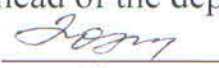


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MASTER'S THESIS
on the topic of
SILENCE AS A KEYWORD IN THE PROVERBS OF DIFFERENT
CULTURES


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Department of Translation and Intercultural Communication

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«11» 06 2024

Assignment

To the master's thesis of the student **Z.A. Kulichenko**

1. The topic of the thesis: **Silence as a keyword in the proverbs of different cultures**

(Approved by the order from _____ № _____)

2. The date of the thesis final version submission: 11th June 2025

3. The thesis baseline information: scientific works on proverbs, linguistics, culture and their application in the English language _____

4. The contents of the thesis (the objectives necessary to achieve):

1) Phraseology as a brunch of linguistic;

2) Silence as a key word in the proverbs of different cultures;

5. Appendix list (schemes, graphics, tables and other illustrative material):

1 table _____

6. Thesis advisors (by chapters): _____

7. The date of assignment issue: the 2nd of September 2024

Academic supervisor: N.M. Zalesova, assistant professor, candidate of philological sciences, assistant professor

(last name, first name, patronymic name, post, advanced degree, academic title)

The assignment is subject to execution (date): _____
(student's signature)

ABSTRACT

The thesis is comprised of 60 pages, 1 table, 52 references and includes introduction, chapter 1, chapter 2, and conclusion.

PROVERB, SILENCE PROVERBS, PHRASEOLOGY, KEYWORD, LANGUAGE, CULTURE.

The thesis deals with the silence proverbs the way they are represented in different language and culture.

The relevance of the work lies in the fact that the study of silence in proverbs is relevant both linguistically and culturally. In an era where verbal communication dominates and social discourse is increasingly fast-paced, understanding the value of silence as reflected in traditional wisdom offers insights into alternative modes of expression, restraint, and thoughtfulness. By analyzing silence in proverbs, this research contributes to cross-cultural understanding and enriches the study of paremiology (the study of proverbs), pragmatics, and intercultural communication.

The objective of the thesis is to analyze the representation of silence in proverbial expressions from different cultures, identifying recurring patterns, contrasts, and cultural implications. It seeks to answer how silence is perceived, whether as a sign of wisdom, power, submission, or something else, depending on the cultural and historical context.

The object of the study is proverbs that feature silence as a central theme. These proverbs originate from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, encompassing Chinese, English, Arabian, German and Russian traditions.

The methods of are the following: paremiological analysis, comparative analysis, semantic analysis, cultural-historical approach, corpus-based analysis.

The thesis main results were presented at the scientific conference “The Day of Science-2025” (AmSU, Blagoveshchensk). There was published a scientific article: «Silence as a key word in the proverbs of different cultures».

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INTRODUCTION

Silence has been a fundamental aspect of human communication and cultural wisdom across civilizations. Proverbs, as condensed expressions of collective knowledge, often encapsulate profound insights about silence, reflecting its various interpretations, functions, and values in different cultures. This thesis, titled as "Silence as a Keyword in the Proverbs of Different Cultures," explores the significance of silence in proverbial expressions worldwide, examining its cultural, philosophical, and linguistic dimensions.

The relevance of the work lies in the fact that the study of silence in proverbs is relevant both linguistically and culturally. In an era where verbal communication dominates and social discourse is increasingly fast-paced, understanding the value of silence as reflected in traditional wisdom offers insights into alternative modes of expression, restraint, and thoughtfulness. By analyzing silence in proverbs, this research contributes to cross-cultural understanding and enriches the study of paremiology (the study of proverbs), pragmatics, and intercultural communication.

The object of the study is proverbs that feature silence as a central theme. These proverbs originate from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds, encompassing Chinese, English, Arabian, German and Russian traditions.

The subject of the study is the linguistic, cultural, and philosophical connotations of silence in proverbs, with an emphasis on how different cultures perceive and value silence.

The objective of the thesis is to analyze the representation of silence in proverbial expressions from different cultures, identifying recurring patterns, contrasts, and cultural implications. It seeks to answer how silence is perceived, whether as a sign of wisdom, power, submission, or something else, depending on the cultural and historical context.

The methods of the study are the following:

- Paremiological analysis – studying the structure and meaning of proverbs.
- Comparative analysis – identifying similarities and differences across cultures.

- Semantic analysis – examining the meanings and implications of silence in different linguistic contexts.
- Cultural-historical approach – considering the historical and social factors influencing these proverbs.
- Corpus-based analysis – utilizing databases of proverbs to identify patterns in the usage of silence-related expressions.

The material of the study is based on a diverse corpus of proverbs collected from written sources such as proverb dictionaries, folklore collections, linguistic studies, and online paremiological databases. The exact number of proverbs is 54 (12 English proverbs, 10 German, 12 Chinese, 11 Arabic, and 9 Russian). The material spans multiple languages and regions, ensuring a broad and representative selection of proverbs.

Academic novelty is that this research offers an original contribution to the field by systematically analyzing silence in proverbs across multiple cultures. While silence has been studied in philosophy and linguistics, its treatment in proverbs remains an underexplored area. This study provides fresh insights into how silence is encoded in proverbial wisdom and how it serves as a marker of cultural identity.

Theoretical significance of the work is that it contributes to theoretical discussions in paremiology, sociolinguistics, and cultural anthropology. By examining the role of silence in different linguistic traditions, the research enhances our understanding of how cultures conceptualize non-verbal communication and the boundaries between speech and silence.

The practical value of the work is that:

- intercultural communication - individuals have an understanding of the role of silence in different cultural contexts.
- Translation studies – aiding in the interpretation and translation of silence-related proverbs.
- Education and pedagogy – providing insights for teaching about cultural differences in communication styles.

- Linguistic research – offering data for further studies in paremiology and discourse analysis.

Approbation. The research has been presented at academic conferences on linguistics, paremiology, and cultural studies. Some findings have been published in peer-reviewed journals specializing in proverb studies and intercultural communication.

Provisions submitted to defence:

1. Silence in proverbs is a cross-cultural phenomenon, but its meanings and implications vary significantly across different societies.

2. Silence is often associated with wisdom, but it can also signify power, submission, secrecy, or consent, depending on the cultural and linguistic context.

3. The perception of silence in proverbs reflects broader cultural attitudes toward speech, authority, and social interaction.

4. A comparative analysis of silence-related proverbs reveals both universal valuations of restraint and culturally distinct functions shaped by history, philosophy, and social norms.

5. The study of silence in proverbs contributes to a broader understanding of non-verbal communication and the implicit meanings embedded in traditional wisdom.

1 PHRASEOLOGY AS A BRUNCH OF LINGUISTICS

1.1 Definition and Scope of Phraseology

Phraseology, as a branch of linguistics, can be defined as the study of how words combine to form stable, often predictable, multi-word units. Unlike free word combinations, which can be generated spontaneously by the speaker based on the rules of syntax, phraseological units are more fixed in structure and meaning. They often carry cultural connotations and reflect the historical evolution of a language.

The scope of phraseology is broad, covering expressions such as:

- Idioms, like “kick the bucket” (to die), where the meaning cannot be deduced from the individual words.
- Collocations, such as “make a decision” or “fast food,” where the words co-occur more frequently together than with other words.
- Proverbs or sayings, like “A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush,” which convey wisdom or advice in a fixed form.
- Phrasal verbs, like “run into” (to meet unexpectedly), where the meaning is a combination of the verb and preposition.

These expressions function as fundamental building blocks of fluent communication, often acting as shortcuts to convey complex meanings without the need for elaborate explanations.

Phraseological units, commonly referred to as idioms, constitute a vital layer of figurative language where the meaning is often inseparable from the cultural and historical background that shaped it. As Duk and Levitskaya emphasize, idioms are “integral to authentic communication,”¹ since their semantic value rarely stems from literal interpretation. For example, to kick the bucket encodes the concept of dying, while a direct translation would lead to semantic confusion. Idioms such as to blow one’s top (to become angry) or behind the eight ball (in trouble) rely heavily on

¹ Duk A., Levitskaya M. English Phraseological Units and Idioms. Minsk: Belarusian National Technical University, 2008, 120 c.

metaphorical associations and fixed cultural imagery, which may prove opaque to non-native speakers.

In this regard, it is essential to recognize that phraseological units are deeply embedded in the cultural worldview of a language community. As highlighted by the author of the study *Phraseology and Culture in English*, phraseology functions not merely as a linguistic phenomenon, but as a cultural one. Idioms and fixed expressions act as carriers of national identity, reflecting historical experience, everyday life, and collective values².

The article emphasizes that English idioms such as *Time is money* or *Don't put all your eggs in one basket* illustrate a cultural focus on pragmatism, self-reliance, and financial caution. These expressions are rooted in the socio-economic fabric of English-speaking societies and reflect cultural attitudes toward time, risk, and personal responsibility. Thus, phraseology is closely intertwined with cultural cognition, and its mastery requires not only linguistic but also intercultural competence.

Moreover, the article points out that many phraseological units are culturally bound and often untranslatable in a literal sense. Their successful interpretation depends on familiarity with cultural background knowledge and shared symbolic frameworks. In this way, phraseology provides unique insights into the mentality of native speakers and becomes a valuable tool in cross-cultural communication and education³.

The inherent complexity of such expressions lies in their dual nature: while they enrich speech with vivid imagery and condensed meaning, they simultaneously pose significant challenges for learners. Misapplication of idioms may result in pragmatic failure or even unintended humor, as the context-specific use of idioms is crucial.⁴

² Skandera P. (ред.). *Phraseology and Culture in English*. Berlin; N. Y.: Mouton de Gruyter, 2007. 408 c.

³ Skandera P. (ред.). *Phraseology and Culture in English*. Berlin; N. Y.: Mouton de Gruyter, 2007. 408 c.

⁴ Duk A., Levitskaya M. *English Phraseological Units and Idioms*. Minsk: Belarusian National Technical University, 6.г. 120 c.

To better understand this complexity, idioms are often categorized according to their semantic transparency. Duk and Levitskaya propose a three-tiered taxonomy⁵:

- Phraseological fusions (completely opaque): e.g., at sixes and sevens (in disarray), to come a cropper (to fail catastrophically).
- Phraseological unities (partially transparent): e.g., to sit on the fence (to remain neutral), to lose one's head (to panic).
- Phraseological collocations (relatively transparent): e.g., bosom friends (close friends), gospel truth (undeniable fact).

This classification highlights how idioms range from purely idiomatic to semi-compositional and conventional word pairings, reflecting the diverse ways they function within language.

From an etymological perspective, idioms emerge through several mechanisms, such as morphological adaptation (make hay while the sun shines → to make hay), semantic shift (care killed the cat), antonymic contrast (fat cat → thin cat), and borrowing (Lebensraum → living space). Notably, some idioms are credited to literary origins, such as Benjamin Franklin's time is money and Washington Irving's the almighty dollar.

The article "English Phraseology in Teaching: Interrelation of Theory and Practice" by Zerkina and Kostina (2015) expands upon these ideas, combining both theoretical insights and practical implications for teaching. It explores the semantic complexity of phraseological units, emphasizing how PUs encode cultural-historical values and resist literal translation. Meaning derivation is shown to exist on a continuum – from transparent units like break the ice to opaque ones such as kick the bucket.⁶

⁵ Duk A., Levitskaya M. English Phraseological Units and Idioms. Minsk: Belarusian National Technical University, 6.r. 120 c.

⁶ Zerkina N., Kostina N. English Phraseology in Teaching: Interrelation of Theory and Practice // GlobELT: An International Conference on Teaching and Learning English as an Additional Language. Antalya, Turkey. Russia: Nosov Magnitogorsk State Technical University, 2015. 10 c.

The authors propose a typology of PU components, dividing them into four categories: real words (e.g. face in face the music), potential words (e.g. heart in lose heart), “former” words with detached meanings (e.g. cropper in come a cropper), and ghost-words – lexical items that exist only in fixed expressions, such as muttons in return to muttons (a calque from French).

The article also outlines competing theoretical views. Molotkov denies the lexical status of PU components, seeing them as purely structural. Savitsky suggests a hybrid status, while Alefirenko advocates for a cognitive view, where PU meaning emerges from an interaction between linguistic form and cultural knowledge.

Pedagogically, the article stresses the need for both diachronic (historical) and synchronic (functional) approaches to teaching idioms. It recommends combining linguistic analysis with contextual practice and cultural interpretation. Because phraseological units often carry subjective and connotative meanings, situational appropriateness must be a key focus in instruction.

Ultimately, phraseological units are seen as a linguistic-cognitive continuum where form, meaning, and culture intersect. Effective teaching requires helping learners both decode (comprehend) and encode (produce) idiomatic language with cultural awareness and communicative competence.

For language learners, understanding and using phraseological units is crucial for achieving fluency. Non-native speakers often struggle with idiomatic expressions and collocations, as they do not always follow logical patterns that can be easily translated or deduced from their constituent words. Mastering these expressions enables learners to sound more natural and authentic in their speech, making their language use not only grammatically correct but also culturally and contextually appropriate.

Furthermore, phraseological competence helps learners interpret language more efficiently. In both spoken and written discourse, encountering idiomatic expressions, proverbs, or common collocations can be a challenge for those unfamiliar with them. For example, a learner who interprets “raining cats and dogs” literally might miss the intended meaning that it’s raining heavily. Understanding

such phrases is not just about translating words but about grasping the cultural nuances and contextual applications inherent in the language.

Over the years, various theoretical approaches have emerged to understand and categorize phraseology.

These theories range from structuralist perspectives, which focus on the formal properties of set expressions, to cognitive and pragmatic theories, which examine how phraseological units are processed by the human mind and used in communication.

In the early 20th century, structuralist linguists such as Ferdinand de Saussure laid the groundwork for understanding phraseology as a system of language: "Language is a system of signs that express ideas, and the relationship between the signifier (the form of a word) and the signified (the concept it represents) is arbitrary and based on social convention."⁷ Later, more detailed studies in the field of lexicology and semantics expanded the understanding of fixed expressions as not just linguistic structures but also carriers of meaning and cultural significance.

In more recent years, cognitive linguistics has provided insights into how phraseological units reflect conceptual metaphors and cognitive patterns. For instance, understanding that "breaking the ice" is a metaphor for initiating social interaction highlights how cognitive structures influence language use. Similarly, pragmatic approaches focus on how context and usage patterns shape the interpretation and meaning of set expressions in actual communication.

Phraseology is an essential area of linguistic study, bridging the gap between formal language rules and the fluid, dynamic ways in which language is used in everyday life. By investigating its various components, this paper will offer a deeper understanding of how language functions beyond individual words and contribute to our broader understanding of communication.

1.2 Proverbs: main features and functions

⁷ Saussure F. de. Course in General Linguistics / ред. Bally C., Sechehaye A.; пер. Harris R. London: Open Court Publishing, 1986. 274 c.

Proverbs are concise, commonly known expressions that convey traditional wisdom, shared values, and life lessons. As a distinct type of phraseological unit, proverbs are characterized by their fixed structure, metaphorical meaning, and didactic function. Unlike idioms or collocations, proverbs often offer general truths or moral advice derived from collective cultural experiences. Their concise nature and rhythmic qualities make them memorable and easily transmitted across generations, contributing to the oral and written heritage of a language community⁸.

The formation of proverbs spans centuries, rooted deeply in the accumulated experience and practical wisdom of communities. Traditionally transmitted orally, proverbs represent one of the oldest forms of folk literature. They crystallize the collective knowledge of ancestors, reflecting socio-historical conditions, moral values, and daily realities of past societies.⁹ This historical layering endows proverbs with cultural and historical significance as living relics that preserve the worldview of previous generations.¹⁰ For example, many English proverbs originating from medieval times retain references to agrarian life, highlighting the enduring connection between proverb content and the historical context of their creation.

Proverbs typically exhibit several linguistic features. First, they are structurally stable, meaning their form tends to resist change over time. Phrases like “Honesty is the best policy” or “When in Rome, do as the Romans do” remain fixed in wording, even as language evolves. This fixedness is a defining characteristic that distinguishes proverbs from other phraseological units and aids their recognizability and memorability.¹¹

Second, proverbs are often metaphorical or symbolic, allowing them to communicate complex ideas through simple imagery. For example, “Don’t count your chickens before they hatch” uses a farming metaphor to warn against premature

⁸ Mieder W. *Proverbs: A Handbook*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004. 242 c.

⁹ Mieder W. *Proverbs: A Handbook*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004. 242 c.

¹⁰ Dundes A. *Interpreting Folklore*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980. 192 c.

¹¹ Norrick N. R. *How Proverbs Mean: Semantic Studies in English Proverbs*. Berlin: Mouton, 1985. 211 c.

expectations. Metaphor enables proverbs to compress extensive cultural knowledge into vivid and easily grasped images.¹²

Third, many proverbs employ parallelism, alliteration, rhyme, or rhythm to enhance memorability. Examples such as “Easy come, easy go” or “No pain, no gain” illustrate how poetic devices contribute to the oral transmission and longevity of proverbs.¹³ Functionally, proverbs serve multiple roles in communication. One of their primary functions is didactic – they teach moral lessons or offer practical advice. For instance, “Look before you leap” cautions individuals to consider the consequences of their actions. In this sense, proverbs encapsulate societal norms and values, reflecting what is considered wise or acceptable behavior in a given culture¹⁴. This makes them not only linguistic artifacts but also cultural ones.

Proverbs cover a wide variety of thematic fields and can be classified according to the subjects they address. Common categories include moral and ethical lessons, social relationships, natural phenomena, work and labor, time and fate, and practical wisdom about everyday life.¹⁵ For instance, proverbs like “Hard work pays off” belong to the category of labor-related wisdom, while “Time and tide wait for no man” addresses the concept of time’s inevitability.

This thematic classification underscores the multifunctionality of proverbs, which not only teach morals but also reflect observations about nature, human behavior, and social dynamics. Additionally, proverbs vary stylistically and functionally within these categories, some being purely didactic, others ironic or humorous.¹⁶

Functionally, proverbs serve multiple roles in communication. One of their primary functions is didactic – they teach moral lessons or offer practical advice. For instance, “Look before you leap” cautions individuals to consider the consequences of their actions. Proverbs encapsulate societal norms and values, reflecting what is

¹² Lakoff G., Johnson M. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. 242 c.

¹³ Mieder W. *Proverbs: A Handbook*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004. 242 c.

¹⁴ Hrisztova-Gotthardt H., Varga M. A. (ред.). *Introduction to Paremiology: A Comprehensive Guide to Proverb Studies*. Warsaw: De Gruyter Open, 2015. 380 c.

¹⁵ Shaw B. *The Proverb*. London: Penguin Books, 1993. 168 c.

¹⁶ Dundes A. *Interpreting Folklore*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980. 192 c.

considered wise or acceptable behavior in a given culture. This didactic nature makes them powerful instruments of socialization and education.¹⁷

Another important function is rhetorical. In both everyday conversation and formal discourse, speakers use proverbs to lend authority, familiarity, or persuasive force to their arguments. Because proverbs are culturally recognized and widely accepted, referencing one can strengthen a speaker's position or create a sense of shared understanding with the audience. For example, a politician invoking "A house divided against itself cannot stand" appeals to unity through a well-known moral lesson (Norrick, 1985).

Proverbs also have a cognitive function, aiding memory and comprehension. Their compact form and imagery make them useful tools for summarizing complex situations or guiding decision-making¹⁸. This is particularly relevant in educational contexts, where teachers may use proverbs to illustrate abstract concepts. Moreover, their repeated use reinforces certain thought patterns and worldview assumptions, subtly shaping how people interpret events or interact with others.

The meaning and effect of a proverb can vary significantly depending on the context in which it is used. Factors such as the speaker's intention, the relationship between interlocutors, the social setting, and intonation can alter the interpretation of the same proverb. For example, the proverb "Silence is golden" can be uttered sincerely as praise for discretion, ironically to criticize taciturnity, or even sarcastically to rebuke someone's silence.¹⁹

Contextual variation highlights the pragmatic dimension of proverbs, where understanding requires shared cultural knowledge and sensitivity to social cues. This dynamic usage contributes to the vitality of proverbs as living elements of language.²⁰

Proverbs do not merely reflect culture – they actively participate in shaping cultural identity and social norms. By embedding shared values and behavioral models, proverbs contribute to the continuity of collective memory and reinforce a

¹⁷ Mieder W. *Proverbs: A Handbook*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004. 242 c.

¹⁸ Gibbs R. W., Beitel D. What Proverb Understanding Reveals about How People Think // *Psychological Bulletin*. 1995. T. 118, № 1. C. 133–154.

¹⁹ Mieder W. *Proverbs: A Handbook*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004. 242 c.

²⁰ Norrick N. R. *How Proverbs Mean: Semantic Studies in English Proverbs*. Berlin: Mouton, 1985. 211 c.

sense of belonging within a community or nation.²¹ For example, Russian proverbs emphasizing patience, endurance, or communal solidarity express cultural ideals that help maintain social cohesion.

Furthermore, proverbs are often invoked in moments of cultural affirmation or negotiation, functioning as symbolic resources in the construction and preservation of ethnic or national identity.

Cross-cultural studies reveal that while the content of proverbs varies widely, their functions are remarkably universal. Every culture has proverbial expressions addressing similar themes such as patience, hard work, honesty, and fate. For instance, the English proverb “Actions speak louder than words” shares conceptual equivalence with the Chinese saying “听其言，观其行” (“Listen to their words, but watch their actions”) (Yao, 1999).

At the same time, differences in wording, metaphor, and usage reflect unique cultural worldviews, values, and historical experiences. This duality illustrates how proverbs serve as a window into both universal human concerns and culturally specific patterns of thought.

In the era of digital communication and globalization, proverbs continue to be relevant but also undergo transformation. New forms such as internet memes or viral slogans can be seen as contemporary analogues to traditional proverbs, fulfilling similar functions of social commentary and shared wisdom in digital culture.²²

Moreover, globalization facilitates cross-cultural exchange of proverbial expressions, sometimes leading to hybridization or reinterpretation. Despite these changes, proverbs remain a vital part of linguistic heritage and everyday communication.

Proverbs are frequently employed to enhance expressiveness and impact in literature, public speaking, and daily interaction. Writers and orators use proverbs to evoke familiarity, create emotional resonance, or provide moral framing. In everyday

²¹ Dundes A. *Interpreting Folklore*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980. 192 c.

²² Shifman L. *Memes in Digital Culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014. 216 c.

conversation, proverbs serve as concise summaries or warnings, often introduced to validate a point or teach a lesson.

In educational settings, proverbs are effective tools for cultural transmission, language learning, and moral education. Their memorability and imagery facilitate understanding and retention of abstract idea.²³

Proverbs are more than decorative elements of speech; they are integral to how language conveys collective wisdom, enforces cultural norms, and supports rhetorical and cognitive processes. Their persistence across time and cultures underscores their importance in both linguistic study and everyday communication. The multifaceted nature of proverbs – historical, linguistic, functional, and cultural – makes them a rich subject for interdisciplinary research and an essential component of cultural identity.

1.3 Proverbs and culture

Proverbs are concise expressions of collective wisdom that often reflect the values, beliefs, and experiences of a culture. Unlike idioms or collocations, which primarily serve linguistic or grammatical functions, proverbs function as moral guides, cultural indicators, and repositories of social norms. They are used across cultures to transmit traditional knowledge, shape behavior, and provide commentary on human nature and society.

Proverbs have served as cultural compasses since antiquity. In medieval Europe, collections like Erasmus's *Adagia* functioned not only as linguistic references but also as moral guides, reflecting societal norms and religious value.²⁴ Similarly, in ancient China, Confucian sayings were passed down as proverbs to shape social behavior and interpersonal ethics.²⁵

One of the key features of proverbs is their didactic function: they often aim to teach or advise. Phrases like “Actions speak louder than words” or “He who hesitates is lost” serve as moral or practical guidelines and are passed down through generations²⁶. This transmission plays a significant role in cultural continuity and

²³ Tannen D. Silence: Anything but Silent // *Language in Society*. 1985. T. 14, № 1. C. 93–95.

²⁴ Mieder W. *Proverbs: A Handbook*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004. 242 c.

²⁵ Chen X. *Confucianism and the Chinese Way of Life*. London: Routledge, 2017. 178 c.

²⁶ Mieder W. *Proverbs: A Handbook*. Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 2004. 242 c.

intergenerational communication. By encapsulating culturally specific moral lessons and social norms, proverbs reinforce group identity and continuity. For example, in Irish culture, sayings like “A silent mouth is sweet to hear” reflect values of moderation and tact, helping to distinguish group-specific communication styles.²⁷

Proverbs also serve as cultural mirrors, encapsulating the priorities and philosophies of the societies in which they originate. For example, the Chinese proverb “Silence is a source of great strength” emphasizes self-control and introspection, aligning with Confucian²⁸. In contrast, Western cultures may favor proverbs that emphasize action and individualism, such as the American saying “God helps those who help themselves.” In Japan, the saying 「沈黙は金」 (“Silence is golden”) stresses inner calm and harmony, while in Spanish, “En boca cerrada no entran moscas” (“Flies don’t enter a closed mouth”) reflects wariness about excessive speech. These comparative examples underscore the universality of proverbial themes – such as the power of silence – while highlighting culturally distinct ways of expressing them.

Proverbs are deeply embedded in social interaction. In many African and Native American communities, proverbs are employed as rhetorical tools in daily speech, storytelling, and conflict resolution²⁹. Their use signals cultural competence and wisdom. In Islamic tradition, proverbs derived from the Qur’an or Hadith are widely used in moral discourse and family education, reinforcing religious values.

Proverbs also play an essential role in early education and socialization. In Confucian teachings, sayings like “知之为知之，不知为不知” (“To know what you know and know what you don’t know is true knowledge”) are used to instill values of humility and learning. Similarly, African proverbs like “Wisdom is like a baobab tree;

²⁷ Dundes A. *Interpreting Folklore*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1980. 192 c.

²⁸ Hrisztova-Gotthardt H., Varga M. A. (ред.). *Introduction to Paremiology: A Comprehensive Guide to Proverb Studies*. Warsaw: De Gruyter Open, 2015. 380 c.

²⁹ Obeng S. G. The Proverb as Mitigating and Politeness Strategy in Akan Discourse // *Anthropological Linguistics*. 1996. T. 38, № 3. C. 521–549.

no one individual can embrace it” emphasize collective knowledge in child-rearing practices. In Western households, parents and teachers frequently use expressions like “Don’t cry over spilled milk” or “Practice makes perfect” to teach patience and resilience.

Literature provides a rich domain for examining the intersection between proverbs and culture. Many authors use proverbs to explore philosophical themes or develop characters. For instance, in Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*, the proverb “Give every man thy ear, but few thy voice” (Act 1, Scene 3) promotes the value of silence and discernment, reflecting Elizabethan ideals of prudence³⁰. In Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, silence is portrayed as a spiritual strength. The character Father Zosima embodies the proverb “Silence is golden,” symbolizing wisdom and inner peace. Similarly, in Indian literature, Tagore writes in *Gitanjali*: “The language of silence is understood by the heart,” reflecting Eastern spiritual traditions where silence is a form of communion with the divine³¹. These literary examples show that proverbs function as narrative devices and philosophical statements, shaping both plot and thematic depth. The integration of culturally specific proverbs allows authors to subtly convey social norms and emotional states.

Proverbs about silence are particularly telling. In Western literature, silence is often portrayed as meaningful subtext. In *Wuthering Heights*, Heathcliff’s silence conveys disdain and inner torment, echoing the proverb “Silence is the perfect expression of scorn.” In *Pride and Prejudice*, Elizabeth Bennet’s quiet disapproval communicates more than words could, embodying the idea that “Silence is the most perfect expression of contempt.”

Beyond literature, folklore and oral traditions are rich sources of proverbs, offering insight into communal values. The African saying “Silence is the best answer to a fool” teaches discretion and restraint, while the Russian “Silence is a

³⁰ Gibbs R. W., Beitel D. What Proverb Understanding Reveals about How People Think // *Psychological Bulletin*. 1995. T. 118, № 1. C. 133–154.

³¹ Lakoff G., Johnson M. *Metaphors We Live By*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980. 242 c.

fence around wisdom” emphasizes thoughtful speech³². These sayings function as moral compasses and are often passed on through storytelling or daily conversation.

Proverbs are also powerful tools in political and religious rhetoric. Leaders often invoke well-known sayings to lend authority or foster solidarity. For instance, Martin Luther King Jr. referenced proverbs from the Bible and African-American oral traditions to support moral arguments and appeal to collective memory (Mieder, 1993). Similarly, political speeches across cultures frequently draw on proverbial language to emphasize national identity, unity, or shared values.

In the digital age, the essence of proverbs lives on in memes, aphorisms, and viral phrases. Platforms like Twitter and TikTok condense wisdom or humor into tweetable forms, which resemble traditional proverbs in brevity and resonance. These “digital proverbs” reflect contemporary values, humor, and anxieties, suggesting that the proverbial form remains adaptive and culturally relevant.³³

Proverbs thus play a multifaceted role: they are tools of communication, markers of cultural identity, and literary devices. Their power lies in their ability to condense complex social and emotional truths into accessible, memorable forms.

When we examine proverbs through the lens of culture and literature, we gain a deeper understanding of how language not only reflects but also shapes human experience.

Phraseology and proverbs represent a unique phenomenon in language, where linguistics, culture, and history intertwine into a unified system of meanings. These fixed expressions are not merely sets of words but function as “time capsules” preserving centuries-old wisdom, social norms, and the worldview of entire nations. They serve as a mechanism of cultural memory, transmitting across generations not only linguistic patterns but also philosophical concepts, moral principles, and even strategies of social behavior.

The defining feature of phraseological units and proverbs is their profound cultural embeddedness. The same concept – such as silence – takes on diametrically

³² Norrick N. R. *How Proverbs Mean: Semantic Studies in English Proverbs*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter, 1985. 211 c.

³³ Shifman L. *Memes in Digital Culture*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2014. 216 c.

opposed connotations across cultures: from wisdom and spiritual strength (as in Taoism) to suspicion or forced submission (as in authoritarian societies). At the same time, universal human values – such as honesty, diligence, or caution – are reflected in the proverbs of all peoples, yet articulated through the prism of local metaphors and historical experience. Thus, English pragmatism ("Time is money") and Russian fatalism ("Speak less, and you'll live longer") convey the same idea – the value of resources – but within entirely different cultural frameworks.

The most crucial role of these linguistic units lies in their functional versatility. They serve as tools of education, means of rhetorical persuasion, and markers of group identity. In literature, they become powerful symbols, while in the digital age, they evolve into new forms – memes, slogans, aphorisms – retaining their essence: the ability to condense complex ideas into concise, memorable formulas.

Thus, the study of phraseology and proverbs extends far beyond pure linguistics. It is an exploration of the very mechanism of cultural encoding, where language functions not merely as a means of communication but as a living system encapsulating collective experience, fears, ideals, and even subconscious societal attitudes. Understanding this system allows us not only to comprehend the past but also to explain many contemporary communicative phenomena – from political slogans to internet discourse. Ultimately, phraseological units and proverbs demonstrate that language is a mirror reflecting not just reality but the spirit of a people – their "mental DNA."

2 SILENCE AS A KEY WORD IN THE PROVERBS OF DIFFERENT CULTURES

Silence, often misunderstood as the mere absence of sound, is a powerful and complex element of human communication. This chapter explores the multifaceted roles of silence, examining its cultural, pragmatic, technological, and artistic dimensions. By synthesizing insights from linguistics, sociology, and media studies, we aim to demonstrate how silence functions as an active communicative tool that fosters understanding, conveys emotions, and shapes interactions across diverse contexts.

1. Silence as a Communicative Tool

Edward T. Hall argued that silence is a crucial component of communication, especially in high-context cultures, where it can express respect, contemplation, or agreement³⁴. Silence transcends linguistic boundaries, serving as a paraverbal element that enriches communication. Key aspects include:

Active Listening: Silence signals respect, attentiveness, and reflection, enabling deeper engagement in conversations.

Emotional Expression: It can convey fear, empathy, disagreement, or contemplation, depending on context.

Strategic Use: In negotiations or conflicts, silence can assert power, avoid confrontation, or encourage introspection.

2. Cultural Interpretations of Silence

Cultural norms profoundly influence the perception and use of silence:

High-Context Cultures (e.g., Japan, Finland): Silence signifies respect, thoughtfulness, or harmony.

Low-Context Cultures (e.g., U.S., Spain): Prolonged silence may be interpreted as indifference or discomfort.

³⁴ Hall E. T. *Beyond Culture*. N. Y.: Anchor Books, 1976. 320 c.

Stella Ting-Toomey emphasized that in collectivist cultures, silence is used to maintain harmony and “face,” whereas individualistic cultures prefer direct verbal communication³⁵.

3. Pragmatic and Linguistic Perspectives

Jaworski describes silence as a linguistic marker that carries cognitive and interpersonal functions, serving as a powerful means of communication beyond words.³⁶ Similarly, Ephratt highlights that silence can function as a pragmatic device conveying messages indirectly within conversational contexts.³⁷

From a pragmatic perspective, silence is a deliberate communicative act with illocutionary force:

Intentional Omission: Choosing silence over speech can communicate ambiguity, refusal, or strategic withholding.

Contextual Dependency: Its meaning depends heavily on situational factors such as power relations, social roles, or relational closeness.

4. Silence in the Digital Age

Technology has transformed silent communication, especially among younger generations:

Preference for Text: The so-called “Generation Mute” prefers messaging apps (e.g., WhatsApp) over vocal calls, valuing control and asynchronous interaction³⁸.

5. Artistic and Literary Dimensions

Silence serves as a potent expressive medium in various art forms:

Cinema: Films like *No Country for Old Men* (2007) utilize silence strategically to build tension and underscore existential themes (Plantinga, 2009).

Music: John Cage’s composition 4’33” famously frames silence itself as an auditory experience, challenging traditional perceptions of sound and music³⁹.

³⁵ Ting-Toomey S. Toward a Theory of Conflict and Culture // *International Journal of Intercultural Relations*. 1985. T. 9, № 1. C. 1–47.

³⁶ Jaworski A. Silence // *Encyclopedia of Language & Linguistics*. 2-е изд. Amsterdam: Elsevier, 2006. T. 11. C. 377–379.

³⁷ Ephratt M. The Pragmatics of Silence: Conversational Functions and Implications // *Journal of Pragmatics*. 2008. T. 40, № 12. C. 2157–2176.

³⁸ Valkenburg P. M., Peter J. Social Consequences of the Internet for Adolescents: A Decade of Research // *Current Directions in Psychological Science*. 2009. T. 18, № 1. C. 1–5.

³⁹ Gann K. *No Such Thing as Silence: John Cage’s 4’33”*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010. 304 c.

Literature: Silence in Emily Dickinson's poetry and Shelagh Stephenson's plays often depicts isolation, repression, and unspoken trauma, serving as a thematic and stylistic device.

Conclusion

Far from being a passive void, silence is a dynamic and intentional element of human communication – shaped by culture, context, and creativity. This chapter has shown that silence is not merely the absence of speech but a presence with its own grammar, its own logic, and its own power. It functions across disciplines as a communicative, pragmatic, cultural, technological, and artistic force.

Silence enriches communication by offering space for reflection, signaling emotions, and allowing nuance to surface where words might fail or falter. In high-context cultures, it conveys respect and social harmony; in low-context cultures, it can create tension or uncertainty. Across these spectrums, silence reflects deep cultural codes – as a form of discipline, self-protection, or dignity.

From a linguistic and pragmatic perspective, silence is never random; it is often strategic, context-dependent, and meaningful. It can withhold, affirm, protest, or soothe – carrying illocutionary force that rivals speech. As media environments evolve, silence too transforms: in the digital age, younger generations use textual silence and asynchronous communication to retain agency, privacy, and emotional space.

In art and literature, silence transcends language altogether – becoming a canvas for tension, ambiguity, or transcendence. Whether in music, film, or poetry, it can render absence meaningful, turning the unsaid into the unforgettable.

Ultimately, silence reveals as much as it conceals. It draws attention not only to what is spoken, but to the conditions under which speech is possible, permitted, or withheld. As this chapter has demonstrated, silence is one of the most nuanced forms of human expression – at once universal and culture-bound, intimate and strategic, fragile and powerful. To understand silence is to listen beyond language –to hear the meanings that emerge when words fall away.

2.1 Silence as a key word in the proverbs of the English culture

Silence occupies a paradoxical yet potent place in English-speaking cultures, simultaneously evoking discretion, prudence, suppression, and ambiguity. This chapter investigates the representation of silence in English proverbs, applying the lenses of linguistic anthropology, pragmatics, and cultural studies to reveal how silence is encoded as a form of moral and strategic behavior.

English proverbs are rich in metaphoric and moralistic representations of silence. They not only reflect communicative preferences but also encapsulate historical and societal shifts in the understanding of voice, authority, and self-restraint. From the enduring maxim “Silence is golden” to the more cautionary “Children should be seen and not heard,” these expressions convey deeply embedded cultural assumptions about the social role of speech and the value of reticence.

Silence as a Cultural Construct in English-Speaking Societies

Unlike high-context cultures where silence is often positively connoted, English-speaking cultures (particularly in the UK and the U.S.) tend to treat silence with ambivalence. According to Edward T. Hall, low-context cultures rely more on explicit verbal expression, which can position silence as uncomfortable or suspicious. However, within the sphere of proverbs, silence is frequently re-evaluated as a virtue – evidence of maturity, self-control, or wisdom.⁴⁰

As Stella Ting-Toomey notes, cultural communication styles influence how silence is perceived: while Anglo cultures often prize assertiveness and clarity, there remains an undercurrent of admiration for those who know when to withhold speech. Proverbs thus serve to mediate this tension, constructing silence as a behavior that is both socially strategic and morally desirable.⁴¹

1. Axiological Function: Silence as Virtue

A dominant theme in English proverbs is the moral elevation of silence. These expressions extol silence as a marker of intelligence, caution, and good judgment:

⁴⁰ Hall E. T. *Beyond Culture*. N. Y.: Anchor Books, 1976. 320 c.

⁴¹ Ting-Toomey S. *Communicating Across Cultures*. N. Y.: Guilford Press, 1999. 289 c.

- “Silence is golden.” This iconic proverb originates from the earlier saying, “Speech is silver, silence is golden,” which appeared in English in the 19th century but draws on much older Western traditions, including medieval Christian and Stoic teachings. It encapsulates the belief that silence, in many situations, is superior to speech – more refined, more powerful, and more virtuous.

- “A still tongue makes a wise head.” This proverb reinforces the association of verbal restraint with intelligence and sagacity. In a culture where talkativeness may be linked with carelessness, the ideal of quiet wisdom finds cultural resonance.

- “He who says little is seldom foolish.” Here, the proverb suggests that speaking less reduces the likelihood of error or embarrassment – a pragmatic approach consistent with Anglo communication norms that prize cautious self-presentation.

These proverbs reflect a cultural appreciation for self-control, especially in public and professional domains. They also hint at a Protestant ethic of restraint and moral discipline, which has historically influenced British and American communication values.

2. Directive Function: Silence as Social Regulation

English proverbs also impose silence as a normative behavior, particularly for maintaining decorum, hierarchy, and order:

- “If you can’t say anything nice, don’t say anything at all.” This Americanized moral instruction teaches children to restrain negative speech and instead practice silence as a form of kindness and social discipline.

- “Children should be seen and not heard.” Once common in British culture, this expression highlights the historical silencing of youth and women, reinforcing hierarchical structures where the right to speech is tied to authority and age.

- “Think before you speak.” This widely circulated maxim is not uniquely English, but its frequent use in English-speaking cultures underscores the importance placed on premeditation and verbal prudence.

These proverbs serve to regulate behavior within family, school, and public life, reinforcing silence as a virtue aligned with respect, civility, and social control.

3. Emotive and Informative Functions: Silence as a Communicative Gesture

While English-speaking societies may be verbally expressive, proverbs reveal an appreciation for silence's communicative power in emotionally charged or ambiguous situations:

- “Silence speaks louder than words.” This proverb turns the traditional value of speech on its head, suggesting that silence can express more than verbal declarations – especially in moments of grief, disapproval, or intense feeling.

- “Silence gives consent.” Common in legal and ethical discourse, this saying implies that a failure to object is interpreted as agreement. Though contentious in modern consent theory, it reflects a cultural tradition of interpreting silence contextually, often in hierarchical settings.

- “Silence is the sleep that nourishes wisdom.” Attributed to Francis Bacon, this poetic expression highlights the contemplative, restorative aspect of silence – useful in both learning and emotional processing.

These examples illustrate the double-edged nature of silence in English communication: it may comfort or condemn, clarify or confuse, depending on the speaker's intent and the audience's expectations.

4. Negative Connotations: Silence as Suspicion or Weakness

Though often valorized, silence can also be cast in a negative light within English proverb lore:

- “Silence means guilt.” Common in courtrooms and interpersonal conflicts, this interpretation reflects a suspicion that silence masks wrongdoing or cowardice.

- “Cat got your tongue?” This idiom, usually directed at those who remain awkwardly silent, implies that silence is unnatural and possibly dishonest – especially when speech is expected.

- “A dumb priest never got a parish.” This lesser-known British saying mocks those who stay silent when they ought to advocate for themselves, reflecting a more entrepreneurial or competitive Anglo mindset.

These proverbs complicate the narrative that silence is always golden; they show that silence may arouse distrust, signify social incompetence, or signal moral failure when context dictates speech.

The examination of silence in English proverbs reveals a layered and often contradictory cultural attitude. On one hand, silence is lauded as a sign of wisdom, civility, and self-mastery. On the other, it can denote passivity, guilt, or moral evasion. This duality reflects the broader tension within Anglo cultures between expressive individualism and social restraint.

In legal, educational, and interpersonal contexts, silence often operates as a tool of power or discipline. Proverbs such as “Think before you speak” and “He who says little is seldom foolish” reinforce verbal caution as a socially respected norm. Simultaneously, sayings like “Silence gives consent” highlight the risks of non-verbal communication in systems that favor clarity and assertiveness.

Furthermore, the Protestant work ethic and Victorian ideals of self-control have left a strong imprint on English-speaking communication, where silence is moralized as both a virtue and a duty.

This contrasts with cultures that treat silence more spiritually (e.g., Japan or India), suggesting that Anglo silence is more secular and pragmatic in nature.

The linguistic repertoire of English includes silence-themed idioms, euphemisms, and metaphors that extend beyond proverbs into everyday discourse. These linguistic patterns not only mirror cultural values but also reinforce them through repeated socialization.

Silence in English proverbs is portrayed as a multifaceted communicative resource – sometimes golden, sometimes damning, but always meaningful. Whether as a marker of wisdom, a strategy of restraint, or a sign of suspicion, silence is shown to be deeply embedded in the Anglo cultural psyche. The proverbs analyzed here suggest that English-speaking societies value the capacity to speak judiciously and remain silent when appropriate. As with German culture, silence in English tradition is far from a void; it is a rich, culturally laden presence that reveals much about collective norms, ethics, and interpersonal expectations.

Understanding the role of silence in English paremiology thus opens a window into the cultural logic of speech, civility, and control. In mastering silence, one not only observes linguistic etiquette but also engages with the deeper moral and social codes of the English-speaking world.

2.2 Silence as a key word in the proverbs of the German culture

Silence holds a distinctive place in German culture, serving as a powerful communicative tool that reflects societal values, behavioral norms, and collective wisdom. This chapter explores the representation of silence in German proverbs, analyzing its semantic, pragmatic, and cultural functions through the lens of linguistic anthropology and cultural studies.

The German language possesses a rich paremiological tradition where silence is conceptualized not merely as an absence of speech, but as a meaningful social practice with its own grammar and vocabulary. From the philosophical "Schweigen ist Gold" (Silence is golden) to the pragmatic "Reden ist Silber, Schweigen ist Gold" (Speech is silver, silence is gold), these proverbs form a complex system of cultural codes that govern interpersonal communication, legal discourse, and social etiquette.

Silence as a Cultural Phenomenon

In German linguistics, silence (Schweigen) is conceptualized as both the absence of speech and an intentional communicative act (Kurzon, 1998). Proverbs, as condensed cultural artifacts, reveal how silence is institutionalized in German society. Key characteristics include:

1. Axiological Function: Silence as Virtue

German proverbs frequently associate silence with positive moral attributes:

- "Schweigen ist oft besser als sich verantworten" ("Silence is often better than answering") – It is better to remain silent than to give an answer that could be interpreted against you, jeopardize your reputation, or lead to undesirable consequences. This aligns with German legal and business culture, where every word carries legal weight, and careless statements can come at a high cost.

- "Kein Kleid steht der Welbern besser als Schweigen" ("No garment suits women better than silence") – silence, rather than outspokenness, was considered the

ultimate feminine virtue, aligning with broader European patriarchal traditions that associated women's modesty with moral purity.

German proverbs in the study's corpus valorize silence, slightly lower than Russian, but higher than English.

2. Directive Function: Silence as Social Control

German proverbs often command silence to enforce social order:

- "Wer sich schuldig weiß, der schweige" ("He who knows his guilt should be silent") – This proverb reflects a core principle of German legal and ethical thought, where silence serves as both a moral duty and a pragmatic strategy.

- "Sprich, was besser ist als nichts, oder schweige" ("Speak what is better than nothing, or be silent") – This proverb reflects a deeply pragmatic and utilitarian approach to communication in German culture.

3. Emotive and Informative Functions

- "Schweigen ist für viel Unglück gut" ("Silence is good for much misfortune") – This proverb encapsulates a pragmatic German worldview where silence serves as both emotional resilience and strategic restraint in adversity.

- "Schweigen ist auch eine Antwort" ("Silence is also an answer") – This concise proverb distills a fundamental truth about German communication culture, where silence carries intentional meaning rather than merely indicating absence of speech. .

4. Negative Connotations

While rare, some proverbs frame silence as dangerous or deceitful:

- "Stumm wie ein Fisch" ("Silent as a fish") – This vivid German metaphor carries layered cultural meaning about silence, offering insight into communication norms and social expectations. Fish proverbially make no sound, making this an image of complete, unnatural quiet - suggesting silence taken to extremes.

Cultural Analysis

The analysis of silence in German proverbs reveals a nuanced and deeply rooted cultural phenomenon where silence functions not as a passive absence of speech but as a meaningful, intentional, and often moralized act. German

paremiology reflects a society that places significant value on verbal discipline, discretion, and strategic communication. The idiomatic wisdom encoded in proverbs such as „Schweigen ist Gold“ and „Sprich, was besser ist als nichts, oder schweige“ underscores a pragmatic worldview in which silence is not only socially acceptable but often preferable to speech.⁴²

The axiological dimension shows how silence is idealized as a mark of wisdom, especially in legal, interpersonal, and gendered contexts. It is seen as a protective mechanism – morally and practically – that helps avoid conflict, preserve dignity, and maintain social boundaries. The directive function, in turn, demonstrates how silence is imposed through culturally embedded norms that prioritize restraint over expressiveness. These proverbs reflect Germany’s high-context communication style, where much is conveyed implicitly, and silence may serve as both social glue and tool of exclusion.

The emotive and informative functions further illustrate that silence is never empty in German thought; it is often loaded with communicative intent. Whether as a coping mechanism during misfortune or as a nonverbal response pregnant with meaning, silence embodies emotional intelligence and self-mastery. Even when negative connotations arise, such as in the metaphor „Stumm wie ein Fisch“, they serve to warn against extreme silence, rather than challenge its general virtue. This duality confirms that silence in German culture is not uniformly valorized but is instead interpreted within a spectrum of situational meanings.

Moreover, the linguistic structure of German, lacking a single exact equivalent for the English “silence,” underscores the semantic richness of *Schweigen* and *Stille*. Each term carries distinct cultural associations, shaping the German worldview around silence in unique ways. This distinction further validates the role of language as a mirror of cultural priorities.

In conclusion, silence in German proverbs emerges as a complex communicative practice, shaped by historical, legal, and social forces. It functions as a vehicle of moral guidance, social regulation, and emotional depth. Far from being

⁴² Kurzon D. *Discourse of Silence*. Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 1998. 285 c.

mere absence, silence is portrayed as an active presence – subtle, disciplined, and deeply cultural. The study affirms that understanding proverbs about silence offers valuable insight into the broader ethos of German society, where speaking is a responsibility and silence, a virtue.

2.3 Silence as a key word in the proverbs of the Chinese culture

Silence in Chinese culture is not merely an absence of speech but a complex communicative tool deeply rooted in philosophy, social hierarchy, and interpersonal dynamics.⁴³ Unlike Western cultures that often associate silence with discomfort or lack of engagement, Chinese tradition views silence as a strategic, respectful, and expressive practice. This chapter explores the cultural, philosophical, and pragmatic dimensions of silence in Chinese society, drawing from comparative studies in intercultural communication. Generally speaking, silence is used in most situations in Chinese culture, thus the attitude of Chinese towards silence is positive. Chinese people emphasize the functions of silence in their communication. In Chinese people's communication, pause and silence can express plenty of meanings, such as agreement, praise, disagreement, protest, decision, respect, etc. When Chinese people talk with strangers, they will not break the ice, for they think that it will be embarrassed to talk with someone that they don't know at all. So it is very common to find in train or plane or even bus that Chinese people would like to keep silent instead to talk with each other if they do not know each other, even though they have nothing to do and they feel the trip or journey bored. In class, Chinese students are just audience.⁴⁴ They usually listen to the teachers quietly. They seldom participate in the activities in class, let alone proposing their own opinions, asking questions to their teachers or offending their teachers. In Chinese culture, when the superior are speaking or put forward some proposals, the inferior just keep silent to show their respect to the superior.

1. Philosophical Foundations of Silence

⁴³ Yuan Y. Q. Analysis of Silence in Intercultural Communication // Proceedings of the 2015 Int. Conf. on Economy, Management and Education Technology. Atlantis Press, 2015. C. 155–159.

⁴⁴ Hall E. T., Hall M. R. Understanding Cultural Differences. Yarmouth, ME: Intercultural Press, 1990. 218 c.

Chinese attitudes toward silence are deeply influenced by Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism, which shape its moral, ethical, and spiritual significance.

Taoist Influence

Taoism views language as limited and silence as aligned with the natural order. Lao Tzu's maxim "The way that can be spoken is not the eternal way" underscores the inadequacy of words.

- The proverb "One who knows does not speak; one who speaks does not know" reflects distrust in verbosity and emphasizes inner knowing.

Confucian Values

Confucianism links silence to moral character and social propriety.

- Confucius advocated "slow speech and earnest conduct" (君子欲讷于言而敏于行), suggesting that restraint in speech reflects wisdom and ethical refinement.

- Silence is also an act of respect: students listen quietly, subordinates do not interrupt, and younger individuals defer to elders.

Buddhist Practice

In Buddhism, silence supports meditation and mindfulness. It fosters spiritual development, emotional control, and detachment from worldly distractions.

These three traditions establish silence as a cultivated inner state and a culturally sanctioned form of expression.

2. Social and Communicative Functions

Silence in Chinese communication plays distinct social and pragmatic roles that reflect high-context cultural norms.

A. Social Hierarchy and Respect for Authority

In traditional Chinese society, silence signifies deference.

- In families and workplaces, juniors are expected to remain silent when elders or superiors speak.

- Gender roles have historically associated silence with female virtue, as in the proverb “A virtuous woman is silent.” Although this view is evolving, it remains embedded in cultural consciousness.

B. High-Context Communication

Chinese culture relies on context rather than direct verbal expression.

Silence may imply agreement, refusal, or hesitation, depending on the situation.

For instance, in response to a marriage proposal, silence might signify acceptance – a cue easily misread in low-context cultures.

C. Conflict Avoidance and Face-Saving (面子)

Silence is used to preserve harmony and avoid confrontation.

- Instead of voicing disagreement or criticism, silence allows for emotional and social “cooling off.”

- In uncomfortable moments (e.g., someone being misaddressed), silence is preferred over correction.

3. Silence in Everyday Contexts

In daily life, silence manifests in multiple settings and behaviors:

- Education: Chinese students rarely interrupt or question teachers, valuing respect over verbal engagement.

“沉默是金” (Chénmò shì jīn – Silence is golden.)

“言多必失” (Yán duō bì shī – The more you say, the more likely you are to slip.)

These proverbs reflect the value placed on measured speech and respect for authority.

- Public Transport: On buses, trains, or planes, silence is common among strangers, reflecting a norm of privacy.

“静以修身，俭以养德” (Jìng yǐ xiū shēn, jiǎn yǐ yǎng dé – Tranquility cultivates the self; frugality nourishes virtue.)

Silence in public can be seen as a form of self-discipline and social harmony.

- Business: In negotiations, pauses are not a sign of discomfort, but of thoughtfulness. Rushing to speak may appear immature or unprofessional.

“三思而后行” (Sān sī ér hòu xíng – Think thrice before you act.)

“言贵有物，语贵有度” (Yán guì yǒu wù, yǔ guì yǒu dù – Words should have substance, speech should have measure.)

These express the virtue of careful, deliberate communication.

Such habits are shaped by both philosophical traditions and social expectations, reinforcing the role of silence as a respected norm.

4. Modern Adaptations and Intercultural Challenges

Globalization and changing social norms are reshaping silence in China.

- Generational Shift: Younger urban Chinese often mix traditional restraint with Western-style expressiveness.

“入乡随俗” (Rù xiāng suí sú – When in a village, follow its customs.)

This reflects the adaptive approach of young people blending into new norms.

- Misinterpretation: In international contexts, especially in business, Western partners may misread Chinese silence as evasiveness or lack of transparency.

“沉默是智慧的标志” (Chénmò shì zhìhuì de biāozhì – Silence is a sign of wisdom.)

This underscores how silence, often misunderstood, is actually a sign of thought and intelligence. These dynamics reflect the ongoing cultural negotiation between traditional values and modern realities.

These dynamics reflect the ongoing cultural negotiation between traditional values and modern realities.

Conclusion

Silence in Chinese culture is a multifaceted practice – simultaneously a philosophical ideal, a social lubricant, and a communicative art. Its nuanced role challenges Western binaries of "silence versus speech," revealing how cultural values

shape even the absence of words. Understanding these dimensions is critical for effective intercultural engagement, whether in diplomacy, education, or business.

The analysis of silence in Chinese culture, based on proverbs and philosophical traditions, demonstrates that silence in Chinese society is not merely an absence of communication, but a complex and meaningful form of expression deeply rooted in cultural and ethical values. Unlike many Western traditions, where silence is often perceived as a sign of discomfort or disengagement, in China, it is viewed as a manifestation of wisdom, respect, and inner harmony.

The philosophical foundations of Chinese attitudes toward silence are shaped by Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Taoist texts emphasize the limitations of language and extol silence as a path to true knowledge. Confucianism associates silence with moral virtue, self-discipline, and respect for hierarchy, while Buddhism regards silence as a means of spiritual purification and enlightenment. These three philosophies form a unique semiotics of silence, where stillness speaks more than words.

Social functions of silence in Chinese culture are also multi-layered. It serves as an important marker of hierarchy: juniors remain silent in the presence of elders, students in the presence of teachers, and subordinates in front of superiors. Silence in women, according to traditional proverbs, is associated with virtue and modesty. While modern Chinese society is increasingly revising gender norms, these perceptions continue to influence the cultural understanding of speech and silence.

Communicatively, silence serves a broad range of functions in China's high-context culture. It can express agreement, disagreement, contemplation, or polite avoidance – all depending on the context. In business communication, silence is not seen as a sign of uncertainty or disinterest, but rather as a signal of thoughtfulness, caution, and strategic approach. In everyday life, silence is often preferred as a way to avoid awkward situations, maintain “face,” and preserve harmony.

Even in everyday situations

– in class, on public transportation, or during random encounters

– the Chinese often prefer silence. This is not only linked to cultural heritage but also to social norms regulating the boundaries between personal and public spaces.

Modern changes, driven by globalization and intercultural interactions, are introducing modifications to the traditional Chinese model of silence. Young people in urban areas increasingly blend traditional restraint with Western expressiveness. However, this often leads to misunderstandings: Western partners may interpret Chinese silence as passivity or insincerity.

Thus, silence in Chinese culture emerges as a complex, multifunctional phenomenon that plays an important role in philosophy, ethics, and everyday life. It serves as a form of expression of respect, a tool for social navigation, and a manifestation of inner balance. Understanding these profound meanings is essential for successful intercultural communication, particularly in diplomacy, education, and business. Silence in this context is not emptiness but a meaningful presence, reflecting the wisdom of an ancient civilization.

2.4 Silence as a key word in the proverbs of the Arabian culture

Silence, as a communicative and cultural phenomenon, occupies a paradoxical space in Arabic society. While often praised as a sign of wisdom, discretion, and virtue, silence can also be criticized, ridiculed, or even weaponized, depending on the context. This ambivalence creates a rich field of stylistic, rhetorical, and cultural relationships that reflect the values, fears, and expectations surrounding verbal expression in Arab culture. Through the analysis of selected Arabic proverbs, this chapter explores how silence is culturally constructed and symbolically expressed in the Arab world.

1. Silence as Virtue and Self-Control

Many Arabic proverbs strongly recommend silence as a noble trait, linking it to wisdom, restraint, and moral character.

- “اللسان حفظه خير” (The best characteristic is to keep one’s tongue): This phrase metaphorically frames the act of ‘holding the tongue’ as the highest virtue. The verb *ḥifẓ* (“to preserve”) reflects control, suggesting not speaking at all

unless necessary. Similar expressions such as “لا سأنك أذ فظ” and “لا سأنك أذ سك” (“Hold your tongue”) are both advice and a warning, urging caution in speech. These expressions demonstrate the high cultural value placed on verbal restraint, comparable to spiritual or ethical superiority.

- “إلا كلام ن قص الذ ع قل ن م إذا” (When reason becomes perfect, speech lessens): This antithetical structure draws a direct link between wisdom and silence, implying that excessive speech undermines intellect. The expression promotes minimal speech as a marker of maturity and mental discipline.

- “ذهب من الذ سكوت” (Silence is gold): A universal metaphor shared with Western cultures, this proverb materializes silence into gold – suggesting that silence is not just wise but also precious. Its rhetorical power lies in aligning a communicative behavior with the highest material value.

2. Silence as a Communicative Response

Arabic culture, much like other high-context cultures, recognizes silence not only as a lack of speech but also as a form of intentional communication.

- “جواباً الذ سكوت كان رب ما” (Perhaps silence is a reply): This proverb suggests that silence may express more than spoken words. Depending on tone, context, and relationship, silence may indicate approval, rejection, discomfort, or even deeper emotional states such as fear or hesitation. It recognizes the symbolic density of silence as a pragmatic communicative strategy.

- “شفة ب ذنت ن بس ما” (He did not whisper a daughter of a lip): A highly expressive metaphor, where ‘daughter of a lip’ symbolizes even the smallest word. It conveys complete, deliberate silence, often out of strong emotional restraint or social caution.

- “مطبق صمت” (Closing silence): This phrase evokes a sense of externally imposed or overwhelming silence – akin to psychological suppression or emotional shutdown. It may be used to describe a person rendered mute by confusion, fear, or deep contemplation.

3. Silence as Protection and Survival

Silence is often framed as a strategy for self-preservation in Arabic proverbs, especially in environments where speech may have dangerous consequences.

- “نعمّة سدل بت كلمة رب” (One word may steal a bounty): This phrase portrays speech as potentially destructive, where a single word could cause someone to lose status, opportunity, or material blessings. It frames silence as a protective investment.

- “لسان حصيد أسر رب” (Maybe a head is the price for a slip of the tongue): This proverb serves as a stark warning – words can be fatal. The metaphor links the tongue (speech) to the head (life), emphasizing the serious consequences that thoughtless speech can bring. In tribal, political, or legal contexts, silence is a safety mechanism

Your tongue is your horse: if you take care of it, it will take care of you): This metaphor likens the tongue to a horse – something that can either carry you safely or betray you. The image implies that control over one’s speech ensures social and personal security.

- “القول على الندم من خير ال سكوّت على ال ندم” (Better to regret silence than utterance): A moralistic conclusion suggesting that silence, even if later regretted, is safer and more honorable than speech that causes harm or shame.

- “أنت إلا المهالك أوردني ما” (Nothing ruined me but you, my tongue!): Here, the tongue is personified and blamed for all misfortunes – highlighting its power and danger when left unchecked.

4. Sarcasm, Irony, and Control

In some expressions, silence becomes a tool of sarcasm or social power, either to mock others or to exert dominance.

- “! سكوّتك ب يعلنا” (Sell us your silence!): This colloquial phrase is a sarcastic way to tell someone to shut up, implying that their speech is so useless that silence would be worth purchasing. The ironic tone reflects social fatigue with empty or annoying talk and elevates silence as a rare, desirable commodity.

5. Stylistic and Rhetorical Implications

Arabic silence-related proverbs are rich in stylistic features: metaphor, exaggeration (hyperbole), personification, and irony. They construct silence not

merely as a passive absence of speech but as a culturally significant act that interacts with morality, social status, power, and emotion.

The allegorical force of these phrases turns silence into gold, a shield, a reply, or even a weapon – each function shaped by context. The abundance of figurative expressions for silence in Arabic attests to its semantic complexity and its central role in communicative ethics.

Conclusion

Arabian proverbs about silence illustrate the profound and multifaceted role that silence plays in Arab culture, serving not only as a revered virtue but also as a powerful tool of social control and personal discipline. These proverbs present silence as an essential element of wisdom, restraint, and moral fortitude, emphasizing its value as a form of communication in itself. Proverbs such as “Silence is from gold” and “When reason is perfect, speech lessens” illustrate how silence is associated with intellectual depth and moral superiority. These expressions elevate silence to a highly respected status, equating it with valuable material wealth, like gold, or linking it to the virtue of wisdom, which becomes more pronounced when one speaks less.

However, the cultural significance of silence in Arabian proverbs goes beyond just positive associations. Silence is not only about wisdom but also about survival, control, and power. Proverbs such as “A slip of the tongue could get a man killed” serve as stark reminders of the dangers inherent in careless speech, underscoring the importance of restraint. These warnings reflect a society where the consequences of speaking out of turn can be severe – both socially and even literally. In this context, silence becomes a shield, a protective mechanism to avoid conflict, danger, or social reprimand.

Moreover, the sarcastic phrase “Sell us your silence!” highlights the irony of silence as something so precious that it could, in theory, be bought and sold. This expression suggests that, in certain situations, silence holds greater value than speech. It emphasizes the idea that words can be cheap, unnecessary, or even harmful, while silence is seen as a more powerful, and even valuable, response. The phrase’s

sarcastic tone implies a societal tendency to view those who speak excessively or without thought as less wise, further reinforcing the cultural preference for silence.

The use of metaphors like “gold,” “horses,” and “stolen blessings” in these proverbs helps to convey how deeply silence is embedded in the social fabric of Arab culture. These vivid and often exaggerated comparisons highlight silence’s immense value, both in terms of its material worth and its symbolic power. Silence is not simply the absence of speech – it is a powerful tool that commands respect, maintains social order, and demonstrates personal wisdom.

Thus, silence in Arabian culture is never passive. It is an active, dynamic force that communicates a wide range of meanings – respect, wisdom, power, and even danger. The cultural duality surrounding silence – as both a virtue and a weapon – reflects the complexities of Arab social and moral codes. Silence can serve as a means of protecting oneself, conveying agreement or disagreement, avoiding confrontation, or maintaining social harmony. At the same time, it can also be wielded to suppress others, enforce conformity, or protect social status.

In conclusion, Arabian proverbs about silence reveal its central role in shaping behavior and societal norms. Silence in this context is not merely the absence of speech, but a potent and multifaceted element of communication. It carries immense weight, influencing social interactions, personal conduct, and even survival. These proverbs illustrate how silence functions as a language of its own – one that holds both value and risk, teaching individuals when to speak and, more importantly, when to remain silent. Silence in Arab culture is a mark of wisdom, a tool of power, and a symbol of moral and social discipline.

2.5 Silence as a key word in the proverbs of the Russian culture

Silence holds a deeply symbolic and functional place in Russian culture, reflected in a vast array of proverbs and idiomatic expressions. Much like in Arabian traditions, silence in Russian is praised as a sign of intelligence, wisdom, and prudence – but it can also signal fear, obedience, or social caution.⁴⁵ This dual nature

⁴⁵ Маковецкий С. Русская фразеология: Семантика и культура. СПб.: Академический проект, 2005. 368 с.

of silence results in complex stylistic and moral undertones that illustrate how Russians perceive the power of language, restraint, and communication.

Silence in the Russian Linguistic and Cultural Context

In Russian, silence is conceptualized through the noun *молчание* and the verb *молчать*, with nuanced connotations that go beyond the mere absence of speech. These terms capture a wide range of communicative and psychological states, from prudence and wisdom to timidity or compliance. Proverbs, as compressed units of cultural meaning, provide insight into how silence is interpreted in Russian society – not only as virtue but also as a survival strategy, a social signal, or even a form of protest.

Methodology

The analysis is based on Russian proverbs drawn from classical collections and contemporary sources, classified according to their communicative function. Through structural-semantic and contextual interpretation, the proverbs were examined to highlight axiological, directive, emotive, and cautionary functions of silence in Russian culture.

1. Axiological Function: Silence as Wisdom and Virtue

Russian proverbs often elevate silence to a moral and intellectual ideal. One of the most well-known expressions is:

- “Слово – серебро, а молчание – золото” (“A word is silver, but silence is gold”).⁴⁶

This proverb values silence above speech, portraying it as more noble and precious. The metaphor suggests that while words can be valuable, silence is a rarer and wiser form of communication. It reflects a cultural belief in the power of restraint and the dignity of discretion.

- “Молчи, за умного сойдёшь” (“Stay silent, and you’ll pass for a wise man”).

⁴⁶ Русская народная пословица // Собрание русских пословиц / сост. В. И. Даль. [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/bolshoy-slovar-russkih-poslovits-opyt-sostavleniya?ysclid=mcabe0ex40407037466>.

This saying, often used humorously, implies that silence helps one avoid revealing ignorance. It underlines the Russian association between restraint and intelligence, warning that careless speech can undermine one's image.

2. Directive Function: Silence as Social Strategy and Control

Several Russian proverbs prescribe silence as a recommended or expected behavior, often as a means of ensuring safety, avoiding conflict, or complying with social norms:

- “Язык мой – враг мой” (“My tongue is my enemy”).

This expression presents speech as a potential threat to the speaker, emphasizing the risks of talking too much or too freely. It highlights the dangers of verbal recklessness in a society where words can have serious consequences.

- “Говори меньше – проживёшь дольше” (“Speak less and you'll live longer”).

Here, silence is associated directly with self-preservation. This may be understood both literally – avoiding trouble by keeping quiet – and metaphorically, as a principle of emotional and social resilience.

- “Не говори гоп, пока не перепрыгнешь” (“Don't say ‘hop’ before you've jumped”).

Though not about silence in the strictest sense, this proverb reinforces a broader cultural value: avoid speaking prematurely. It warns against overconfidence and impulsive declarations, encouraging cautious and measured communication.

3. Emotive and Informative Functions: Silence as Expression and Response

Silence in Russian proverbs is not merely passive; it is also presented as a communicative and emotional act:

- “Молчание – знак согласия” (“Silence is a sign of consent”).

This expression reflects a common legal and social assumption that silence can imply agreement. It can also signal discomfort, strategic compliance, or subtle protest, depending on context.

- “Молчанье – золото, когда говорить не к месту” (“Silence is golden when words are out of place”).

This variation of the more general “silence is golden” phrase adds situational nuance. It suggests that wisdom lies not only in knowing what to say but also when – and whether – it is appropriate to speak at all.

4. Cautionary and Negative Connotations of Speech

In contrast to the valorization of silence, many Russian proverbs function as warnings against excessive or careless speech:

- “Не болтай – язык без костей” (“Don’t babble – your tongue has no bones”).

This vivid image highlights how easy it is to speak impulsively, and how dangerous such speech can be. The metaphor serves as a reminder to exercise verbal discipline and mindfulness.

- “Семь раз отмерь – один раз отрежь” (“Measure seven times, cut once”).

Although typically applied to actions, this proverb reinforces the importance of forethought in speech. It reflects a cultural orientation toward caution and deliberation, suggesting that words, like actions, should be carefully considered.

Cultural Analysis

The corpus of Russian proverbs reveals that silence is not seen simply as the absence of speech but as a meaningful, strategic, and often morally superior act. It plays a central role in social interactions, self-presentation, and cultural identity. The axiological dimension underscores how silence is linked to wisdom, restraint, and maturity. It is framed as a protective mechanism – both social and psychological – that shields individuals from unnecessary risk and maintains group harmony.

The directive and cautionary functions further demonstrate how silence is embedded in Russian communicative norms as both a defense strategy and a form of behavioral control. The proverbs reflect a high-context culture where implicit meaning often takes precedence over direct expression. Emotional and informative functions of silence likewise point to its role in expressing assent, emotional containment, or passive resistance.

Importantly, the moral ambiguity of silence – sometimes noble, sometimes fearful – reflects the layered complexity of Russian social life. While silence may be

a virtue, it may also represent submission, especially in hierarchical contexts. The linguistic economy of *молчание* emphasizes this tension, revealing how silence can function simultaneously as power and vulnerability.

Conclusion

Russian proverbs about silence reveal a cultural orientation toward prudence, thoughtfulness, and the control of expression. Silence is not mere passivity – it is portrayed as a form of wisdom, a means of protecting oneself, and a marker of social intelligence. Whether equated with gold, mistaken for wisdom, or seen as a tool for avoiding misfortune, silence emerges as a strategic and morally charged behavior.

At the same time, the darker side of silence is subtly present in these sayings. Phrases like “My tongue is my enemy” and “Silence is a sign of consent” remind us that speaking carries risk – but so can silence. It may imply submission or complicity, particularly in a context where open dissent is discouraged. Thus, Russian silence is not always about wisdom alone – it may also reflect fear, caution, or calculated neutrality.

The frequent use of metaphors – tongues without bones, words as silver, silence as gold – shows the richness of figurative language in the Russian worldview. Silence is often stylized as a treasure or a form of armor, suggesting its value in both moral and practical terms. This linguistic imagery conveys how deeply embedded the idea of restraint is in Russian society.

Ultimately, silence in Russian proverbs is multifaceted. It may be golden, wise, or even lifesaving – but it is never meaningless. It is an active choice, a tool of self-preservation, and a cultural ideal that reflects centuries of lived experience under varying historical, political, and interpersonal conditions. In this sense, silence becomes a communicative act in itself – one that speaks volumes.

2.6 Comparative analysis of “silence” characteristics in different cultures

Silence, despite its apparent universality, is interpreted and used differently depending on cultural context. In this analysis, we examine how silence functions in English, German, Chinese, and Arabic cultures, highlighting key dominants and their cultural-historical foundations. See table 1.

Table 1 – Table of primary functions and characteristics of silence in English, German, Chinese and Arabic cultures

Culture	Primary Functions of Silence	Key Characteristics	Example Proverbs
English	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Moral virtue (self-control, prudence) – Social regulation – Ambivalence: suspicion/weakness 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Low-context culture – Duality: silence is both valued and criticized – Pragmatism, Protestant work ethic influence 	<p>"Silence is golden"</p> <p>"Children should be seen and not heard"</p> <p>"Silence means guilt"</p>
German	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Virtue (wisdom, caution) – Social control – Communicative strategy (law, business) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – High-context communication – Clear distinction between <i>Schweigen</i> (deliberate silence) and <i>Stille</i> (quietness) – Legal significance 	<p>"Schweigen ist Gold"</p> <p>"Wer sich schuldig weiß, der schweige"</p> <p>"Stumm wie ein Fisch"</p>
Chinese	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Philosophical wisdom (Taoism, Confucianism) – Social hierarchy (respect for elders) – Harmony and conflict avoidance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – High-context culture – Silence as a form of respect and self-discipline – Strategic use in negotiations 	<p>"沉默是金" (Silence is golden)</p> <p>"言多必失" (Too much talk leads to mistakes)</p>
Arabic	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Wisdom and self-control 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – High-context communication 	<p>من الـ سكوت "ذهب" (Silence is gold)</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Protection from danger (politics, tribal conflicts) – Irony and social critique 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Silence as a weapon or shield – Rich metaphorical expressions 	is golden) كلمة رب "نعمه سدا بت (One word may steal a blessing)
Russian	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Wisdom and prudence – Social caution and survival strategy – Ambivalence: virtue vs. submission 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – High-context culture – Silence as both power and vulnerability – Strong link to self-preservation 	"Слово – серебро, молчание – золото" (Speech is silver, silence is gold) "Молчи, за умного сойдёшь" (Stay silent, and you'll pass for wise)

In English tradition, silence has a dual nature:

Positive aspect: Silence is associated with prudence (“Silence is golden”)⁴⁷, self-control (“A still tongue makes a wise head”), and social discipline (“Children should be seen and not heard”). These expressions reflect the influence of Protestant ethics, particularly the values of modesty, restraint, and individual responsibility. Silence here is not a passive state but a cultivated form of self-regulation and moral strength. Within educational and familial settings, verbal restraint has traditionally been linked to good upbringing, emotional maturity, and civilized behavior. This

⁴⁷ Speake J. (ред.). Oxford Dictionary of Proverbs. 6-е изд. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. 400 с.

aligns with a broader cultural emphasis on personal boundaries and the idea that unnecessary speech may lead to conflict, indiscretion, or loss of dignity.

Negative aspect: At the same time, silence can carry ambiguous or even negative connotations. It may be interpreted as a sign of guilt (“Silence means guilt”)⁴⁸, social incompetence, or lack of confidence (“Cat got your tongue?”). In a predominantly low-context culture where clarity, efficiency, and directness in communication are valued, silence can be seen as disruptive or suspect. Prolonged pauses may be viewed as evasive, disingenuous, or indicative of emotional discomfort. This discomfort with silence is evident in conversational norms, where quick verbal responses are often expected and valued as signs of engagement and sincerity.

Conclusion: English culture is pragmatic – silence is respected when it serves socially approved purposes such as self-discipline, deference, or reflection. However, it is questioned or rejected when it appears to violate the norms of openness, responsibility, or communicative clarity. Silence, therefore, functions as a socially regulated tool rather than an inherently virtuous state. Its meaning is judged not in isolation, but in context – by who is silent, why, and when.

German Culture: Discipline and Order

The German attitude toward silence is more systematized:

Axiological function: Silence is deeply associated with values such as wisdom, discretion, and moral responsibility. Proverbs like “Schweigen ist Gold”⁴⁹ (“Silence is golden”) and “Wer sich schuldig weiß, der schweige”⁵⁰ (“He who knows himself guilty should remain silent”) reflect a cultural tendency to treat silence as a meaningful and strategic act. In legal or formal contexts, silence may be viewed as a protective measure rather than a suspicious one, emphasizing the right to refrain from speech until one is ready to speak responsibly.

⁴⁸ Manser M. H. The Facts on File Dictionary of Proverbs. N. Y.: Facts On File, 2007. 320 c.

⁴⁹ Redensarten-Index. Sprichwörterlexikon. [Электронный ресурс]. URL: <https://www.redensarten-index.de> (дата обращения: 22.04.25).

⁵⁰ Mieder W. Deutsche Sprichwörter in Literatur und Leben. Tübingen: Niemeyer, 1996. 301 c.

Social control: Silence also operates as a mechanism of discipline within Germany's traditionally hierarchical and rule-based social structures. Proverbs and cultural norms prescribe verbal restraint, especially in settings that require deference, such as schools, workplaces, and institutions. Subordinates are often expected to speak only when invited or when they have something of substance to contribute, reinforcing ideals of respect, precision, and social order. Talking too much or without purpose can be interpreted as a lack of seriousness or discipline.

Linguistic aspect: The German language itself reflects this cultural attitude with distinct terms – *Schweigen* (intentional silence) and *Stille* (stillness or quietness). This linguistic duality suggests that silence is not merely the absence of noise but a deliberate communicative position. *Schweigen* carries the implication of control and awareness – of choosing not to speak in order to preserve harmony, avoid escalation, or demonstrate dignity.

Conclusion: In Germany, silence is a disciplinary tool that regulates social, legal, and moral behavior. It is not perceived as emptiness or uncertainty but as a conscious and often virtuous act of self-governance. This approach reflects a cultural preference for clarity, structure, and thoughtful expression, where speaking less is often a sign of strength rather than weakness.

Chinese Culture: Philosophy and Harmony

In China, silence is deeply rooted in traditional teachings:

Taoism: The Taoist worldview regards language as inherently limited in its ability to convey profound truths. The saying “He who knows does not speak; he who speaks does not know” (知者不言，言者不知)⁵¹ reflects a metaphysical belief that the ultimate reality, or *Dao*, transcends verbal expression. Silence becomes a way to align oneself with the natural order (*ziran*) and to cultivate inner stillness, which is seen as a precondition for true understanding. In Taoist texts such as the *Dao De Jing*, silence represents not absence, but presence – a deep attunement to the universe that words can only disrupt.

⁵¹ Lau D. C. Chinese Classics and Proverbs. Hong Kong: The Chinese University Press, 1974. 200 c.

Confucianism: From a Confucian perspective, silence serves an ethical and social function. The maxim “君子欲讷于言而敏于行” (“The noble man is hesitant in speech but prompt in action”) elevates restraint and non-assertiveness as moral virtues. In hierarchical relationships – between ruler and subject, elder and younger, teacher and student – silence signals respect, humility, and self-discipline. Speaking out of turn is seen as both impolite and immature. This reflects a relational worldview where maintaining harmony (he) and face (mianzi) takes precedence over assertive self-expression.

Social practice: In daily interaction and especially in formal settings like negotiations or conflict resolution, silence is interpreted not as avoidance or weakness but as a sign of careful deliberation. A pause before responding indicates wisdom, strategic awareness, and emotional control. In high-context communication, where much is conveyed implicitly, silence becomes an eloquent tool. It allows room for reflection and often leaves meaning open-ended, respecting the listener’s ability to infer the speaker’s intent without confrontation.

Conclusion: For the Chinese, silence is not passive but active – it is a conscious and cultivated form of communication. It conveys depth, reverence, and interpersonal sensitivity. Rooted in centuries of philosophical thought and social customs, silence functions as a form of non-verbal eloquence, expressing values central to Chinese culture: harmony, hierarchy, introspection, and the primacy of action over speech.

Arabic Culture: Wisdom and Survival

Arabic proverbs reflect the ambivalence of silence:

Virtue: The well-known saying “بهدنم توكسل” (“Silence is golden”) mirrors similar expressions in Western and Eastern traditions, but within Arabic culture, it carries particular weight due to the high value placed on verbal eloquence (fasaha).⁵² In a society that reveres poetry, rhetoric, and oral storytelling, choosing silence over speech is not a sign of passivity but of exceptional wisdom. To remain silent in a culture of expressive language signifies a strategic elevation of thought over talk – a conscious decision to withhold rather than waste words.

⁵² Pellat C. *The Meaning of Arabic Proverbs and Sayings*. Beirut: Librairie du Liban, 1999. 240 c.

Protection: In tribal or politically volatile environments, where honor and reputation are tightly bound to speech, silence functions as a protective mechanism. The proverb “ناسل دي صر س أر بر” (“A head is the price for a slip of the tongue”) underscores the potential consequences of speaking incautiously.⁵³ In contexts marked by historical instability or strict social codes, verbal restraint is essential for survival. Silence becomes not just a virtue but a necessity – a defense against gossip, slander, or political retribution.

Irony and Ambiguity: Despite this reverence, silence in Arabic culture is not immune to mockery. The phrase “!كتوكس ان عيب” (“Sell us your silence!”) highlights the cultural awareness of silence as a commodity – one that can be manipulated, traded, or even resented. Such irony reflects the richness of Arab oral traditions, where silence is both respected and playfully criticized, depending on the context. This duality illustrates the fine balance between discretion and expressiveness in Arabic communication.

Conclusion: In the Arab world, silence operates as a multifaceted tool – a symbol of inner wisdom, a shield against external threat, and a signal in complex social negotiations. It reflects a culture where words are powerful and potentially dangerous, and where silence offers not emptiness but choice: the choice to preserve honor, navigate risk, and maintain dignity in an environment where every utterance carries weight.

Russian Culture: Strategic Restraint and Survival

Russian proverbs present silence as both virtue and necessity:

Wisdom: The widely known saying “Слово – серебро, молчание – золото” (“Speech is silver, silence is gold”) aligns with the universal valuation of restraint, but in the Russian context, it carries a deeper layer of introspective wisdom and emotional control. Russian culture has long emphasized the importance of reflection and inner life – a tradition reinforced by literary archetypes of the “quiet thinker” and the “silent sufferer.” Here, silence reflects a contemplative mindset, a preference for depth over superficial talk, and an awareness of the limits of language to capture truth.

⁵³ Abdel-Malek Z. *Arabic Proverbs: A Treasury of Arab Wisdom*. N. Y.: Hippocrene Books, 2001. 260 c.

Speaking too much is often associated with shallowness or indiscretion, whereas silence signals seriousness, dignity, and internal strength.

Self-preservation: The proverb “Говори меньше – проживёшь дольше” (“Speak less and you’ll live longer”) offers a glimpse into a collective memory shaped by centuries of political repression, surveillance, and social instability. Under tsarist rule, Soviet censorship, and authoritarian governance, speech has frequently carried tangible risks. In such an environment, silence became a mechanism of survival – an unwritten code for navigating uncertainty, avoiding denunciation, and protecting one’s inner world. This has fostered a cultural tendency toward verbal caution and the compartmentalization of public and private expression.

Social ambiguity: The expression “Молчание – знак согласия” (“Silence is a sign of consent”) exemplifies the contextual ambiguity of silence in Russian society. Depending on the speaker’s status, intent, or the surrounding power dynamics, silence may signify agreement, fear, disempowerment, or passive resistance. This layered ambiguity reflects the historically tense relationship between individual agency and authority in Russian life. In hierarchical interactions, especially with the state or in formal institutions, silence may not express consent but rather enforced compliance or protective neutrality. At the same time, silence can serve as a subtle protest – refusing to speak as a quiet act of defiance.

Conclusion: In Russian culture, silence is a double-edged phenomenon – respected as a form of philosophical and moral wisdom, yet also conditioned by historical experiences of censorship, danger, and ideological conformity. It serves as both a protective veil and a cultural marker of maturity, seriousness, and inner life. Unlike in some Western traditions where silence may raise suspicion, in Russia it is often expected, even admired, as a sign of prudence, self-control, and social intelligence. Ultimately, silence in the Russian context is not emptiness but a loaded space – one where survival, strategy, and meaning coexist in tension.

Across diverse cultures, silence emerges not as a universal absence but as a deeply encoded presence – a mirror reflecting each society’s core values, communicative norms, and existential outlooks. The meanings attached to silence are

shaped by history, religion, ethics, and social structure, revealing striking contrasts as well as unexpected convergences.

In English culture, silence is a pragmatic social tool. Rooted in Protestant ethics and individualist values, it is admired when it signals self-restraint, maturity, and respectability, but is distrusted when it violates the cultural norm of openness. In a low-context communication style, where meaning is conveyed directly through words, silence is often treated with suspicion unless its purpose is socially justified.

By contrast, German culture approaches silence with systematic rigor and moral intentionality. It is not merely tolerated but institutionally embedded – as a marker of responsibility, legal awareness, and social discipline. Distinctions in the German lexicon (e.g., *Schweigen* vs. *Stille*) suggest a nuanced understanding of silence not as void, but as conscious and controlled communicative presence, often tied to hierarchy and precision.

Chinese culture, with its philosophical roots in Taoism and Confucianism, elevates silence to a metaphysical and ethical principle. It is not just a communicative strategy but a cultivated state of being, reflecting harmony with nature, respect for authority, and a preference for implicit meaning. Silence here is often more eloquent than speech – a mark of inner cultivation, social harmony, and moral depth in a high-context society that values suggestion over assertion.

In Arabic culture, silence is multifaceted: it can be a virtue, a weapon, and even a source of irony. In environments where language is both a cultural art and a social risk, silence serves as protection, wisdom, and tactical self-restraint. The value of verbal eloquence heightens the power of silence, turning it into a strategic absence that guards honor and negotiates survival, especially in contexts governed by tribal codes, politics, and the weight of spoken word.

Russian culture adds a distinct and historically charged dimension to this comparative picture. Silence is not merely a virtue but often a necessity – a strategy for both philosophical depth and survival. Proverbs such as “Слово – серебро, молчание – золото” and “Говори меньше – проживёшь дольше” reflect a society where internal reflection and external caution coexist. Silence carries the weight of

historical trauma, formed under regimes where words could endanger lives. It functions simultaneously as a moral ideal, a psychological shield, and a tacit protest against authority. In a culture shaped by both literary introspection and political repression, silence is often admired – not as emptiness, but as a loaded and intentional space. It marks dignity, intelligence, and emotional depth, even while signaling caution and fear. Unlike the more communicative suspicion seen in Anglo cultures, silence in Russia is often expected and respected – a mode of strategic ambiguity that reveals rather than conceals the social landscape.

Taken together, these traditions reveal that silence is not a fixed or neutral element of communication – it is a culturally encoded act with specific functions. In some societies, it reflects self-discipline and moral restraint; in others, it expresses respect, survival, or philosophical alignment with the ineffable. Some cultures view it as suspicious, others as noble; some mock it, others revere it. What unites them is the recognition that silence is never just the absence of sound – but a language in itself, shaped by cultural logic and communicative intent.

Thus, silence becomes a lens through which we can observe the interplay of speech and self, community and control, wisdom and risk – a subtle yet powerful index of the human condition across civilizations.

CONCLUSION

The exploration of phraseology and proverbs across cultures reveals language as not only a system of signs but also a mirror of collective human experience. Phraseological units such as idioms, proverbs, and fixed expressions serve as condensed vessels of meaning, carrying within them the cultural memory, moral values, and communicative habits of societies. Their stability and metaphorical richness make them not just tools of expression but also instruments of cultural transmission. Particularly, the focus on silence as a recurring motif in proverbs demonstrates the profound variability and significance of this concept across linguistic and cultural traditions.

In English-speaking cultures, silence oscillates between virtue and suspicion. While it may symbolize wisdom, restraint, or prudence, it also risks being misinterpreted as weakness or guilt. This ambivalence reflects the cultural tension between assertive expression and the moralized value of discretion. In German culture, silence is viewed through a more pragmatic and disciplined lens – tied to legal caution, moral integrity, and communicative efficiency. It is not simply absence but a deliberate act, respected for its ability to maintain order and protect one's position.

Chinese cultural perspectives on silence are perhaps the most philosophically grounded, deeply influenced by Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Here, silence embodies harmony, respect, and spiritual insight. It is a cultivated art, integral to interpersonal and hierarchical relationships. In Arabic proverbs, silence takes on both reverent and defensive dimensions – celebrated as wisdom and self-restraint, yet simultaneously framed as a strategic shield in environments where speech can entail real risk. Russian proverbs, in turn, frame silence as a means of survival, prudence, and often moral superiority, though they also hint at silence as submission or passive endurance in oppressive circumstances.

What unites these diverse views is the recognition of silence not as mere muteness, but as a meaningful communicative gesture – one that can express, protect,

empower, or critique. Proverbs about silence encode deeply embedded cultural attitudes about speech, authority, emotion, and power. They offer the lens through which we may understand the values and social logics of different peoples. Ultimately, the study of silence through proverbs uncovers a universal yet profoundly culture-bound language of restraint – where what is unsaid often speaks most clearly.

Thus, silence in proverbs is a cross-cultural phenomenon, but its meanings and implications vary significantly across different societies.

Silence is often associated with wisdom, but it can also signify power, submission, secrecy, or consent, depending on the cultural and linguistic context.

The perception of silence in proverbs reflects broader cultural attitudes toward speech, authority, and social interaction.

A comparative analysis of silence-related proverbs reveals both universal valuations of restraint and culturally distinct functions, shaped by history, philosophy, and social norms.

The study of silence in proverbs contributes to a broader understanding of non-verbal communication and the implicit meanings embedded in traditional wisdom.

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