was moving on to a different topic, was that ESL speakers “can’t just successfully think in English, so they think, often think in their first language,” and accordingly, this reliance on translation caused the delay. Aside from being inaccurate, this explanation was also potentially offensive. While Becky's comment may be true for a number of L2 learners, many L2 speakers absolutely can think in English, and do it successfully. Becky also misinterpreted a coincidence (when we interrupted each other and started talking at same time), something that could have easily happened even between people of the same cultural or language background, as a sign of Boomie’s foreignness, English deficiency, and the backwardness of her native language. She surmised:

She’s probably not used to the language. I mean, in English, for example, we do have, like, a lot of long pauses, and, like, you know, dropping off and then picking up again.

And maybe that’s not common in her [language].

On the other hand, having a narrow mind about silence was not the only cause of misinterpretations. For starters, NSs used their experiences with L2 people in their lives as a strategy to interpret silence producers' silences. According to previous research, this should have been a good strategy because Dalton-Puffer, Kaltenboeck, and Smit (1997) found that more exposure to different cultures made people more accepting of non-native English varieties, and more likely to overlook accents. Hence, if exposure to other cultures made people's interpretations generally kinder, this could have been an intervening variable for silence interpretation in this study. However, this strategy did not always help with accuracy. For example, when Becky listened to Qing pause before a proverb, she remembered that when her boyfriend wanted to explain a Chinese proverb, he translated it from Cantonese first. Thus,
she (incorrectly) assumed that Qing was also translating.\textsuperscript{55}

Even more troubling, however, were the clumsy assumptions made by many of the NS participants. For instance, when talking about why Chengjiang paused when trying to answer if he planned to go back to China, Maris immediately assumed that he loved Canada, even though he did not say or hint at this in any way. She also assumed that when he was talking about having difficulty getting work, he was talking about China (he was actually talking about Canada). Another NS (Clay) made a similar assumption. When Keivan was talking about two immigration systems, a Canadian and an Australian one, and he paused as was saying that the Australian system was completely different from the Canadian one, Clay immediately assumed that “there’s something unsavoury about it” and that Keivan paused because “do you really wanna, like, spell that out, or do you want to just sort of choose words that don’t get into it.” He explained, “to me it sounded more like a bit of an evasion of saying ‘didn’t like it, but don’t really want to tell you why.’” In reality, Keivan fell silent because he realized that he had made a language error. However, Clay’s unconscious assumption, that if things were done differently from the way things were done in Canada, it meant that they were automatically unsavoury, was troubling, especially since in reality, Keivan loved the Australian system, and said the Canadian system needed work.

In addition, there were many instances in which NS participants showed a clear lack of awareness of intercultural differences, by projecting their own attitudes onto the silence producers. For example, Maris projected her very North American attitude towards high school onto Chengjiang. When he paused before saying that his high school in Toronto was “really bad,” she said:

You know, thinking about high school, maybe he has his own memories, maybe he was

\textsuperscript{55} In this case, part of the problem was that her bilingual boyfriend was born in Canada. Hence, one cannot compare him to Qing, who immigrated from another country at the age of 34.
very bad? Or he doesn’t want to, maybe there is a lot of pride there, and he doesn’t want to say that his high school was very bad either, the population or the school itself, you know?

Similarly, she judged a related silence as “It was a shame thing, he didn’t want to say ‘my high school sucked or whatever.’” The idea of having pride in one’s high school, and having school spirit, is a very North American phenomenon, and it was not even remotely close to what Chengjiang was telling me. However, it did reflect Maris’ attitude towards high school, and how she did not modulate her perspective when interpreting actions of an immigrant. Instead, she assumed that everyone else thought the same way she did, indicating a lack of awareness of intercultural differences.

It was not just silence, towards which NSs in this study had a negative attitude. They displayed a generally antagonistic attitude towards anything foreign or different. In fact, largely inadvertently, NSs made a number of cringe-worthy comments about ESL speakers, foreign languages, and other cultures. For example, Becky showed intolerance for other languages and ways of speaking when she said that whenever her boyfriend forgot to code-switch and started talking Cantonese to her, she thought: “What’s wrong with you?!... It just sounds like he made a bunch or random hissing sounds. 'I don’t know what you told me, but okay' [laughing].” She added that Cantonese people were “very snappy with each other” and “they, kind of like, yell at each other. It’s not like English. It’s really bizarre.” Although she was talking about people she cared about, and clearly, did not intend to be offensive, the unconscious disdain for foreign languages, and differences in articulation, was evident. Towards the end of our session she remarked, “I’m guessing people who have English as first language don’t have a very good first impression of people who don’t speak English [Chuckled].” Again, she meant no harm, but it was quite disheartening that not only did she assume that it was a given, but she also laughed
about this.

It must be noted that Becky\textsuperscript{56} was not the only one making cringe-worthy comments: NSs Brian and Steven made very stereotypical attributions of Stellar’s laugh. In reality, she laughed because she was uncomfortable. However, Steven thought she laughed due to her excitement and joy upon realizing how great English language was (compared to Korean), whereas Brian thought she laughed because, as a Korean woman, she felt liberated when someone asked her to express her opinion for the first time.

Nonetheless, NS participants did not produce solely cultural blunders and cringe-worthy comments. At times they were very aware and perceptive. For example, Maris\textsuperscript{57} very astutely pointed out that “speaking Mandarin before English might also affect things.” She elaborated, “I don't want to say there is a hierarchy, but I think people, kind of, have a bit of a bias against certain languages,” while other languages are favoured. She said that if a person came up to an Anglophone (presumably white) and spoke with a very thick mainland Chinese accent, “I think they would get a far different reaction than someone who spoke with a really strong German one. And it’s sad, but I do think it’s true.” There is empirical evidence to support this idea. Reiko’s (2004) literature review showed that not all non-native accents were rated equally, and some were more downgraded than others. She blamed this phenomenon on people's reliance on stereotypes about various communities. Likewise, Mulac, Hanley, and Prigge’s (1974, p. 420) factor analysis showed that the more “foreign-accented” a speaker was, the more devalued s/he was, with variables like gender, age, or occupation of listeners not intervening with the result.

\textsuperscript{56} Since she has been a friend of mine for a long time, maybe she, unlike other participants felt very comfortable with me and thus, was honest and allowed herself to verbalize what others simply kept to themselves. In fact, Mann (2012) believes that a previous relationship with a participant involves a lot of shared understanding and trust, which removes a need for the facework that we engage in when talking to strangers.

\textsuperscript{57} Maris was another participant with whom I had a previous relationship.
Researcher’s Silence Use

Because I (the researcher) was also a participant in this study, an analysis of my own behaviour can be useful. Listening back to the audio recordings of the mentoring sessions and interviews, it became evident that I could be quite talkative, especially when nervous or excited. However, even taking nervousness into consideration, in the collected data, I demonstrated a low tolerance for (even my own) silence because, as much as I could, I tried to fill in any conversational gaps or pauses. For example, when I had thinking hesitations, I filled them with talk, by externalizing my thoughts to do so. I also read and wrote aloud, and took every opportunity to fill silences with fillers. As a matter of fact, I frequently used fillers to communicate something. For example, an “uummmmm” was used to indicate that I was thinking, simultaneously avoiding a thinking silence. In one context “hmmm” meant “it's not working,” whereas in another, “hmmm” conveyed that I found the interlocutor’s comment interesting.

Meanwhile, there were times when I still externalized segment-search numbers58 even though there was enough noise that there would be no silence either way. Moreover, I tried to talk through most segment set-up pauses, and with time, Keivan noticed that this was meaningless filler talk, because he started trying to initiate new topics during these instances. It seemed that he recognized my filler speech for what it was, and used it as a green light to introduce a new topic. Ironically, my unconscious need to eliminate silence sometimes backfired, and my actions ended up creating more pauses, because I could not cognitively handle doing two tasks at the same time. Thus, as I thought aloud, or wrote out loud, or as I was setting up a segment and trying to talk at the same time, this attempt at multitasking only

58 During delayed stimulated recall and the Listen and Reflect task, I needed time to find a particular segment of the audio, which I wanted to play for the participant. The location of this segment had been written down in my notes as numbers ahead of time (e.g., 22:15a meant that the segment was on the 22nd minute and 15th second of the A file created on that particular day).
created more silences.

Not only did I fill my own pauses as much as I could, but I also filled others’ silences. For example, when I was communicating with someone who had a slower speaking style than I, I used acknowledgement to fill his or her silences. In fact, I acknowledged almost every comment my interlocutors made, even when there was no communicative or pragmatic necessity to do so (such as when I was making notes). Sometimes, when I could not tolerate the length of Keivan’s thinking pauses, to avoid silence, I tried to move on while he was still thinking. Likewise, I asked Boomie questions, and even though I tried to give her some time to process what I had said, when she did not respond (generally, because she was thinking about the answer), and the pause lasted too long by my standards, I cut her off and corrected her myself. Finally, not only did I interrupt silences, but, as was the case with Boomie, I even interrupted her when she used fillers like “ummmm.”

My behaviour was not unforeseen; Sharpley (1997) said that trainee counsellors were often afraid of silence, because they saw it as awkward, especially when waiting for a client’s reply. As a result, they had a tendency “to ‘fill’ silence with words,” thus interfering with client’s ability “to mull over issues raised by the counselling interaction” (Sharpley, 1997, p. 238). Not surprisingly, this behaviour could be quite counterproductive, because many clients valued “an opportunity to think, free of counsellor’s talking” (p. 238), especially when they were “at the ‘work’ and the ‘decision’ stages of the interview” (Sharpley, 1997, p. 243). Because a counselling session and a mentoring session have a great deal in common, all these findings are easily transferable to the mentoring context as well.

What were the causes of my silences? Most of the time, my silences had a mechanical or feeling rattled cause, and a cognitive or communicative function (such as word search or

---

59 This designation could be applied to me because, while I have been a tutor in the past, this was my first time being a mentor.
phrasing silences). I also frequently paused because I did not understand what had been said, or fell silent for emphasis. In addition, when I had to do something quickly (because we were in a rush), I did it in complete silence, showing that most of my aforementioned filler talk was not a cognitive requirement to complete a task, but instead, it was an interactive and pragmatic choice.

How did culture influence my silence usage? Even though English was not my first language (my native language is Russian, but my dominant language is English), I have been socialized into the Canadian silence norms since the age of 10. This is the reason why, at times, my interpretations matched with those of the NS participants, such as when I misinterpreted Qing's thinking-of-an-example silence for a translation pause, or when Stepan's long pauses made me feel tense. Nonetheless, there were also moments when I was reminded that I was not a native speaker of English after all, not only in the way that I interpreted many silences, but also when, while talking about Boomie's problems with pronunciation, Sofia said that Boomie might have been having a hard time understanding me because “your accent is strong too.”
Chapter Six: Discussion

Next, I aspire to articulate what all of the aforementioned findings mean, as I attempt to examine how and why the previously enumerated silence misinterpretations occurred. I begin Chapter Six by showing how the study’s key findings in Chapters Four and Five are supported (or not) by the existing literature. Then, I discuss this study's emergent themes: the lack of support NNS participants exhibited towards each other; an intriguing phenomenon where a perception of an individual as having high language proficiency results in more negative attributions of his or her silences; a possible moderating variable that seems to underlie intercultural silence norms (negative attitudes towards using fillers); and finally, the unfortunate outcome of all this: the silencing of L2 speakers.

Linking Findings to the Literature

Before proceeding to the main themes that emerged from the data, it is important to highlight if, and how, the findings in Chapters Four and Five were supported by the existing literature.

Participants' Perceptions of Silence's Causes and Functions. In Chapter Four, this study’s participants echoed many of the silence functions and explanations described in the literature.

On the whole, there were a few examples of silence serving prosodic function, such as when Keivan talked about silence resulting from pronunciation problems, or when Maria said that pauses played an important role in punctuation and, thus, in making sense of speech units (Jaworski, 1993). In contrast, a large variety of silences were attributed cognitive function, with participants referencing discourse-organizational and planning silences (Zuo, 2002; Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985), remembering silences (Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985), and hesitations due to difficulties in verbalizing something one already had in mind (Zuo, 2002; Nakamura,
In addition, mirroring existing literature, word search, grammar search, and translation pauses were mentioned particularly often within this data set, whereas analyzing and thinking silences were given more emphasis by the participants, than by the researchers.

A number of silences were also assigned stylistic function by one of the mentees. Keivan mentioned that some silences served as an emphasis device (Zuo, 2002; Nakamura, 2004), or were used in rhetorical questions, and their main purpose was to impress an audience (Jaworski, 1993). However, mostly, he talked about stylistic silences utilized by speechmakers, which intended to make the speaker easier to understand by showing the audience where the explanation was, and by allowing time for the listener to catch-up.

As in the literature, social, interactive and communicative pauses were another major silence function category in the data. Silences were explained as turn-maintaining devices that prevented the listener from taking over a turn. For example, Carol thought that Svetlana paused “just to take up time or not to be interrupted,” thus marking a turn as her own, signalling that she was not done speaking yet (Zuo, 2002). Furthermore, many of the silences were attributed emotional function, and not just for managing emotional states like surprise and confusion, as specified by Tryggvason (2006); these silence also served as indicators that the speaker was burdened by negative emotions and memories, and conveyed negative feelings about a subject, demonstrating that he or she did not want to discuss this matter further. Finally, many silences were interpreted as a tool to communicate uncertainty, a signal that a clarification needed to be made, and also as an opportunity to do so. In other words, as Nakamura (2004) stated, they were treated as both a form of feedback, and a device to make adjustments and accommodate the interlocutor.

However, in addition to these commonly cited functions, many silences were also perceived to communicate agreement or disagreement, show that the speaker was expressing an
opinion, or simply imply to the interlocutor that it was time to wrap-things-up.

The silences used for politeness followed the “don't do a face-threatening act (FTA)” super-strategy denoted by Jaworski (1997, p. 5), when disagreement was implied but not verbalized. Also, as Cruz (2008) pointed out, politeness silences were exercised in those cases when the speaker felt that what he or she intended to say could generate disagreement; in such cases, a pause was used to imply something negative without having to say it directly. Svetlana was often interpreted to do this, and Keivan frequently did this, to avoid having to openly disagree with me. Other participants (including Boomie and Keivan), for example, said that they were silent because they did not want to distract me, or did not want to interrupt my thinking, showing consideration and deference for their interlocutor (Cruz, 2008).

Furthermore, some pauses were believed to have ideological function, such as when Homa thought that Keivan's silence indicated that he wanted to create a power shift in our interaction, in order to perpetuate gender roles and maintain his status as a male (Jaworski, 1997). Likewise, Keivan said that he paused to show his subordination to me, while a topic-ending pause was used by Boomie to assert power (Scollon, 1985; Nakane, 2007).

Overall, while these findings corroborated many of the functions attributed to silence by researchers, because this study put the participants’ perspectives to the forefront, they drew attention to some functions that may not have been attended to as much. These scarcely mentioned in the literature, yet oftentimes brought up by participants, silence categories included falling silent because the speaker felt rattled, unattributable silences, and silences resulting from dishonesty. Finally, data indicated that participants believed that a particular silence could have more than one cause, and serve more than one function, and accordingly, belong to more than one functional category.

**Features of Silence.** First, in accordance with Saville-Troike’s (1985) postulation that
silence functions at a lower conscious level than speech, the evident lack of silence awareness among all participants (across all cultures) has been corroborated by other research. For example, in his study, Plank (1994) found a profound lack of silence awareness among teachers and students. In fact, approximately 50% of teachers had no notion what silence meant; thus, many educators were walking into their classrooms without any knowledge of their students’ important cultural and psychological characteristics. Plank wondered, if many professions require that their members be sensitized in cultural differences prior to working with another culture, why not teachers? By the same token, Navajo children did not perceive silence as having an impact on classroom proceedings, or social interactions in general.

Second, once they had an opportunity to think about it, the context-dependent nature of silence was acknowledged by participants from every cultural group: Jing, Yuyuan, Lisa, Maria, Alexei, Sofia, Rafael, Boomie, Homa, and Keivan all said that how people interpreted silence depended on the situation or context. The almost universal belief (although not unanimous: Stellar, for example, saw silence more as feature of personality rather than situational circumstances) that interpretations of silence were context-specific was not an unexpected finding, because previous research demonstrated that silence was more context-embedded than speech, and, thus, its interpretation depended more on culture and the situation (Saville-Troike, 1985).

Inter/Intracultural (Mis)Communication. Much of the findings in Chapter Five are supported by other empirical studies on intercultural communication. Namely, the five inter/intracultural comparison case studies reinforced past research that cultural norms affect interpretations of silence in interaction (Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985), that silence can mean different things across cultures (Saville-Troike, 1985; Tryggvason, 2006), and that silence usage

---

60 To be fair, the burden of blame should not fall solely on the teachers' shoulders. Many teachers indicated a lack of administrative awareness and support in this matter (Plank, 1994).
can lead to miscommunication and pragmatic failure (Boxer, 2002).

Meanwhile, Jamie’s silence usage, and her justifications why she used it, were a great example of pragmatic transfer. She motivated her silence by saying, “I don’t want to hurt people’s feelings while they are talking, so I rather choose not to hurt people, but I was a very attentive listener when I was in Korea. Rather than speaking something, I was a listener.” Accordingly, she admitted that she used Korean communicative behaviors and strategies (such as avoiding questions and confirmation checks, because it was regarded as rude) when speaking English. She added that she always held herself back when speaking, “So what I do is just nodding, and say ‘it’s right’, say ‘it’s cool’, say ‘you’re right’ and stuff like that. That’s how I learned, or that I am accustomed to.”

Another illustration of pragmatic transfer was Maria's observation that if one talked quickly in one's own language, s/he talked quickly in English too. She said that her husband was “a really slow-talker,” even in Russian. Sometimes he started saying something, and she interjected two words before he finished. However, she pointed out, “you can’t say his English is bad, he’s just talking slow. But his English is good. Because same way he talks in Russian.” Overall, both of these examples provided support for the idea that “speakers have a strong inclination to transfer their pause profile from the first language to the second language performance” (Raupach, 1980, p. 270), and the way these silences were interpreted by the listener participants showed that this phenomenon plays a major part in intercultural miscommunication (Golato, 2003).

Furthermore, my data corroborated research from another qualitative and in-depth analysis of intercultural silence interpretation. Plank (1994) investigated teachers' interpretations of their silent Navajo students, and she found that many of them made much of the same silence attributions and interpretations as the listeners in the present study did. For
instance, some teachers interpreted silence as a sign of low self-concept, shyness and introversion, just as Yuyuan, Maria, Sofia, and Maris did. In fact, Sofia thought it was “evident,” that because I talked loudly and Boomie spoke quietly, it was a sign of low confidence on Boomie’s part. Similarly, despite the fact that I explained that Keivan and I were meeting in a library, and this, at least partially, accounted for his lowered voice, Bahman and Clay both saw it as sign of insecurity, disappointment, and worry.

This is a common misconception. In fact, parallel to his study, Plank (1994) conducted experiment in which teachers selected what they saw as low-confidence children by picking quiet, shy, timid and bashful children who usually did not talk in class. However, when their self-concepts were tested, these children actually demonstrated high self-confidence. Clearly, Navajo children's self-concepts should not be assessed using silence or soft-spoken behaviour as a benchmark, and my study reinforced that the same was true for other cultural groups as well.

Another explanation that teachers in Plank's (1994) study gave for silence was that it was a feature of L2 speech: Silence was an indication of problems with language, translating, frustration, and fear that they did not have sufficient communication skills. In other words, speaking in a second language slowed the communication process down (Plank, 1994). In turn, all of the same explanations were provided by most of the participants (both NSs and NNSs) in the present study as well.

**Negative Interpretations of Silence.** The current study's conclusions on harshly-judged silences were corroborated by Plank's (1994) findings that some teachers provided very harsh judgments of the silent students. They perceived silence as evidence that a student was ungrateful, or that students “want to be entertained” (Plank, 1994, p. 5), and many of them believed that silence “greatly stymies the educational process,” joking, that being confronted by
a silent class, “it’s like being on stage and dying” (p. 6). Still, others believed that students’ silence meant that Navajo children did not value education as highly as non-Navajo children did, that they were lazy (and silence was a ploy to appear dumb so they would not have to expend a lot of energy), lacked respect, lacked desire for an education, were biased against Anglo teachers, or they simply did not care about classroom performance. Remarkably, most of these comments were cited by this study’s participants (such as Colombian Sofia, Russian Maria, and NS Maris) as well. Accordingly, in support of Huth and Taleghani-Nikazm’s (2006) conclusion that, although miscommunication arising from difficulty with vocabulary or grammar could be clearly identified as such, pragmatic errors were more likely to be attributed to the speaker's personality than to the speaker’s pragmatic competence in English, the findings from both Plank’s (1994) and the current study reinforced that harsh character judgments in response to silence were a reality, and that something needed to be done to try and reduce them.

Other unfavorable judgments of silence in this study also found support in existing literature. Remember when Qing’s reaction to silence was “I want to know what is you’re hiding”? Or when NS Carol misinterpreted a pause in which Jamie simply finished her point as a sign that she was hiding her initial offensive and prejudiced thoughts? Or, likewise, when Stepan paused because he was thinking, both Maris and Maria thought he was refusing to admit to having a weakness, hiding something, and not being sincere? All these interpretations were in accordance with previous research that showed that silence could create doubt in the hearer, and that silences were often interpreted as pauses for concealment (Walker, 1985).

Another common pattern in the data was that Stepan, a man who made longer pauses than acceptable by English-language norms, was judged as incoherent by NS listeners. Steven said that his first impression of Stepan was that “he’s totally confused” and “incoherent,” and

---

61 Such negative NS attitudes towards silence were also echoed by the NS participants in the current study (see the Native Speakers’ Attitudes section) as well.
whenever Stepan grew silent so he could think, Maris assumed he did not understand what I had asked him, saying, “He might have been completely lost by your question.” This, again, echoed past research on silence, since Scollon and Scollon (1981) found that people from cultures that allow slightly longer pauses between sentences were often judged as incoherent, and as not making any sense or having anything important to say. This was clearly the case with Carol’s assessment of Jamie’s silence, when she said, “it didn’t sound like she had anything important that she wanted to get out.”

Furthermore, there was also support for Tryggvason’s (2006) finding that, while people of other nations may interpret silence as a device to show respect for the person having the floor, others can see them as tedious partners in conversation. For example, Sofia explained Boomie’s silences (which were intended to be polite and considerate of the interlocutor) as lack of commitment, and rated Boomie as a ‘completely’ tedious partner in conversation, while Becky interpreted the aforementioned silences as lack of understanding, and rated her as a ‘usually’ tedious conversation partner. Moreover, both NNS and NS participants misinterpreted Keivan’s politeness silences for arrogance, refusing to show weakness in front of a woman, and being upset that he had been shown to be wrong; meanwhile the soft-spoken Jamie (who used silence out of courtesy and concern for interlocutor’s feelings) and Stellar (who was concerned with interlocutor’s face), were consistently rated by NS listeners as tedious. It is no wonder that such politeness silences are referred to in literature as “inappropriate politeness” (Jenkins, 2000)!

Why did listeners resort to such negative judgments? First, Svetlana’s reaction to her own pauses, as well as Maris’, Brian’s, and others’ reactions to others’ silences showed the deeply ingrained attitude that silence was something aversive or defective, and that it, somehow, indicated failure (Scollon, 1985; Jaworski, 1993; Jenkins, 2000; Riazantseva, 2001).
Second, Jenkins (2000) believes that, in intercultural communication, inferences about speaker's motivation are influenced by the participants' culturally-mandated language use and background knowledge. Hence, the less two speakers share or have in common, the higher the possibility for miscommunication (Jenkins, 2000).

Third, within the data, the progression of Kivik’s (1998) stereotype formation sequence was clearly evident: Maris, the best example of this, went from seeing Stepan as a faulty inter-actant (someone who was initially “reserved” and needed “some liquid courage” to get talking) to seeing him as a faulty person (by accusing him of being “creepy,” “suspicious,” and “sketchy”). A follow-up questionnaire on attitudes towards other cultures could be used to check if this eventually evolved into a stereotype about Russians in general.

Expanding existing knowledge. Nakane’s (2007) study on communicative problems faced by Japanese ESL students found that underelaboration was frequently judged negatively by NSs. Similarly, in the present study, Maris said that Stepan did not seem “forthcoming” or “very honest” since he did not elaborate his answers to my questions. Then, as already mentioned, she proceeded to classify him as “creepy” and “sketchy.” What is more, it was not just native-speakers who used elaboration as an honesty indicator: Alla said she liked that Svetlana elaborated her problems, because that made her seem more honest. Hence, the misinterpretation of underelaboration apparently extends to other cultures as well.

Moreover, this study expanded on Nakane’s (2007) finding that taciturnity is valued and promoted in Japanese culture, by showing that this can be true for Koreans as well. Nakane (2007) found that Japanese interviewees gave minimal responses in English oral proficiency interviews, particularly to personal questions, and my data suggested that the same may be true for Korean participants.

Likewise, previous research with NSs showed that, for NS students, silence represented
a lack of initiative, agency, desire to improve one's English, and was often inaccurately seen as a lack of commitment or a negative attitude towards studies (Duff, 2002). My findings indicated that this may be true for Colombians as well, as illustrated by Sofia's reaction to Boomie's silences, when she believed that Boomie paused frequently because she did not care and did not want to try. More research is needed to establish if this phenomenon can be generalized beyond the existing sample of participants.

**Cultural Differences.** In this study's findings there was some support for previously investigated intercultural differences between the (supposedly) reserved and silent Eastern cultures and talkative and expressive Western cultures: in particular, variations in culturally-mandated expectations about how long someone should speak and when one can relinquish his or her turn (Scollon & Scollon, 1981). Moreover, while Garrot (1995) cautioned against making broad generalizations about cultures, some inter-group differences were apparent. For instance, Tae-Hwan made a comment that, in contrast to their Western counterparts, Koreans were hesitant to talk about themselves and “overshare” in class discussions. In fact, both he and Jamie said that, for Koreans, bothering someone by taking a longer turn was considered very bad manners. This is consistent with existing research that shows that, in contrast to North American culture, in many Asian cultures people believe that talk is desirable only when there is something to be communicated (Saville-Troike, 1985).

Furthermore, intercultural differences between the East and the West came to the forefront when Chinese participant YuYuan, who described herself as talkative and extroverted, appeared reserved, soft-spoken, and quiet, by Western standards. This was evidenced by her silent demeanour, the fact that, during our interaction, I was always the one initiating small talk or conversation, and because I occasionally interrupted her when I felt she took too long to answer. As illustrated by YuYuan's example, while others see such behaviour as shyness (Cruz,
taciturn individuals do not see themselves as shy or introverted (Plank, 1994).

Meanwhile, in accordance with past research showing that Western cultures regard talk as desirable, and utilize it for referential, as well as social or affective purposes (Sifianou, 1997), the majority of NS participants made it very apparent that they considered non-stop talking and being chatty as a benchmark of fluency. Hence, talkativeness was seen as a universal compliment. Likewise, reinforcing finding that people go into conversation with different expectations because they are socialized into different social assumptions, and different cultural knowledge (Huth & Taleghani-Nikazm, 2006), NS Maris's misinterpretation of Chengjiang's hesitations when he talked about his high school was rooted in her culturally-influenced presumption that he was ashamed to say anything negative about his school, since one is supposed to have school spirit and feel pride in one's high school.

In addition, Colombian Boomie voiced the Latino attitudes towards silence: She said, “too much silence is no good,” and that when people interacted with others, they had to “share” with them; if it was too quiet, someone had to do something, “even a stupid thing,” because silence was “uncomfortable.” Accordingly, the data from this study demonstrated that Colombians had the same emphasis on volubility and use of phatic utterances as detailed by Cruz (2008) in reference to Western society.

These intercultural differences, and mismatches in silence norms, frequently led to miscommunication, as illustrated by the findings in Chapter Five and those of Tyler (1995), who showed that Korean teaching assistants' cultural norms, which required them to come off as modest while trying to preserve NSs' face, led to miscommunication: NS undergraduates saw them as too tentative, vague, and lacking authority, and both sides saw each other as uncooperative. Other research found that Chinese ESL speakers may have had attitudes and beliefs about communication that conflicted with American norms and rules of conduct
(Jenkins, 2000). In particular, Mandarin used very few acknowledgement tokens, which NSs found “somewhat unnerving, leaving them wondering what the listener is thinking” (Jenkins, 2000, p. 383). While, in this study, I did not find this phenomenon to be as pronounced with the Chinese participants, Chapter Five described many such occurrences involving Russian and Korean ESL speakers.

Finally, the relative nature of what was considered “too long” was also quite evident in my findings. Alexei talked about conversational pausing that “might become irritating” if it was “too long,” while not realizing that the person he was evaluating as “normal” was actually considered “too long” by all other listeners. Thus, what counted as “long” for him was much longer than what counted as “long” for other participants, including listeners from the same cultural background as he. This begs a question: Is tolerance for silence a matter of personality or cultural baggage? Tryggvason (2006) demonstrated that who was labeled talkative or taciturn depended a person’s culture. In contrast, a NS participant, Becky, articulated the other side of this debate when she conceptualized tolerance for long pauses not as a cultural phenomenon, but more as an individual trait, saying:

I guess some people are just uncomfortable with silence, not being able to work on their own… you know, it’s a little strange working next to somebody and not talking, right?

Especially for some people. I don’t know, don’t care, I do it all the time.

Discernibly, she put the emphasis on individual differences, not cultural norms. My findings also showed that this relativity of what counts as “too long” can exist among participants of the same culture: Maria and Alexei had very different concepts of “too long” and, not only were they from the same cultural background (Russian), but they were also a married couple who lived together for thirty years. Thus, it appears that Sifianou’s (1997) idea, that what is “idle chatter” to one person is actually “phatic communion” for another, is true not only across
cultures, but also across individuals of the same culture. Therefore, the idea that there is an
unwritten agreement in different cultures about acceptable duration of pauses between turns
(Tryggvason, 2006; Cutting, 2008) was partially supported in this study, yet qualified to show
there is likely much more intra-cultural variation than previously assumed.

**Individual Differences.** This leads me to one of the present study's most salient
findings, namely, that when it come to silence usage and interpretation, the situation is not as
simple as NS versus NNS. The data demonstrated that an array of individual differences, such
as gender and speaking style variations, at times, over-rode what culture dictated. Thus, while
culture had a powerful impact on participants’ use of silence, and its influence could never be
overlooked, so much also depended on personality characteristics, speaking style and individual
silence tolerance.

Again, support for this idea can be found in other research. Many speech-production
researchers have indicated that there are large individual differences in fluency (a large
component of which involves silence use, or lack thereof) within one language group
(Riazantseva, 2001). Moreover, some types of pauses, which are less affected by context and
are more trait-like, tend to reflect personal conversational style (Scollon, 1985). Other
researchers found that introverts tended to use more and longer silences, and talked slower, than
extroverts (Crown & Feldstein, 1985). In fact, silences in English conversations appear to have
more stable relationship to personality differences than do vocalizations (Tannen & Savile-
Trobeke, 1985).

Furthermore, Matarazzo et al. (1962b, p. 424) found that while both types (quickness
and latency) of silence distributions were J-shaped, the quickness distribution was “step-like”
and “smooth,” whereas the latency distribution was not as “smooth.” In fact, the quickness
distribution “tends toward 'multimodality' with peaks at about two seconds, four seconds, seven
seconds, and possibly even other points” (Matarazzo et al., 1962b, p. 424). Is it possible that this corresponds with slow/medium/fast speaking styles? Moreover, Matarazzo et al. (1962b) hypothesized that interviewees with low scores on the quickness dimension (which refers to the tendency to speak again when the interlocutor did not respond to one's last remark), and those individuals who waited longer, might have had different psychological profiles. In fact, Matarazzo et al. (1962, p. 424) indicated that age and anxiety were important individual difference factors: “Compared to older people, younger participants showed fewer initiative responses and waited longer before responding during interviewer’s planned silence period.”

Likewise, participants with higher Taylor Anxiety Scores responded more quickly (and, hence, had shorter quickness-silence scores) than participants with lower anxiety scores. Lastly, the role of individual differences was further highlighted by another Matarazzo et al., (1961) study, which indicated that silence behaviour was noticeably different in various psychiatric groups, and the same was likely true for different occupational groups of non-clinical participants.

**Intersubjectivity.** In addition to extending evidence of phenomena to other population and showing that impact of individual differences could be just as strong as the pull of culture, another potentially controversial finding of the current study was that increased intersubjectivity could lead to more tolerance for silence. This phenomenon was observed with the mentees, when, with time, instances of silence between us increased and became more comfortable, revealing increased intimacy and shared knowledge (Jaworski, 1993). Oh the one hand, this finding is consistent with Jaworski and Coupland’s (1999) description of the skew of phatic talk on the social distance continuum. However, it also contradicts Plank's (1994) data, which showed that educators working with Navajo students often felt that the longer they were at the school the more verbal the students became. However, that discovery may have been an oddity.

---

62 This finding was contested by Plank (1994), who found that teachers reported that older students hold off speaking longer.
that stemmed from the special features of a particular cultural group under study (the Navajo Indians); research demonstrated that Navajos adopted a silent manner when faced with uncertainty and ambiguity, so passage of time and increased familiarity may have reduced social ambiguity and uncertainty, and, accordingly, decreased silence (Plank, 1994).

**With compatriots like these, who needs enemies!**

I went into this study with an open mind regarding any trends that I would find, but also an expectation (based on the existing literature, previous studies, and my knowledge of social psychology) that, in general, the NS participants would judge L2 silence producers harshly, whereas NNS participants may be more lenient and understanding. After all, in Jenkins’ (2000) study, NNSs reported that they learned how to act appropriately in a North American academic context by asking other NNSs (instead of NSs), and that they “greatly relied on their compatriots for assistance and support” (Jenkins, 2000, p. 488). The decision to turn to NNSs for support was made with good reason: The findings of the same study (which explored faculty attitudes towards foreign teaching assistants) revealed that a NNS faculty member was the only one to disagree with his NS colleagues’ harsh negative judgments of the international ESL students (Jenkins, 2000). However, while these findings were reinforced by some examples in my data, in many other cases, it seemed as though the NNS participants were actually much harsher on the L2 silence producers than the NSs were, to a point that it made me wonder: With compatriots like these, who needs enemies!

The first example that illustrated this phenomenon involved listener participants’ evaluations of Stellar's language proficiency. The NSs acknowledged her language difficulties, saying that there was “definitely a language barrier,” and that “her English isn’t fantastic.” However, Brian praised her lack of accent and both NSs were tactful and gentle in their assessments. The Korean listener, however, while sympathetic to Stellar throughout most of the
Listen and Reflect session, was appalled (and almost offended) that Stellar's English was “so bad,” and seemed incredulous when she found out that Stellar came to Toronto over a year ago and her English was still so poor. Was she worried that Stellar's poor English would somehow reflect on her, and, thus, she exaggerated her reaction to distance herself from Stellar? This is a possible explanation that requires further study.

Regardless, this was a minor case of NNS participants turning on each other, compared to what happened in the Russian and Colombian case studies. While no one, except Alexei, was particularly kind to Stepan, Maria was one of his harshest critics. When Stepan did not answer my question regarding why he came to Canada right away, Maria described him as calculating, insincere, and impulsive. Later on in the session, she called him incoherent, uneducated and simple: “He doesn’t sound like he’s an intelligent, he’s or, like, really educated, or something. Like, you know, like, very simple.” She went on to say: “He’s not like err good con-con-con- conversation partner. So you have to just, like, you know, playing into one gate.” She also implied that he was refusing to admit to having a weakness, and hiding his limitations. In fact, throughout the session she acted bewildered that he was pausing so much, and her harsh comments were likely an attempt to separate herself from him, and show that, even though she was also Russian, she was not like him.

Nonetheless, the worst case of NNS participants being very critical of each other involved Colombians, where the female listener Sofia was, by far, Boomie's harshest critic, especially when compared to the NS Becky's evaluation of her. Sofia downright made fun of Boomie's English, asking sarcastically if “finally she learned English with you?” and she did not stop there. She called Boomie completely confused, “clear in nothing,” and uncommitted to our mentoring sessions. She said:

    Because a person who even doesn't get too much understanding of English, if you're
interested in your resume, because it's what you're focused now, or at least the way your express, you want to-, to be a little bit more active. And I see her, very passive...I don't see very committed with that.

Moreover, when I turned off the recorder, she gave me her true and uncensored impression of Boomie. Sofia said that Boomie was a “very low level woman,” in terms of both language proficiency (“very low proficiency”) and professionalism (“very unprofessional”). She explained that professional people (even if they had poor English) were more committed and involved in conversation, and while working on a resume. In contrast, because of her pausing, Sofia perceived Boomie as very “upset and absent.” Moreover, Sofia characterized her as “a very hard woman,” and added that she believed that “she has a very low level of education.” She surmised that Boomie did not come to Canada on her own merit, and instead, her husband probably brought her here, which explained why Boomie did not know what she was doing here, and why she was so uncommitted and uninvolved. This assumption was completely false, because Boomie immigrated to Canada as a skilled worker, and she was a successful senior civil engineer in Colombia. Furthermore, Sofia interpreted Boomie's silences as an abdication of all the power and responsibility of resume writing (and other such tasks) to her mentor, while she, in turn, checked out. In contrast, NS listener Becky said that Boomie:

...seemed trustworthy. She seemed nice. She was trying to always respond to you in, I think, the best way possible. It never seemed like she was just trying to ignore you. Like she was [brief pause] compliant. She was willing to improve herself and whatnot, she was actually trying.

When one compares Sofia's comments to Becky's assessment, the harshness of the former becomes even more apparent.

Even more troubling was the fact that Sofia's characterization of Boomie was based
solely on her pausing and her language, because there was barely any other content in the segments that I played for her. In fact, the Colombian case study exemplified the NNS turning on each other trend even when it came to the assessment of English-language proficiency: Although acknowledging that she was having some difficulties with her English, NS Becky still rated Boomie as proficient, while both Colombian participants evaluated her as a beginner.

All things considered, despite the counter-intuitive nature of these findings, they were not completely unexpected. First, harsh judgments of proficiency could be explained by the fact that NNSs have a very hard time understanding other NNSs: NNS students reported that they had problems understanding their professors’ English speech in general, and NNS professors’ speech in particular (Jenkins, 2000). In addition, when studying people’s reactions to spoken languages, Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner, and Fillenbaum (1960) found that (contrary to their expectations) French speakers evaluated English speakers more favourably than members of their own linguistic group. Furthermore, Girard and Sions’ (2004) study found that NS and NNS listeners' ratings were highly intercorrelated, both within, and between groups of listeners, and both groups paid attention to the same features of oral production when they made their fluency ratings. Likewise, Reiko’s (2004) literature overview showed that, when it came to evaluation of NNS's speech, NNSs had perceptions approximately similar to NSs: Both groups downgraded non-native accents, with NNSs acting as harshly as, or even harsher than, NSs. In fact, her own quantitative study found that, compared to other groups (which included NSs) Hindi NNSs “were the most critical of Japanese English while the American participants were the most positive about it, especially about rudimentary speakers” (Reiko, 2004, iii). In addition, Derwing, Rossiter, and Ehrensberger-Dow, (2002), just like Davies (1983) before them, found that judgements of NNS's grammatical errors by NNS listeners were harsher than

---

63 In this study, participants evaluated others on traits, usually considered crucial for social and economic success, such as confidence and ambition, and likeable personality characteristics such as intelligence and kindness.

64 Please note that in this study the NNS judges were not of the same cultural background as the speakers.
those of NSs.

Finally, Fayer and Krasinski (1987) discovered that Puerto Rican listeners were less tolerant toward the non-native accent than the NS listeners were, with pronunciation and hesitations being their biggest irritants. Their data supports the current study's findings of very harsh NNS silence interpretations among Colombians. Reiko (2004) believes that this phenomenon may be a result of an appropriation of native norms and stereotypes; Chiba, Matsuura, and Yamamoto (1995) found that motivation was also an influential factor: Instrumentally motivated listeners were not as harsh about non-native accents as those with integrative motivation were. Uncovering other explanations why intracultural acrimony occurs will be an important area of future research.

**Proficiency and Negative Attributions**

Another interesting theme that emerged from the current study's data was the inverse relationship between English-language proficiency and negative attributions. In essence, it seemed that when silence producers were perceived to be of high language proficiency, their pauses were given more negative attributions than silences of people who were judged to be of lower proficiency. For example, when comparing Qing to another silence producer (Boomie), NS Becky perceived her as the less honest one, even though her pauses were shorter and less frequent. Why? Becky said that although Qing provided longer answers, “it seemed like, considering the fact that she was pretty proficient in her language, it seemed like she was trying to calculate what she should and should not say. She was trying to monitor herself.” When asked what in particular made Qing seem calculating, Becky elaborated:

Because quite a bit of the time she was able to say things pretty quickly, without you having to even, without you even having to, sort of, um, fix her grammar or fix what she was saying. She said [it] perfectly. Also, she probably had more pauses than she should
have, if you think about her language. You know what I mean? If she was giving straight, clear answers, they should have been faster, and they weren’t. They were slower.

Therefore, it appears that, from Becky's perspective, when slowness could not be explained by English proficiency, it was taken as an indication of the speaker being calculating and dishonest. In other words, if someone seems to be proficient in English, silence becomes a much bigger problem for him or her.

This contingency makes logical sense. If one is judged to be proficient in English, it is assumed that s/he is aware of the pragmalinguistic norms as well. Thus, s/he no longer has an excuse (afforded to people of low language proficiency) that s/he does not know how to say something. With the obvious explanation rejected, this becomes an ambiguous occurrence, and the observer is challenged to attribute and interpret behaviour. In such cases, the fundamental attribution error is pervasive: Whenever people do not know the source of the problem, they attribute it to individual's character/personality (Breckler, Olson, & Wiggins, 2006; Ross, 2000). Jones and Nisbett (1972) theorized that actors (those who perform an action) tend to attribute their own behavior to situational factors, while the observers (those who see their performance) attribute the same behavior to dispositional factors, like the actor's personality. Thus, instead of recognizing the impact of context, culture, and social norms on others' behaviour, ambiguous silences are attributed to the individual's character, and as Kanouse and Hanson (1972) discovered, since negative information is more salient, most attributions end up being negative.

As follows, it is possible that, since NS participants in this study saw silence and pausing as an indication of deficiency and failure, they allowed for silence only if the speakers' proficiency was not up to par. In fact, if the speaker resorted to pauses and silence, data showed
that NSs expected him or her to be aware that there was something wrong with his/her speech, and even to feel embarrassed about it. This phenomenon was best illustrated by Maris' evaluation of Chengjiang and Stepan. She rated Chengjiang as 'completely' sincere and respectful, 'usually' trustworthy, honest, and genuine, and attributed most of his hesitations to shyness about his pausing. She explained:

I felt he came off very concerned about both that and his style of speaking. A lot of the “uhhs” and “umms” sounded like he was trying to avoid saying something negative or embarrassing about the subject- he did not seem 100%, completely relaxed- maybe he was nervous about being in the study/interview, but it came across as self-conscious, and my immediate assumption, personally, rightly or wrongly, was that he seemed concerned about his own English skills. He does not sound confident.

In other words, she attributed his pausing to his bad language skills, as well as his insecurity about these limitations, and, as a result, her overall impression of him and his character was quite positive.

However, when it came to evaluating Stepan, it was a different story. She wrote:

The man does not seem forthcoming, very honest, talkative, nor does he elaborate much on what his experiences are like. I didn’t think his language skills were that bad-but unlike person #1, this man does not seem self-conscious at all, but he seems disinterested. He also seemed several times like he was hiding something, he seemed to act suspicious.

So, because she saw him as proficient in English, and because he did not appear apologetic about his silence use, she attributed his pauses to a variety of character flaws, which, ultimately, resulted in an overall negative impression of him as a person. Thus, it appears that low English proficiency is the only situational factor participants are willing to accept, before they turn to
dispositional factors to explain episodes of non-normative silence usage. Accordingly, it should not come as a surprise, that Nisbett and Ross (1980) described most people's attributions as fundamentally inaccurate, since they are based on bias, fallacious reasoning, and misconceptions.

Fundamental attribution error is one possible explanation why high proficiency generates more negative attributions. Another reason for this phenomenon may be a rejection of foreignness, or a rejection of non-conformity. Riazantseva (2001)'s findings suggest that foreign pausing patterns of NNSs, even the most proficient ones, could potentially intensify their foreign accent. Thus, a NNS who does not adhere to NS silence norms will increase the possibility of creating an impression that his or her speech is foreign; such difference and otherness are frequently seen in a negative light (Riazantseva, 2001; Breckler, Olson, & Wiggins, 2006).

Another possible explanation for the relationship between high proficiency and unfavourable attributions is that people underestimate how conscious silence use is. While people's resistance of accepted silence norms can be intentional (Kivik, 1998; Hinkel, 1996; Blum-Kulka, 1991), silence mostly functions at a lower consciousness level than speech (Saville-Troike, 1985). Unfortunately, observers overestimate how much control people have over their silence use and, when low proficiency cannot account for it, inappropriate silence usage may appear as resistance and refusal to conform, and social psychology research consistently demonstrates that non-conformity is perceived quite antagonistically (Breckler, Olson, & Wiggins, 2006).

**Filler Hate**

One of the most frequently used strategies, and often the only way ESL teachers address silence in the classroom, is teaching students to use fillers (House, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001).
Hence, it came as a surprise that fillers frequently became an issue with the participants in this study. On the one hand, the NS participants (especially Becky, Brian, Clay, and Carol), used many fillers and acknowledgements, and all of the NSs indicated that they did not perceive fillers as parasitic language, or as something useless and devoid of meaning. On the contrary, many of them expressed a belief that filler speech served an important purpose. For example, Steven saw fillers as an indication that information had been processed: When asked why Stellar did not use “mhm,” he said, “Maybe she is not processing it as quick as we are, to be able to say “mhm.” So it all could go back to proficiency.” Thus, to Steven, use of fillers signalled high English proficiency and quick mental functioning. Another NS, Carol, saw fillers like “ummmm” as a sign of politeness, and as an important turn-keeping strategy. She said:

I think it’s more, just like, a space filler, trying to just take up time. ‘Cause it sounds like she knows what she’s talking about, at this point she is a little bit more thorough in her answers. So maybe just, out of politeness, just to take up time or not to be interrupted.

She added that it was important to use a filler like “ummmm” to make sure one did not get cut off by the interlocutor. All in all, she saw filler use as something completely unconscious, natural and totally normal: “It’s just, I think, innate behaviour. It’s, like, a reaction you have [laughs].”

Likewise, Becky, saw filler “eeeehhhhh” as a transitional device. She said, “It’s almost like she’s transitioning from Spanish to English. It’s kind of, like, you have to switch your brain on and off.” Other NS participants also voiced their support for fillers: Brian said that fillers like ‘okay’ or ‘mhm’ were important aspects of interaction, because they communicated confirmation and agreement. Similarly, Maris indicated that she believed that fillers like “ummmm” implied a yes or no answer to a question.

The reported NS perspective on fillers has empirical support. In English, fillers have an
important purpose: they improve fluency. English fluency is defined in temporal terms, and refers to “the ability to talk at length with few pauses, the ability to fill time with talk” (Fillmore, 1979, p. 93), which entails “being minimally hesitant or maximally pause-free” (Riazantseva, 2001, p. 500). Therefore, the definition of fluency presupposes an absent of silence, and fillers allow speakers to reduce silence in their speech. In fact, the use of formulaic sequences and filler formulas is crucial in the development of speech fluency over time (Rossiter, 2009). Lennon's (1990) study showed that NS teachers attributed an improvement in fluency to a reduction in silent pause time and an increase in the mean length of run; formulaic sequences like fillers contribute to increases in mean length of run by allowing speakers to produce longer runs between pauses (Wray, 2002; Wood, 2001). Finally, fillers may be an important aspect of higher cognitive development, since fillers in speech may indicate human “tendency to convert outer or social speech to inner speech” (Wood, 2006, p. 30).

In contrast to the NS participants in this study, who demonstrated consistent support for using fillers, NNS participants' attitudes to fillers were much more ambiguous. In fact, a troubling trend emerged: It was not that many of them were not aware how to use fillers; the problem was that many cultures saw fillers as something negative, a sign of bad education and low class, and, thus, many L2 learners consciously avoided using them. For example, Jamie said that she used transition words and fillers as a strategy to cope with her language difficulties and to sound more natural, but she admitted that she did so out of necessity, and against her wishes, because she did not like using them. In fact, she said that when she spoke Korean, she

65 It is also important to note that not all NNS showed a dislike for fillers. The Colombian participants' attitude towards fillers was more in line with the attitudes exhibited by the NSs. Sofia and Rafael agreed with Becky that fillers served a transitional or even ice-breaking function, and Boomie was of the same mind as Carol, that using fillers such as “eehhh” was unconscious and natural because people “do it in Spanish all the time.” She explained, “We think a lot sometimes when we, when we talk. You see like-. we don’t talk plain.” She added, “That’s why I say to you we don’t have too much silence times, because we just fill it with ‘eeh’ ‘eee’ ‘aaaa’ ‘mmm’.” Thus, unlike speakers of Korean and Russian, she did not express a severe dislike of fillers, because from her perspective, those who used fillers were thinkers. In fact, she implied that, in contrast to “plain” filler-less speech, fillers added colour to one’s speech.
did not use fillers at all. She recalled how she once had a chance to transcribe her speech, which made her realize that she used a lot of fillers. She was shocked because “This is the language I don’t like!” Her strong negative reaction highlighted the cognitive dissonance involved in using fillers: Although, on the one hand, she tried to “jump up [a language level] by using the fillers” in hopes of sounding more fluent, she also said that “I consciously try to reduce it,” because, to her, speech with fillers was “pseudo-fluency.” The existence of this psychological conflict, as described by Jamie, and the resistance of NNSs to fillers is supported in the literature. Hinkel (1996) found that NNSs often resist NS norms, choosing not to follow them. In fact, “while most subjects displayed an overt self-reported willingness to conform to L2 pragmalinguistic norms, their self-reported behaviours largely did not support this inclination” (Hinkel, 1996, p. 67).

Jamie was by no means alone in her dislike of fillers. Another Korean, Lisa, expressed a similar sentiment. She said that fillers were “not really common” in Korea, and that she had “a problem” when speaking English because she used “I mean,” “whatever,” and “like” a lot. She added that, although she tried to control her filler use, it was very difficult, especially, when she was faced with a topic which was more complex than her language capacity. Thus, even though she, too, used fillers out of necessity, she also had an aversion towards using them.

As much as the Korean participants seemed to dislike fillers, Russian participants took their antipathy even further. They considered them everything from annoying to an indication of low educational level and low class. During stimulated recall, when I brought Svetlana’s attention to her use of fillers, her response was quite surprising. She said that it was quite useful to hear herself speak because “I think next time when I try to talk to people I’ll try to control myself.” I tried telling her that it was okay to use fillers, but she interjected and said, “I think it’s better to be, like, just silent but don’t say all these stupid [laughs] sounds.” I asked her why
she thought that way, and she explained:

   It sounds…. for my ears, it sounds better for my ears when it’s just silence. You know, people say something, and just silence, he’s thinking. But when he says “um” it’s so annoying. When I listen to myself I just want to [laughs and gestures shooting herself in the head].

All in all, Svetlana made it clear that she found fillers quite bothersome and preferred to stay silent instead of using them.

Likewise, a female Russian listener Maria said that when people used fillers (she gave an example of her husband using them when he talked on the phone), it aggravated her. She said that when learning a new language, “in English you use these fillers like ‘you know,’ you’re picking up the wrong stuff as well!” Hence, she too made it clear that she regarded fillers as something negative. Similarly, when I asked Alla how silence was treated in Russia, she said:

   It’s not good thing. It’s not usual thing. If people have-has to say something, he usually says it. If people keep silence, it’s-, it means he has nothing to say. Or he try to fill those gaps with “um”, “ah,” stuff like that.

When asked how she felt about the aforementioned fillers, she said, “It’s-, it’s lower-, lower level of speech, like, when we use these words.” She emphatically stated that it was considered bad form to use them. Moreover, she added:

   Even silence is better than use those filler-, fillers. Yeah. Silence maybe it’s style of speech, maybe person, it’s his, personal, personal-, I don’t know-, feature. It’s better than fillers. Because sometimes in Russia fillers it’s very bad words [we both laughed].

Thus, Alla extended the range of filler perceptions from a simple annoyance, to a sign of low class and low educational level.

   Furthermore, while Korean and Russian participants expressed very strong negative
opinions towards the use of fillers because of how they made them feel (either conflicted or annoyed), or how they could be interpreted (as reflecting badly on the speaker), male Iranian listener Bahman implied that he saw fillers as a symptom of language inadequacy. He said:

When you don't have the words or the phrases or previous stuff to come up with, you can't be sp-, you cannot be spontaneous. And so, when you are not spontaneous, you have to kind of show your agreement or your accompaniment with 'mmm' 'oh' 'yeah' 'yes' 'hm', something like this.

He explained that when a person could not speak fluently and spontaneously, an easy way to keep up with his or her interlocutor was to “use that kind of stuff.” He added that pauses with “mmm, ummm, ahhh” represented situations in which a speaker had something to say, but did not know how to say it.66 To support his idea, Bahman added that, from personal experience, whenever he knew what he wanted to say but did not have the words, he said “mmm,” signalling to the interlocutor to wait up. Thus, for him, fillers indicated a struggle for words, and a manifestation of language deficiency. Granted, Bahman was not altogether wrong, since research shows that learners’ filler use compensates for the morphological features they have not yet learned. In fact, Girard and Sionis (2004) believe that fillers represent an important developmental step in making learners' speech more grammatical.

Incidentally, this study's findings revealed that, even among ESL teachers in Canada, fillers were an ambiguous entity. Whereas new teachers are taught to encourage their students to use fillers, some teachers, as Boomie reported, encourage students to avoid fillers, and advise them to stay silent rather than use “umms” and “uhhhs” in an interview setting. It seems that, at least in that context, silence and thinking are considered better than talking. Hence, considerations of setting and context add even more controversy to the practice of filler usage.

66 In contrast to situations in which one was thinking about something, or analyzing something, and did not know the answer: “in those cases I think he wouldn't say 'mmm, ahh'. He would just silence.”
Why do some participants reject fillers while others embrace them? This is a complex issue that needs further, and more focused, investigation than the scope of the current study. However, it is possible to make some hypotheses. As the findings cited above indicate, one reason that some reject English norms is that appropriating them may be perceived negatively in their own language and culture (i.e., in Russian, fillers are associated with curse words). Analogously, Liberman (1994) wrote that Asian students at North American universities found it difficult to adjust to American academic norms, some of which they perceived as a lack of respect for the professor. Thus, if NNSs adopt NS norms are deemed unacceptable in their own culture, they may be risking alienation from their in-group (Jin & Cortazzi, 1993).

Furthermore, there is also evidence suggesting that the problem could be structural: Languages may differ on temporal variables like pause duration and frequency. For example, Russian language (native-speakers of which rejected the use of fillers), and English language (which generally promotes filler use) are characterized by significantly different pause-duration patterns (Riazantseva, 2001), which, in turn, impact the presence of fillers. In her study, pauses made by native speakers of English were significantly shorter than pauses made by native speakers of Russian (Riazantseva, 2001). More importantly, in support of the current study's findings, when speaking English, “native speakers of Russian seem to maintain the pause duration characteristic of their L1” (Riazantseva, 2001, p. 516). Similarly, Grosjean and Deschamps (1975) found that speakers of French paused less often but for longer duration than speakers of English, whereas Johnson, O’Connell, and Sabin (1979) found that Spanish speakers used more silent and vocal hesitations than Americans did. Similarly, Holmes (1995), who analyzed syntactic encoding of English and French speakers, found that these two groups used different types of strategies (relying on either silent pauses or filled pauses, false starts, or repetitions) in their speech. Altogether, these inter-language differences in temporal variables
may account for the reported differences in attitudes towards fillers and their usage.

Complicating the situation even further is that it is not simply a matter of using fillers or not using them. How one uses them matters tremendously. Even though Spanish language encourages the use of fillers, Scarcella (1994) found that when highly proficient Spanish ESL speakers used English conversational features like topic shifts, pause fillers, and back channel cues in the same way these features were utilized in Spanish, it did not help them achieve native-like fluency because they left an impression of a discourse accent (Riazantseva, 2001).

Finally, the third possible explanation for the observed differences in attitudes towards fillers is social: Cultures may treat the concept of time differently. Riazantseva (2001, p. 516) hypothesized that:

In North American culture, time is viewed as an asset to be used sensibly and sparingly and can even have a monetary value attached to it. In Russian culture, time is treated differently in that it is not seen as having any measurable monetary value, and it is therefore used much less judiciously.

Hence, if silence and pauses are not viewed as a waste of time (which could be better spent on something else), then attitudes towards them might improve; and consequently, attitudes towards fillers may become less favourable, because if there is no pressing need to use them to fill silences, their purpose and usefulness becomes less apparent.

Why do fillers matter? Since English fluency (which, as already mentioned, almost exclusively refers to temporal variables like pauses and speech rate) is equated with language proficiency, to be considered a proficient and competent speaker of English almost presupposes filler use (Girard & Sionis, 2004; Lennon, 1990). Hence, if one chooses to reject using fillers because they are not compatible with his/her native cultural norms, he or she risks being evaluated as lacking in fluency, and thus, lacking in language proficiency. As a matter of fact,
silence clusters have an adverse effect on perceptions of fluency, and unfilled pauses and slow speech rate account for 75% of negative temporal fluency impressions recorded by listeners (Girard & Sionis, 2004; Riggenbach, 1991). Therefore, fillers matter because they make speech appear more fluent, and fluent performance “directs listener attention away from deficiencies in other areas: phonological, grammatical, syntactic, discoursive, lexical,” thereby creating a more positive impression of the speaker's language proficiency and communication skills (Rossiter, 2009; Lennon, 1990, p. 391).

All in all, the delineated clash between English norms and attitudes towards fillers in participants' native languages and cultures reveals an important ethical issue facing ESL teachers. If filler use is rejected by the students' native language, are we allowed to enforce the English way of doing things on them? Should we encourage them to use fillers, a habit which might be met with disapproval when they speak their native language?

This is a real concern, as evidenced by Jin and Cortazzi's (1993) findings that Chinese students fear alienation from their in-group if they embrace English norms that their culture considers objectionable. Furthermore, one of the silence producers (Jamie) reported that, after spending only a few months in Canada, her transition back to Korea was very difficult. As she began to adopt Canadian culture norms, her parents said, “you’ve changed a lot,” and she felt rejected and marginalized by her own culture, her own parents, and her own family.

More than that, if there is such a strong psychological and cultural repulsion to using fillers (with potentially serious consequences for the NNSs), will L2 speakers ever truly feel comfortable using them? And, if not, what can be used in their stead?

**Silencing of L2 speakers**

The last of the main themes that emerged from this study’s findings was the unfortunate outcome of all of the aforementioned trends: the silencing of L2 speakers. Due to differences in
conversational and silence usage norms, participants from Korea, China, and Russia reported having significant problems simply getting a speaking turn in English conversations or discussions. For example, Jamie from Korea said that because Canadians talked so quickly, and were always fighting for turns, she often did not get an opportunity to speak, and instead, had to remain silent.

Other Korean participants, Tae-Hwan and Lisa, echoed her sentiments, and said that, in Canada, people talked too much about their personal lives, and “they interrupt all the time what other people are saying.” As a result, Tae-Hwan and Lisa reported feeling pressured “to say something less meaningful, and contribute to discussion in classroom.” Moreover, they explained that things were different in Korea, because, for Koreans, bothering someone, hurting someone's feelings, and taking up someone's time was considered unconscionable. Thus, because of these profound cultural differences, all three Korean participants talked about their inability to get a speaking turn in Canada.67

Participants from cultures where silence norms were (reportedly) closer to English norms than Korean norms, also reported feeling silenced. Jing from China attributed her inability to get a conversational turn to her low confidence. She said:

I felt sometimes, maybe my voice is weak, because I am not very confident about that. If you want to grasp the turn, you should use more confident attitude. Sometimes I found if I want to add my opinion in classroom, which is not very easy for me.

Furthermore, she explained that she relied on silence in conversation to be able to get a turn: Her strategy was to wait for silence (a break in classroom discussion), and then “slide” into the exchange through that opening.

Likewise, Svetlana from Russia revealed that her English was “out of practice” because

67 In support of this finding, other studies showed that students from interdependent cultures had a difficult time accepting, and adjusting to, North American norms (Jin & Cortazzi, 1993; Tyler, 1995)
she did not speak it very often. In fact, she said that she spoke English only during coffee breaks, when “of course” NSs spoke “a lot” while she listened. Her coworkers confirmed that she was usually silent and taciturn, and she explained that she “didn’t have an opportunity to speak.” Like Jing, Svetlana attributed this predicament to her personality: She said, “I’m too shy. I’m extremely shy.” She added that one-on-one she could speak normally, but with at least two people there, you could “forget it!” As a consequence, her voice was shut out of the conversation. Beyond the individual impact, this phenomenon has repercussions on a larger scale: Koreans, Chinese and Russians do not participate in class discussions or work conversations as much as individuals from other cultures do, and accordingly, their voices are absent from these discussions. They are, essentially, silenced.

This silencing is not a new occurrence. Scollon and Scollon (1981) found that Americans often silenced the Athabaskans by dominating conversational turns, and this resulted in a situation in which Athabaskans could never get a word in edgewise. Similarly, in Jenkin’s (2000, p. 495) study of Chinese international students, NNSs reported that they wanted to speak English and interact with NSs, but “were inhibited to an extent that curbed their desire to seek out opportunities for interaction,” because they sensed impatience from NSs whenever they spoke to them. My study extends incidence of this phenomenon to include Korean and Russian NNSs.

Why does this happen? Research indicates that silence norms can affect turn-acquisition: Some speakers may think that the pauses others leave for them are not long enough to claim the floor without being rude, while others may think that longer pauses create awkward silences (Jaworski, 1993). Ergo, Pratt (1991) found that norm differences were behind Chinese students’ silence and hesitation to express opinions in classroom discussions.

Beyond the straightforward explanations of intercultural norm disparities lie issues of
power. Past research indicates that when minority group members do not conform to pragmatic and linguistic expectations, as they are set and defined by majority group norms, they suffer negative consequences (Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993). One of these consequences is exclusion from the linguistic in-group, since “when nonnative speakers do not exhibit the L2 pausing patterns, their speech will be judged to be less fluent than native speech, regardless of how accurate and coherent it might be” (Riazantseva, 2001, p. 521). Moreover, Shaw and Bailey (1990) found that NNS's tendency to use non-normative deferential silence in the classroom can limit their access to information. The collective impact of these repercussions on the social status of the L2 speaker can be quite profound, as highlighted by Jenkins' (2000, p. 483) finding that “even when they are the higher status participant in interactions with undergraduates, the ITAs are expected to demonstrate the appropriate pragmalinguistic norms of the American classroom.”

Incidentally, it is interesting how participants themselves explained this phenomenon. While Korean participants attributed their inability to get a speaking turn to cultural differences, Jing and Svetlana ascribed it to dispositional characteristics (such as low confidence and shy personality). This certainly does not mean that situational factors (like English silence norms), or related conversational norms (like how loud one's voice should be, as per Jing's example), did not contribute to these circumstances. What it does indicate, is that in a reversal of the fundamental attribution error (Jones and Nisbett, 1972), some NNS participants attributed culturally and socially structured phenomena to their own character weaknesses and failings.

All in all, participants in this study reported that their voices were being silenced, not by their own choice, but by others, and this continuous silencing of the L2 speaker served to further exacerbate the existing power inequality between NSs and NNSs. A similar situation

---

68 International (Chinese) teacher assistants, themselves graduate students with an authority over the undergraduate students.
69 In fact, in another study, NNSs attributed their cultural isolation to situational factors (Jenkins, 2000).
was described in Losey’s (1997) study, where she showed how Anglo-Americans maintained power over the Mexican-Americans by silencing them, and despite the latter’s efforts to develop strategies to get a turn and ward off interruptions, they were suppressed by social norms and conventions. As Jenkins (2000) pointed out, when the norms are defined by the dominant language group, the burden is on the minority language group to change its behaviour and conform to majority language norms, or be left out. Hence, in such circumstances of social inequality, “perceptions of successful intercultural communication ... may depend on the ability of the lower status group to conform to the expectations of the higher status group” (Jenkins, 2000, p. 482).
Chapter Seven: Final Thoughts

Mark Twain said: “It is better to remain silent and be thought a fool than to open one's mouth and remove all doubt.” Accordingly, many people believe that whenever they are unsure of what to say, it is better to stay silent. Based on this study's findings, however, that may not always be true. Sometimes it may, in fact, be more harmful to keep silent.

One of the main purposes of this thesis was to identify exactly when silence was interpreted most negatively, in other words, distinguish the problematic silences. Because of a strong research base that indicates that culture has a powerful impact on how silence is perceived, silence interpretation was investigated in a series of inter/intracultural case studies. It was hypothesized that students from a particular cultural background may have conspicuous habits that make a negative impression on their interlocutor. If so, and if these habits were identified, ESL teachers could use such findings as a guide to help them teach students how to make positive impressions, instead. Although, further research is needed before most of these findings can be generalized beyond the current sample of participants, this study offers a good start in this challenging undertaking.

Thus, in the final chapter of this thesis, I draw conclusions, and discuss some of the present study’s implications, as well as its limitations.

Conclusions

This study examined inter/intracultural differences in silence interpretation among L2 speakers and native speakers of English (NS). Perceptions of silence usage were examined in six different cultural groups: Chinese, Korean, Russian, Colombian, and Iranian ESL speakers, and Canadian NS.

To answer the first research question (How do participants explain their use of silence in the context of an intercultural mentoring/interview speech event?), Chapter Four explored
participants' perspectives on silence usage by describing the range of silence causes and functions they resorted to, in order to interpret silences. Data indicated that many of the silences were explained in line with previous literature, with participants giving them prosodic, cognitive, stylistic, social/interactive/communicative, politeness, identity, and ideological functions. However, it was also clear that, at least from the perspective of the participants, one silence could belong to more than one category. Moreover, other silence causes and functions, which were rarely mentioned (or even completely overlooked) in previous literature, were frequently brought up by this study’s participants. These included silences that resulted when the speaker felt rattled, unattributable silences, and silences indicating (and caused by) dishonesty.

Chapter Five answered research questions three (What reasons do silence producers give for their own instances of silence, compared to what reasons do listeners (from the same or different cultural background) attribute to these silences?), four (What are the similarities and differences between the interpretations of these silences by native speakers of English and non-native speakers of English?), and five (Which silences do the listeners consider deviant, and thus, judge negatively?). The key findings are summarized in Table 13.

Many of the results corroborated other research on intercultural silence interpretation (Plank, 1994). Participants interpreted silence as a sign of low self-concept, insecurity and introversion, embarrassment, confusion and lack of understanding, negative emotions or language problems (such as low English proficiency, incoherence, translation, or word search). Moreover, many of the participants provided very harsh judgments of the silence producers: They thought silence was an indication of insincerity, dishonesty, faking, hiding something, being calculating, lacking commitment or simply not caring, lacking in professionalism, being uninformed, or concealing prejudiced beliefs or even criminal activity. Moreover, listeners
categorized the silent speakers as uneducated, simple, tedious, dishonest, and “creepy.” Overall, the data reinforced that harsh character judgments in response to silence, were, unfortunately, a reality.

Table 13

Summary of findings for Research Questions Three, Four and Five

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Attitude Towards Silence</th>
<th>Maligned silences*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Maligned silences*</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td></td>
<td>NNS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Qing</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Voluntary pauses (language deficiency)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yuyuan</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Word search (emotions/embarrassment/nerves)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fei</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Thinking pauses (male) (being calculating, language deficiency, or faking an answer)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chengjiang</td>
<td>Neutral to Negative</td>
<td>Voluntary pauses (language deficiency)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jing</td>
<td>Negative</td>
<td>Word search (emotions/embarrassment/nerves)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Korea</td>
<td></td>
<td>Emphasis (language-limitation)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jamie</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Thinking of an example to use (embarrassment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tae-Hwan</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Word search (shyness, negative emotions and embarrassment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stellar</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Thinking (confusion, uncertainty, refusing to talk about the subject; does not understand, language barrier)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lisa</td>
<td>Positive</td>
<td>Finished speaking (language struggle or hiding offensive beliefs or prejudices)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Thinking of an example to use (does not want to talk about the subject)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Russia</td>
<td></td>
<td>Word search (embarrassment)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Svetlana</td>
<td>Negative to Neutral</td>
<td>Thinking pause (hiding something)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maria</td>
<td>Neutral to slightly negative</td>
<td>Blanking on a word (uncertainty and lack of confidence about what s/he is saying, does not know what s/he is talking about)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Alla</td>
<td>Neutral to negative</td>
<td>Blanking on a word (involved in illegal activity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stepan</td>
<td>Neutral</td>
<td>Memory (language)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

186
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Person</th>
<th>Rating</th>
<th>Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Colombia| Boomie | Negative        | Thinking (lack of professionalism)  
Word search or Finished speaking (offended, embarrassed, insecure)  
Politeness and consideration (lack of commitment)                                                                                                                                 |
|         | Rafael | Negative to Neutral | Thought (lack of professionalism)  
Word search or Finished speaking (offended, embarrassed, insecure)  
Politeness and consideration (lack of commitment)                                                                                                                                 |
|         | Sofia  | Negative         | Thinking (lack of professionalism)  
Word search or Finished speaking (offended, embarrassed, insecure)  
Politeness and consideration (lack of commitment)                                                                                                                                 |
| Iran    | Keivan | Neutral          | Thinking (being calculating for the sake of his image or trying to one up me, or low language proficiency)  
Checking for understanding (lacking in interest or distracted)  
Emotional (language deficiency, showing off to his own detriment)  
Confirmation (confusion, embarrassment, poor language)  
Word search (calculating, does not want to come off in a negative light, or crafting words to be politically correct)  
Paused when realized mistake (evasion, or crafting words to be politically correct)  
Politeness (does not want to show that he is wrong or upset)  
No meaning (unattributable) (negative emotions, and having nothing to say)  
Thinking (confusion and stalling) |
Overall, data showed that Chinese participants' attitudes toward silence were negative to neutral, Korean participants' attitudes were neutral to mostly positive, Russian participants' attitudes ranged from negative to positive, Colombian participants' views were mainly negative to neutral, and Iranian participants' attitudes were mainly neutral (although ranging from negative to positive). Why is this important? As already mentioned in the Intercultural Communication and Miscommunication and Patterns, Limitations, and Gaps sections, most research on silence is grounded in generalizations. Qualitative research, however, allows us to take general findings (for example, that culture influences silence norms, judgments, and use), and helps us uncover and examine the how and the why of them. Thus, Chapter Five exposed the phenomenon of intra-cultural variation, in other words, that the variability of perceptions and uses of silence exists not only between the East and the West, but also within these cultural labels and categories. Accordingly, generalizations about Western vs. Eastern cultures (or about any one culture) proved to be crude, superficial and, ultimately, obsolete. Chinese and Korean attitudes and silence norms were not the same, or even that similar. And where do Iranians and Russians fit on this out-dated paradigm? The present study's findings demonstrated that large-scale generalizations about silence are no longer viable.

The initial hypothesis that culture would have an impact on silence interpretation was supported. NS participants exhibited a mostly negative attitude towards silence, and they often implied that they did not consider it very meaningful, treating it more like a void. Many of them seemed to conflate fluency and eloquence with honesty. In turn, participants from other cultures judged NSs as people who babbled endlessly without much meaning or thought. They saw silence as an opportunity to think carefully about what they were going to say. A particularly notable finding was that Korean participants expressed frustration that NSs always interrupted them, and tried to help them with English when they did not actually require assistance, and
were simply taking their time to finish a thought.

However, this study's most salient finding was that, when it come to silence usage and interpretation, the situation is not as simple as NS versus NNS. The data demonstrated that an array of individual differences, such as gender and speaking style variations, at times, over-ride what culture dictates. While culture does have a powerful impact on participants’ use of silence, and can never be overlooked, so much also depends on personality characteristics, personal style, and individual silence tolerance. Incidentally, these idiosyncratic differences may explain the phenomenon of intra-cultural silence norm variation, which was discussed above.

Another crucial discovery from this study was establishing which silences were judged most negatively, since they represent potential sites of inter/intracultural miscommunication. Word search and thinking pauses were the most consistently maligned ones, as well as intentional pauses (such as emphasis, politeness, and end-of-turn silences) and unintentional ones (such as memory search or blanking-on-a-word pauses). These are the silences on which ESL teachers need to focus their classroom instruction. Incidentally, the data showed that no silences, other than possibly mechanical pauses, were truly benign. Every type of silence was misinterpreted at some point. Nonetheless, the some silences were more dangerous than others, because they were consistently misinterpreted, and led to negative evaluations of the silence producer.

The answer to the second research question (the question about participants' awareness of silence's pragmatic value and function), a major pedagogically relevant finding, was that there was an evident lack of silence awareness among all participants (across all cultures). Most participants admitted that they had never thought about silence in conversation before, and those who did not explicitly say this, paused for so long, when asked that question, that it was

---

70 These types of silences resulted from objective phenomena, such as getting interrupted by an outside source or flipping through a newspaper to find an article.
easy to infer that it was not something they contemplated often.

Finally, male Russian speaker Stepan was the most harshly judged participant, accused of everything from covering up a marijuana grow-up, hiding something, not admitting to having flaws, to “fudging the truth.” The kindest NS assessment of him was that he was totally confused and incoherent. Remembering the reason for my initial interest in this topic, I am sad to say that, of all silence producer participants, Stepan’s speaking style was the closest to that of my father’s.

**Implications**

The results of this study have both theoretical and practical relevance. In terms of adding to the existing empirical literature on silence, the attitudes expressed towards silence in this study show how aware people are of their silence use: Some more than others, but mostly, even if they can think of a few examples when silence can be meaningful, the intercultural awareness is clearly missing. Most participants, regardless of cultural background, reported that they never even thought about silence and what it could mean to them. This study also replicated some previous findings on silence in intercultural communication, in particular, the different causes and functions of silence, and harsh character judgments in response to silence. Thus, the present study contributes to the wealth of knowledge on this topic; triangulation is badly needed in the field of applied linguistics, as it adds validity and generalizability to previous research (Porte, 2008). Finally, as far as I know, silence within a mentoring situation has not yet been examined.

However, the current study is most valuable for its practical applications. First of all, I was able to use the research instrument as a very effective teaching tool in one-on-one mentoring sessions. In fact, it fit so seamlessly into the mentoring procedure that the mentees never even realized what exactly I was looking for! Second, this study was a valuable
educational experience for the participants themselves. Raising awareness of intercultural differences in silence, and showing L2 speakers what they could do to avoid miscommunication, is one of the main contributions of this study. Moreover, over the course of this research study, the mentees showed definite progress. Over time, Keivan learned to acknowledge my within-turn pauses; by October, he was acknowledging almost all of my comments and interrupting me by saying “excuse me.” Furthermore, as he talked, he filled his word search pauses with “aaaahh” and “uuhhh,” and when he trailed off, he was generally able to get back into the flow of the conversation rather quickly, without any long and uncomfortable silences. In addition, instead of interrupting or talking each other, as we had previously done, we were able to have large chunks of smooth, tension-free conversation. Likewise, with time, Boomie also became aware of the importance of acknowledgement, and towards the end of data collection in October, even if she was distracted, she still acknowledged my comments with an “mmmm.”

Furthermore, the mentees frequently noted how useful it was to listen to themselves speak. For example, Boonie said that what we were doing (during our mentoring sessions) was “good,” because people are not always aware of some of the things that they do. Moreover, many interview and Listen and Reflect task participants remarked (unsolicited) how awareness-raising and interesting this study was. For example, Carol said “this is so interesting”; as she was listening to Chengjiang, Maris exclaimed, “Like honestly, now I’m, like, oh my gosh I have to be careful with what I say, like aghh! Because people might think [laughs]!” Meanwhile, during our sessions together, Maria, Jamie, Carol, Lisa, and others, often became conscious of their own pausing: At one point Maria rambled on, then stopped herself, and said that she was talking “worse than he,” which demonstrated that what we were doing, and what we were

71 Please see sections on Boomie’s Description and Progress and Keivan’s Description and Progress for more detailed descriptions of mentees’ progress.
talking about, was awareness-raising. Likewise, when I asked Stellar why she paused after “so” she said that she was surprised to hear that, because she had not realized that she had just trailed off and did not finish. This admission highlighted her initial lack of awareness of her own linguistic behaviour, and showed that this study helped bring it to her attention. Similarly, when I asked Svetlana why she often said “um, um” as she spoke, she said, “I never noticed that.” Hence, she, too, did not realize some of her habits.

Such realizations (as outlined above) are crucial, because learners need to become more conscious of the potential consequences of the choices they make in interaction, and be “made aware of the cultural expectations” they face in Canada, in particular, of English paralinguistic communication rules (Jenkins, 2000, p. 499). Knowing the socio-pragmatic differences between their native culture and the L2 culture can prevent a great deal of negative conversational outcomes (Huth & Taleghani-Nikazm 2006). All participants, some more than others, left this study with a new awareness of their own silence use, and of the existing diversity of cultural silence norms. This awareness is particularly important for residents of a multicultural city like Toronto. In fact, one can argue that it is a necessity, as illustrated by a story Boomie shared about her workplace.

Boomie told me that on her first day at work, she was upset because “nobody talk here.... people just stare at the computer, like a machine quiet, quiet [laughs], too much silence for me. I need music.... I can't live without music.” On her second day, she went into the office and heard music, so she was pleased. Unfortunately, soon after, a Chinese man walked up and turned the volume down. As she relayed this incident to me, she said that there were a lot of Chinese and Indian people at the office, and it seemed to her that “they do not like music.” Inadvertently, a stereotype was already starting to form. In order to prevent grudges and hurt feelings in a situation like this, to prevent Boomie from thinking that the Chinese man was
being mean, bossy, or unreasonable, or that all Chinese people hated music, it was enough to raise her awareness that Colombian people and Chinese people had different silence norms and silence tolerances, and accordingly, different expectations about silence in the work place. Such knowledge can potentially reduce the number of intercultural conflicts and negative judgments, as well as curb the development of stereotypes.

Meanwhile, raising teachers' awareness of silence is equally important. As Waring (2012) has discovered, there is a mismatch between how students and teachers interpret silence in the classroom. Teachers treat silence after understanding check questions as an indication that students have understood the lesson, and their silence, as a cue to move on. However, the students, especially the lower-level students, use silence to indicate that there is a problem, and that they do not understand the material. In addition, L2 educators need to become conscious of the fact that L2 speaker's adherence to the target language's pausing patterns may play a role in their perception of him or her as being more or less fluent, and they need to be especially cognizant of this when they assess students' language proficiency (Riazantseva, 2001).

As follows, this study has numerous pedagogical implications. The good news is that, similar to other verbal behaviours, silence can be taught as a skill, and pausing can become more native-like as learners reach higher language proficiency (Riazantseva, 2001; Sharpley, 1997; Bardovi-Harlig & Hartford, 1993). To begin with, teachers need to incorporate teaching of silence pragmatics into their materials, to help students reduce possibilities for miscues and negative attributions. As Riazantseva (2001, p. 523) put it “it is important that L2 practitioners make their students aware of the fact that mastery of an L2 involves competence in both the linguistic and paralinguistic features of any given language.” For example, teachers can

---

72 Defining best practices is not the intended consequence of this study. Research findings are often uncertain and cannot be applied directly to practice because there is no good or bad, just appropriate or inappropriate for a particular context (Sarangi, Candlin, 2003). Thus, I, as researcher, am not claiming practical relevance, because that is for practitioners to acknowledge and decide (Coupland, Sarangi & Candlin, 2001).
explicitly teach filler use to fill pauses, and demonstrate how to tailor the amount of overlapping talk to a specific culture. Since even advanced learners do not seem to acquire aspects of pragmatic competence from exposure alone, teaching chunks of language would seem to be beneficial for learners of all levels, because it will reduce cognitive load (House, 1996; Bardovi-Harlig, 2001).

In addition, it is quite evident in the amassed literature that L2 speakers, especially the less self-assured and less experienced ones, need time to prepare what they wish to say aloud (Losey, 1997). Thus, it is up to the teachers to help students learn how to gain and keep speaking opportunities, instead of interrupting or letting other students interrupt (Losey, 1997). Furthermore, ESL teachers need to communicate to their students (and someone certainly needs to communicate this to NS!) that the responsibility for being understood is shared. Hence, instead of promoting individual competence, teachers should emphasize that communication success is a joint experience (Kennedy, 2012). Therefore, if interaction can be improved by interlocutors speaking slower and more clearly, that should take precedence over any silence norms or habits.

Another feature of this study, comparing silence interpretations of NS and NNS participants, and seeing which aspects they most differ on (thereby, the aspects that are most difficult to acquire even for NNSs of high proficiency) provides specific information for ESL teachers regarding what to address in their classrooms. In particular, it is crucial to address the differences that result in marked silence usage. According the data, the most maligned and misinterpreted silences were word searches and thinking silences. Armed with this knowledge, ESL teachers can teach NNSs to add thinking indicators such as “hmmm” to their thinking silences, and search indicators such as “uhh” or “how do you say?” to their word search silences.
What is more, this study’s findings showed other areas of difficulty for L2 speakers, which also require attention from ESL instructors. For example, Korean and Chinese students, who talked about difficulties getting a turn in English-speaking environments, need to be taught how to interrupt. Maybe even have classes specifically geared to teaching how to interrupt politely: Lisa mentioned one such class, offered by her university, where students learned idioms and expressions that they could use to speak more naturally, and to be able to interrupt politely.

Furthermore, Russians need to be encouraged to use fillers. Also, Svetlana revealed that she was frequently pausing because “I have nothing to say already. Not searching for word. I finished and I don’t know what else to say…. I stopped, I just want to finish, I don’t know how.” An ESL teacher can deal with this in class by teaching students how they can wrap up an idea and relinquish a turn without sending out the wrong message to their NS interlocutor with their silence.

Moreover, Keivan said that some of his pauses occurred when he forgot, or could not say, what he had wanted to say, or when he could not connect his ideas. Thus, ESL teachers need to teach linking expressions like “hold on,” or “before we move on.”

Other useful expressions that came up during mentoring sessions were:

- If you want to indicate/signal that you have made a mistake, you can say “Oh, pardon me” or “Sorry”
- Getting-back-on-topic silence can be filled with “but I digress”; after a digression/interruption, instead of using “and uh...” you can say “Sorry, I got side tracked”
- Uncertainty can be expressed with “I don’t know” or “I am not sure”
- To interrupt, you can say: “excuse me,” “hold on,” or “before we move on.”
- Instead of stretching “sooooo” because you need to stall (sometimes NSs can view that in a negative light), you can say “let me think” or “just a moment” or “hold on.”
- Use “mmhhmm” instead of being silent for confirmation
- Transition words: Use them to relate one statement to the next one

73 Boomie said she was not familiar with these expressions, so she stretched ‘so’ instead. Thus, ESL teachers need to focus on these expressions when planning their syllabi.
Another important area that ESL teachers need to focus on, is teaching agreement and disagreement expressions. When I asked Keivan about his lack of acknowledgement, he said that “the silence is to confirm it.” I asked him why he would stay silent instead of responding, and he admitted that he did not know how to use expressions that meant agreement or disagreement. He also wanted to know expressions he could use when he could not disagree directly because there was still some doubt. Again, these are the topics ESL teachers need to cover in their classrooms. They also need to teach students to acknowledge, and show them how to do it correctly.

Furthermore, Chengjiang said that in his ESL teaching experience, it was often the case that when new immigrants did not understand something, they remained silent. ESL teachers need to explain to students that silence will not help them get their misunderstandings cleared up (and this response will only contribute to their collective silencing), whereas voicing their lack of understanding can save a lot of time and money in the long run, by allowing teachers to detect and address misunderstandings faster, and thus, teach more efficiently.

In addition to improving ESL teaching practice, this study’s findings can also help improve future mentoring practice, by describing what kind of teaching opportunities arise in these types of situations. After all, in this context, the mentor has to come up with interventions on the fly. It would be very helpful if he or she had some heads up on what topics and questions might turn up in these sessions, so he or she could prepare a little bit in advance. Also, nervous interviewers/mentors need to be taught to allow their clients to be silent (at least in the middle, or in the end, of their interviews/mentoring sessions), and they need not judge silence as a weakness, or a sign that they lack professional expertise (Sharpley, 1997). Moreover, any helpful tips from this study may be useful for tutoring and other one-on-one teaching.

---

This is particularly important, because mentoring has been shown to be a very effective settlement service for new immigrants (Metropolis, 2012).
encounters.

Another useful pedagogical implication of the present study is the need to clearly establish (at the start of a language-tutoring relationship) what exactly the interaction is supposed to be, and what is its purpose and protocol. Is it conversation practice? Is it language class? What is the procedure: a one sided Q & A or a two-way discussion? Define it. This is especially important for mentoring sessions, because the roles a mentor is required to play are very ambiguous.

Finally, doing this research was a truly valuable learning experience for me as well. I had never before listened to myself speak while in interaction with others, and I realized that I have a very low tolerance for silence. Moreover, although I do not evaluate silent people negatively, I do interrupt them an awful lot. It is something that I am now aware of, and will try to work on in future interactions, because it can become obnoxious very quickly.

Looking at the findings within a broader context, they indicate that we, as a society, need to change how we think about silence and fluency. Our primary focus should not be silence avoidance, but avoidance of miscommunication. After all, an excerpt may seem ungrammatical or disfluent, but if the speaker was successful in transferring what s/he had in mind, this kind of “hesitation-ridden speech should be highly valued as an accurate expression of speaker’s thought” (Chafe, 1985, p. 88). Moreover, to reduce miscommunication, Scollon and Scollon (1981) advised that communicators should not avoid uncomfortable moments in conversation, and instead, learn to be comfortable with them, and use them to find the truly important points in discourse. In fact, to improve communication with others in a hectic and noisy culture, it is worthwhile to pause, keep silent and slow down.

Furthermore, research indicates that it is not an absence of pausing that should be the ultimate goal, it is how one uses silence that matters; after all, pauses in NS speech are not
necessarily indicative of disfluency (Riazantseva, 2001). As Sajavaara (1987, p. 62) noted, “the ‘good’ speaker ‘knows’ how to hesitate, how to be silent, how to self-correct, how to interrupt, and how to complete expressions or leave them unfinished.” Perhaps following these pausing conventions is what causes speech to be perceived as rapid and smooth, even when it is not. In the long run, the more we know about the function and meaning of silence, the better we can deal with silence in and out of the classroom. Hopefully, by teaching students the pragmatics of silence, we can help them avoid falling victim to stereotypes and negative judgments from others.

**Limitations**

In addition to the already acknowledged limitations of the research instrument and procedure, which were outlined in Chapter Three (see the section on Instrument), one major limitation of this study is that people vary in self-awareness and in their ability to introspect. Thus, some participants were able to explain their use of silence quite well, while others were unable to articulate, or even bring into conscious awareness, some of the reasons why they had said what they had said, and had done what they had done. It is the nature of this kind of research, that those who provided the richest data for analysis, in terms of quality and quantity, do have a stronger voice in the final results of the study. I did try my best to reduce this bias, but obviously, I cannot guarantee complete objectivity. A similar problem that compromised objectivity was that there was only one coder (the researcher) and thus, inter-coder reliability has not been assessed in any way.

Furthermore, because this is a qualitative study, while the findings may be quite intriguing, they are not generalizable beyond this sample of 26 participants. In fact, because this is an explorative and descriptive study, I caution against generalization of these results. As I said previously, I acknowledge the danger of essentializing cultures, and thus, perpetuating
stereotypes, and that is not my intention at all. All this study attempted to do was describe participants' perceptions of silence, and discover any emerging recurring themes, all of which will need to be studied empirically before any concrete generalizations can be made.

Moreover, I cannot vouch for the participants’ honesty, or their commitment to provide the best answer possible. Whereas it was quite evident that people like Maria, Maris, Yuyuan, Jing, Steven, and Clay (among others) made every effort to give me their best possible response, I got a sense that some participants were not as committed, and seemed to be distracted and rushing to finish. In fact, as Fei pointed out, many may not have been as diligent as I had wanted them to be. This, of course, may have influenced their responses, and ultimately, the findings.

In addition, one cannot assume that, in their retrospective interpretations of their own silences, silence producers were accurate in their accounts and explanations why they made the pauses that they made. Retrospection, degree of awareness, and other face-saving factors may have influenced the accuracy of the silence producers’ self reports (Mackey & Gass, 2005). This limitation was best illustrated by an exchange I had with Rafael. When he said that his interpretation of the silence was “what it could have been,” since we did not know for sure, I joked that I actually knew because I had asked the speaker. He thought about it and quipped, “Only know what she told you. Do we know the truth? [laughs]”

Another drawback, which was even brought up by the listeners themselves, was that the stimulus was in audio and not video format. For example, Becky said, “Well, it’s kind of hard to see or tell, because you can’t visualize it.” Sofia agreed with this, and said that one had to see a person to be able to judge their attitude, and have a better idea of what was going on. Alexei was most vocal on this issue, and he repeatedly said that he needed to see the person, not just hear him, because he needed to see his body language to get more clues if this person “is
willing to talk or not.” He said that it could be that the silence producer was talking, but his expression was showing that he hated this and could not wait for the interview to end. In other words, it is not simply speech that creates an impression, body language matters too. Related to this limitation, Yuyuan said that the fact that she did not hear the whole conversation was a problem as well. Bahman agreed with her, saying that the conversation samples were too short, so he could not get a broader sense of what had happened. In the future, to improve the internal validity of a study like this, and to see how silence attributions are influenced by both the context and the content of conversation, during the Listen and Reflect procedure, I would need to play the conversations in their entirety.

Furthermore, some participants were a little uncomfortable with the experimental method, and the tasks that were asked of them. Tae-Hwan explained: “I mean, I can’t look into her brain, what’s going on,” and Bahman also expressed frustration with what I was asking him to do (in fact, much more so than Tae-Hwan). Maris added that it was difficult not to get embroiled in long explanations, and having to narrow one's ideas down to one immediate reaction: “It’s hard to say ‘this is context, this is words, this is emotion’ because it can be several things at once.” I tried to ease her difficulty by saying that I wanted her immediate reaction first, and then welcomed as many explanations as she had to offer.

There were also occasional problems with the quality of the audio. Some of the interviews and mentoring sessions had a bit of background noise, and even at full volume, some parts were difficult to hear, so I had to replay them. This could have added to the listeners' frustration and skewed the results.

Another major concern in this study were leading questions. No matter how hard I had tried to avoid biasing the listeners with my questions, it is likely that what I had asked (and how I had asked it) still had an impact on their answers.
An issue of projection was also an important variable that influenced listeners’ silence interpretations. While it is inevitable that each participant brings his/her life experiences with him/her to any encounter, and consequently, these experiences always influence any interaction that person has, too much projection could be problematic for the results of this study. Bahman was aware of this possibility, and, at the very start of the procedure, whispered: “I’m trying to watch my projections.” However, the real danger came from those participants who were unaware that they were doing this. For instance, Yuyuan projected a lot in her answers. When she said that “[Qing] is hesitating because, inside, she is conflicted,” as an aside, she added that she was going through a similar situation right now. Homa also projected quite a bit, and she, too, did not seem to be aware of this. What complicated the problem of projection even further, was that while projecting was a limitation, sometimes it improved the interpretation agreement scores. For example, when Bahman, Maria and Carol projected, they produced better agreement scores with their silent producers.

Finally, since no one wants to be seen as prejudiced or xenophobic, listeners tended to give socially desirable responses, and accordingly, their real attitudes toward non-native speech might have been much more negative than the results of this research indicate (Eisenstein, 1983). Surprisingly (or not), I found people more forthcoming when explaining others’ silences than their own. Also, some listeners were very concerned with making incorrect interpretations. When I told Maris that her interpretation (that the silence was so long because we were interrupted by an outside source) was incorrect (because we were not interrupted), she was rattled. Furthermore, Becky said, “hope I’m answering these right [chuckles]” showing she was also worried of being wrong. In such cases, the participants may have tried to guess what I was looking for, and instead of their honest immediate reactions, tried to tell me what they thought I had wanted to hear.
All things considered, the best solution to the aforementioned limitations is further research. Analyzing antecedents and consequents of silence at various stages of interviews or mentoring sessions, isolating what contexts make a particular silence more easily misinterpreted than others, examining why certain interlocutor statements may differ in their effects, and investigating pausing patterns of NNSs whose English proficiency is low, are only some potential avenues of future study (Riazantseva, 2001; Sharpley, 1997). Moreover, generalizability of the uncovered trends and phenomena need to be investigated through quantitative research, using larger, and more representative, samples.
Summary

Because of the ambiguous and culturally relative nature, function, and usage of silence, it is a major source of intercultural miscommunication, which frequently leads to negative judgments, and breeds ethnic and racial stereotypes. Previous research indicates that cultural differences in silence interpretation and norms are at the root of silence-related miscommunication (Nakane, 2007; Jaworski, 1993; Kivik, 1998). Thus, using a cross-cultural and interactive theoretical approach, which conceptualizes silence as a communicative linguistic form that is both semantic and pragmatic, I conducted a longitudinal, descriptive, qualitative study, which explored silence perceptions among ESL speakers (from Chinese, Korean, Russian, Colombian and Iranian cultural backgrounds), and Canadian native-speakers of English. Three different perspectives were investigated. The first perspective was obtained using stimulated recall, when eight 'silence producer' ESL participants were asked to explain their use of silence in the context of a series of intercultural mentoring sessions (17 one-and-a-half hour sessions over the course of five months) or one-shot interviews (approximately one hour each). Then, two other perspectives on these silences were procured, one from a 'listener' participant from the same cultural background as the 'silence producer', and the second from a native speaker of English. These latter two groups listened to the same excerpts of recorded conversations as 'silence producers' did, and were asked to interpret the same silences. Thus, speakers' own interpretations were compared with what functions the other two participants attributed to their silences. A total of 26 participants were recruited: eight 'silence producers' (six interviewees and two mentees), and 18 listeners (six native-speakers of English and 12 non-native speakers of English). Data were analyzed using an interactional sociolinguistic approach; a range of silence causes and functions was described, and an inter/intracultural comparison of silence interpretations was carried out in a series of five case studies. Four main themes emerged from
the data: 1) the lack of support non-native speakers of English exhibited towards each other, often judging their country(wo)men with more harshness than native speakers of English did; 2) that perception of a higher language proficiency resulted in more negative attributions of the individual's silence use; 3) that negative attitudes towards fillers may be a moderating variable underlying cross-cultural silence usage norms; and 4) the systematic silencing of ESL speakers. In addition, data indicated that all participants (across all six cultural groups) exhibited a lack of silence awareness. Furthermore, although culture was shown to impact silence interpretation, personal speaking-style variations often over-rode what cultural norms dictated. Moreover, researchers’ generalizations about Western vs. Eastern cultures proved to be crude and superficial. Finally, the data showed that while no silences were truly benign, since every type of silence was misinterpreted at some point, word search and thinking pauses, as well as some intentional pauses (such as emphasis, politeness, end-of-turn) and some unintentional pauses (memory search or blanking) were the most negatively-interpreted silences. The findings of this thesis suggest that ESL teachers and curriculum planners need to focus their curriculum construction and classroom instruction on these negatively perceived silences, because they are potential sites of miscommunication.
References


directly applied to teaching L2 pragmatics? *Language Teaching Research, 10*(1), 53–79.


UK: Palgrave Macmillan.


Norwood, NJ: Ablex.


Ablex Publishing Corporation.


Appendix A: Figure 1

*Figure 1. Participants across the two phases of the study*

**Phase 1: Silence Producers:**

- Mentee #1: Boomie
- Mentee #2: Keivan

- Interviewee #1: Jamie
- Interviewee #2: Stellar
- Interviewee #3: Chengjiang
- Interviewee #4: Qing
- Interviewee #5: Svetlana
- Interviewee #6: Stepan

17 sessions over 5 months

**Phase 2: Listeners:**

For each participant in Phase 1:

- NNS listener(s) from the same cultural background
- NS listener(s)

one-time sessions
Appendix B: Participant Consent Letters

Mentee Participant Consent Letter

Dear Participant,

My name is Alina Lemak and I am going to be your language mentor at Skills for Change. I am asking your permission to audio record our 16 mentoring sessions so I can use the recordings as a teaching tool and also as data for my thesis research study and for a long-term research project designed to improve employment opportunities for engineers like you.

Participation in my study is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time for any reason without any negative consequences. I will still be your mentor, even if you choose to withdraw.

Please note that all materials will be treated confidentially. The data will only be used as required by the aforementioned research studies and nothing else. It will never be made public and your name will not be revealed in the written project. I will keep all the identification about you, this institution, its teachers and students confidential, by using code numbers and general descriptions. I will store the data for up to three years after the end of the study. The data will be kept in locked/secure locations until destroyed.

Participation in the study will be a worthwhile educational experience, which aims to increase your awareness of your own language usage, as well as the language usage of others. I hope that by the end of the study you will learn something about your language choices and judgments in interaction, which will help you minimize miscommunication.

I would be happy to send you a summary report when the study is completed. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask them now. If you agree to participate in my study, please sign the consent form below and keep a copy for yourself.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact me at (647) 436-1923 or by email alina.lemak@gmail.com with any concerns you may have. You may also contact my supervisor, Dr. Julie Kerekes and/or the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Alina Lemak
46 Bards Walkway
Toronto, ON
M2J 4T9
Phone: (647) 436-1923
E-mail: alina.lemak@gmail.com

Dr. Julie Kerekes
Assistant Professor, Second Language Education
Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto
252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, ON M5S 1V6
Phone: (416)978-0303
E-mail: julie.kerekes@utoronto.ca
Participant Consent Form

I, ____________________________________, have been informed of the nature of the present study, including the tasks to be undertaken, and agree to participate in an interview. I have indicated whether I am willing to be audio-recorded. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time.

Name (please print):

Agree to be audio-recorded (please initial)

Agree to allow this data to be used as required by the research study (please initial)

Signature __________________________________________

Date __________________________________________

217
Interview Participant Consent Letter

Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in this study. Participation involves you allowing me a 1.5-hour interview (and if you are interested, some follow-up questions in the future) about your personal job-related experiences in Canada as well as some information about your work experience and education in your country of origin. I am asking your permission to audio record this interview session so I can use it as data for my thesis research study and for a long-term research project designed to improve employment opportunities internationally educated professionals like you.

Participation in my study is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time for any reason without any negative consequences.

Please note that all materials will be treated confidentially. The data will only be used as required by the aforementioned research studies and nothing else. It will never be made public and your name will not be revealed in the written project. I will keep all the identification about you (and anyone else or any institution you mention) confidential, by using code numbers and general descriptions. I will store the data for up to three years after the end of the study. The data will be kept in locked/secure locations until destroyed.

Participation in the study will be a worthwhile educational experience, which aims to increase your awareness of your own language usage, as well as the language usage of others. I hope that by the end of the study you will learn something about your language choices and judgments in interaction, which will help you minimize miscommunication.

I would be happy to send you a summary report when the study is completed. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask them now. If you agree to participate in my study, please sign the consent form below and keep a copy for yourself.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact me at (647) 436-1923 or by email at alina.lemak@gmail.com with any concerns you may have. You may also contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Alina Lemak
46 Bards Walkway
Toronto, ON
M2J 4T9
Phone: (647) 436-1923
E-mail: alina.lemak@gmail.com

Dr. Julie Kerekes
Assistant Professor, Second Language Education
Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto
252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, ON M5S 1V6
Phone: (416)978-0303
E-mail: julie.kerekes@utoronto.ca
I, ________________________________, have been informed of the nature of the present study, including the tasks to be undertaken, and agree to participate in an interview. I have indicated whether I am willing to be audio-recorded. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time.

Name (please print):

Agree to be audio-recorded (please initial)

Agree to allow this data to be used as required by the research study (please initial)

Signature ________________________________

Date ________________________________
Phase Two Participant Consent Form

I, __________________________________________, have been informed that the second phase of Alina Lemak’s project will involve getting others' perspectives on my silence usage. I agree to allow Alina to use the audio from our mentoring session or interview to do a listen and reflect task with a native speaker of English, and another participant from my cultural background. I am aware that this procedure will be completely confidential, and no identifying characteristics about me will be made available to other participants. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may decline or withdraw at any time.

Name (please print):

Agree to participate in the second phase of the study (please initial)

Signature __________________________________________

Date __________________________________________
Dear Participant,

Thank you for your interest in this study. Participation involves you listening to an audiotape, reflecting on what you hear as you go along and answering some follow-up questions (the whole procedure will take about 1.5 hours). I am asking your permission to audio record this session so I can use it as data for my thesis research study.

Participation in my study is completely voluntary, and you may withdraw at any time for any reason without any negative consequences.

Please note that all materials will be treated confidentially. The data will only be used as required by the aforementioned research study and nothing else. It will never be made public and your name will not be revealed in the written project. I will keep all the identification about you (and anyone else or any institution you mention) confidential, by using code numbers and general descriptions. I will store the data for up to three years after the end of the study. The data will be kept in locked/secure locations until destroyed.

Participation in the study will be a worthwhile educational experience, which aims to increase your awareness of your own language usage, as well as the language usage of others. I hope that by the end of the study you will learn something about your language choices and judgments in interaction, which will help you minimize miscommunication.

I would be happy to send you a summary report when the study is completed. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask them now. If you agree to participate in my study, please sign the consent form below and keep a copy for yourself.

Thank you for your consideration. Please contact me at (647) 436-1923 or by email at alina.lemak@gmail.com with any concerns you may have. You may also contact the Office of Research Ethics at ethics.review@utoronto.ca or 416-946-3273 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Alina Lemak
46 Bards Walkway
Toronto, ON
M2J 4T9
Phone: (647) 436-1923
E-mail: alina.lemak@gmail.com

Dr. Julie Kerekes
Assistant Professor, Second Language Education
Department of Curriculum, Teaching, and Learning
Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, University of Toronto
252 Bloor Street West, Toronto, ON M5S 1V6
Phone: (416)978-0303
E-mail: julie.kerekes@utoronto.ca
Listen and Reflect Task Participant Consent Form

I, __________________________________________, have been informed of the nature of the present study, including the tasks to be undertaken, and agree to participate in the listen and reflect procedure. I have indicated whether I am willing to be audio-recorded. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw at any time.

Name (please print):

Agree to be audio-recorded (please initial)

Signature __________________________________________

Date __________________________________________
Appendix C: Biographical Information Form

1. Gender: _____ Male  _____ Female

2. Age ______

3. a) What is your native language? ______________________
   b) What is your dominant language? (the answer for a) and b) can be the same or different)
   _______________________________

   What country were you born in?
   ________________________________________________________________

   List all the countries you have lived in and put how long you stayed there in brackets
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

   When did you come to Canada?
   ________________________________________________________________

Created by Alina Lemak, 2011
Appendix D: Character Questionnaire

Name____________________ Date____________________

Please rate the participant in the recording on the following traits (circle/check one off)

Trustworthy not at all_____ a little bit ______ usually ______ completely ______

Honest not at all ______ a little bit ______ usually ______ completely ______

Genuine not at all ______ a little bit ______ usually ______ completely ______

Sincere not at all ______ a little bit ______ usually ______ completely ______

Forthcoming (willing to share information)
not at all_____ a little bit ______ usually ______ completely ______

Coherent not at all______ a little bit ______ usually ______ completely ______

Respectful not at all______ a little bit ______ usually ______ completely ______

Talkative not at all______ a little bit ______ usually ______ completely ______

Silent not at all______ a little bit ______ usually ______ completely ______

Tedious (tiring conversation partner)
not at all_____ a little bit ______ usually ______ completely ______

Competent communicator (has something to say)
never ______ rarely ______ sometimes ______ always ______

Elaborates answers
not at all_____ a little bit ______ usually ______ completely ______

Engaged in conversation
not at all_____ a little bit ______ usually ______ completely ______

Language proficiency
very low______ beginner ______ medium ______ proficient______ fluent ______