

## Silence and Politeness in Jordanian Society

Ahmad Mohammad Ahmad Al-Harabsheh  
Translation Department  
Yarmouk University, Irbid, Jordan

### Abstract

In Western societies, silence has been the focus of the studies in the last two decades. However, it has not been studied to such an extent in the Arab World. The purpose of the current study is to investigate the employment of silence as a politeness strategy in casual conversation in Jordanian Arabic. Twelve dyadic conversations were conducted for 30 minutes each. The participants were 24 university students at Yarmouk University (Jordan): 12 males and 12 females. They were grouped into two main groups: friends and strangers. Ninety seconds were analysed from the beginning, the middle, and the end of each conversation; these extracts were chosen randomly. The theoretical framework of this study draws on ethnography of communication, politeness theory and Sack et al's (1974) turn-taking model. One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that silence can be used as a positive politeness strategy to avoid confrontation and to save face.

*Key words:* silence, face, politeness, pragmatic, hesitation, interruption, turn-taking and casual conversations

## Introduction

Silence has been neglected in politeness research (Nakane, 2006), since it has not been given sufficient interest, especially in Jordanian society. I have not found a single paper that investigates the use of silence as a politeness strategy in Jordanian society. Silence is a multifaceted and complex linguistic phenomenon, because its interpretation is ambiguous and relies heavily on the socio-cultural norms of a certain society, and the context of situation. To study the employment of silence as a politeness strategy, it is important to investigate the pragmatic function of silence. Pragmatics relies on context to interpret the intentional meaning of a speaker (Ariel, 2010). This is why this study depends on pragmatics to investigate the use of silence as a politeness strategy and to interpret the meaning of silence in its real context of situation. This study also seeks to address the following questions:

- A) What is the relationship between silence and politeness?
- B) How do Jordanians practice and perceive silence as a politeness strategy?
- C) Is silence employed as a positive politeness or as a negative politeness strategy in Jordanian society?

This study proposes a multifaceted model for interpreting silence in social context. This model aims to provide different factors in pragmatic domains to study the relationship between politeness and silence in its social context. Silence is a complex phenomenon. The theoretical framework of the study is, therefore, a combination of Halliday's notion of context of situation; Sacks et al's (1974) model of Turn-taking structure, ethnography of communication and politeness theory.

## Background

Silence can convey multi-meanings, such as "impressions, attitudes, emotions, and intentions with illocutionary force" (Nakane, 2003). Furthermore, "silence is the language of all strong passions, such as love, anger, surprise and fear" (Bruneau, 1973, p. 37). Silence has been defined by the Oxford English dictionary as 'complete absence of sound' or 'the fact or state of abstaining from speech'. Soundlessness, noiselessness, absence of sound, stillness, quietness, emptiness, tranquillity and peacefulness are all words that describe silence. It is clear that silence is defined semantically not pragmatically, because silence in real interaction functions as a linguistic form that conveys meaning in the same way as speech does.

Silence is a non-verbal human behaviour indicates the cultural beliefs and activities of a given group (Hall, 1959). Hall (1959) suggests that culture and communication are the same and that culture determines behaviour, and if someone wishes to interact with a person from a foreign culture, s/he should recognise that non-linguistic and linguistic patterns are significant. The interpretation of silence is therefore culture-specific (Kurzon, 1998). Lehtonen & Sajavaara (1985) explain that the communicative silence may change the intention of the speaker from verbal to non-verbal channel of communication. Silence has the most pivotal cues of the message. Silence can be cultural-specific, which is different from one culture to another or even between friends and unacquainted people.

It is clear that speech and silence do not contradict each other. However, they "form a continuum of forms ranging from the most prototypical instances of silence to the most prototypical instances of speech" (Jaworski, 1993). Silence also occurs during speech. Thus it is impossible to avoid it (Saville-Troike, 1985). Silence and speech should be interpreted in relation to each other. Speakers also have to recognise the structure, the meaning and the purpose of silence in communication. The function of silence not only marks the boundaries of utterances, but also has the "stylistic function of emphasizing arguments and ideas, they [silences] are especially used by experienced speakers to impress their listeners and elicit applause" (Jaworski, 1993).

Since silence has various definitions, the meaning that it represents in the interaction is ambiguous. Silence is a part of language that conveys meaning as words do, yet it is a non-verbal behaviour, and it is a linguistic behaviour that helps in structuring the conversation (Saville-Troike, 1985). Saville-Troike (1985) define silence as

Most often an out-of-awareness phenomenon—the ground against which the figure of talk is perceived. By reversing polarities and treating silence as the figure to be examined against the ground of talk (as well as other actions or events), we aim to lighten awareness of this universal aspect of human behaviour while at the same time emphasising its complex nature as a cultural phenomenon and its richness as a study site.

Saville-Troike (1985) highlights that the meaning of silence is affected by the values and the norms of a speech community. For instance, social status and age may serve as a social distinction. The meaning of silence will therefore change. Silence has illocutionary force, per-locutionary effects and adds truth-value to speech. For example, silence can be used 'to question, promise, deny, warn, threaten, insult, request or recommend, as well as to carry out various kinds of ritual interaction' (Saville-Troike, 1985). Consider the following example which explicates this notion:

Child: Mom! I will go to play outside.

Mother: Silence (gazing angrily at him/her).

Child: Ok, I will not go.

In this example, while the mother's silence signifies the illocutionary force of threatening or warning of the child not to go out, the child's response indicates the per-locutionary effect. S/he is therefore affected by the mother's response (warning). Overall, silence has an illocutionary force, especially in accepting or refusing an invitation.

According to Jaworski (1993, p. 46), "the absence of speech does not imply the absence of communication". That is to say, people can communicate with non-verbal communication, such as body language and silence. In addition, the interpretation of speech is strongly based on the non-verbal component of communication. In other words, interlocutors can communicate without speech. For example, acquainted speakers can communicate using body movements and silence. This study corroborates the idea of Jaworski (1993) who suggests that in conversations between

people who are intimate, interlocutors use silence rather than words, especially when one of them is trying to criticise the other. In other words, the distance between the interlocutors can make speech (verbal communication) very difficult, especially when they wish to say a word which is socially unacceptable. The speaker therefore relies on non-verbal cues such as visual signals or silence to say that word. Jaworski (1993) provides an example for his assumption; a Polish dyad between a wife and her husband who were driving 250km away from their home. They see a traffic sign that says that they are about to arrive at their destination. The wife said "one can make it on foot from here" The husband points at the car's door as an indication to her to get out of the car and walk.

Silence has been divided into different types or forms. Bruneau (1973) proposes three major forms of silence: first, psycholinguistic silence which consists of selected fast-time silences that "are imposed mental silences closely associated with the temporal-horizontal sequencing of speech in mind" and slow-time silences that "are imposed mental silences closely associated with a semantic process of decoding speech" (Bruneau, 1973, p. 24). Second, interactive silence is "pausal interruptions in dialogue, discussion and debates" (Bruneau, 1973, p. 28). This may affect the relationship between the interlocutors and it may affect the alternation of information. Third, socio-cultural silence may "define cultural patterns of communication much better than what is said" (Bruneau, 1973, p. 36)

Van Manen (1990, p. 114) suggests three types of silence: firstly, "the literal silence", when there is no sound. It is sometimes crucial to remain silent rather than to speak. For example, an attendee in court should not speak without the permission of the judge. Secondly, "epistemological silence", in which we have awareness of what is happening around us, but which is difficult to describe in words. In other words, "it is not available in our linguistic competency" (Van Manen, 1990, p. 114). For example, if someone experiences a fearful or embarrassing situation, s/he cannot express him or herself in words. Finally, "ontological silence is the silence of being or life itself". It is a philosophical idea of thinking of the essence of the world around us, such as nature, mankind, animals and so on.

Alerby and Elidottir (2003, p. 43) define two types of silence: firstly, "internal silence". This type of silence is special for us and our inside thoughts that nobody knows. Secondly, "oppressed silence", when one is obliged to keep silent for various reasons, for example, being subject to abuse through ignorance, or as object of an exercise of power. Oppressed people may have the idea that no one will listen to them or value them (Alerby & Elidottir, 2003).

Silence has various functions in communication. According to Saville-Troike (1985), silence in any social settings has two types of function: first, macro-functions, such as "social control, ritual interaction with the supernatural, and establishment or reinforcement of group identity". Second, micro-functions refer to the interlocutors' purposes and needs. Micro-functions include "the level of individuals and small interacting group within a society" (Saville-Troike, 1985, p. 14). An example of macro-function is the social punishment of silence among the Igbo, when an individual breaks a social norm. No one in the community will talk to him and to his family as a punishment until he comes on his knees asking for forgiveness. Then the

sanction on speech will be lifted and again he becomes a full member of the society (Nwoye, 1985). An example of a micro-function is imposing silence in the classroom setting. Silence has communicative function in interaction; it functions as speech (Jaworski, 1993; Jaworski 1997; Saville-Troike, 1985). Walker (1985, p. 61) defines pause as "some unit of time in which phonation is absent, but filled pauses have no agreed-upon definition at all". In addition, a pause is "a noticeable hiatus in an ongoing speech stream, which implies, of course, that what is a pause in some circumstances is not in others" (Walker, 1985, p.62). Researchers in psychology classify the pause into two main classes: in-turn pauses, which occur with the utterance of one speaker only, and switching pauses, which occur at the end of the speaker's turn (Walker, 1985). Walker (1985, p. 61) divides switching pauses into: "A-pause for (Answerer) and Q-pause for (questioner), and they are so named ownership of the stretch of time in which they occur". Therefore, any silence after the question belongs to the answer. Walker (1985) establishes two critical times for pause: a pause between turns becomes a switching pause when it meets or exceeds 1.5 seconds, and an in-turn pause is counted when it reaches or exceeds 1.0 second.

Sacks et al (1974) identify three different kinds of silence: first, intra-turn silence or within a single turn, not at a Transition Relevance Place (TRP), is a pause. Second, silence after TRP is a gap and it can be minimised or transformed into a pause when the current speaker continues talking. Third, a lapse occurs when silence at TRP is extended, because no speaker has selected him or herself to be the next speaker. This type of silence is similar to what Goffman (1967, p. 36) called 'lull', which occurs when the interlocutors have nothing to say in the conversation.

In Jordan, there are only two studies that examine the communicative function of silence: Salih and Bader (1997) examine the function of silence in the classroom in Jordanian schools. Al-Sahawneh (1996) studies the function of silence in Jordanian society in general and in classrooms in particular. He studies three occasions: funerals, wedding parties, and engagements. He discusses the differences and similarities between the function of silence in Jordanian society and American and Danish societies. Al-Sahawneh (1996) concludes that silence is functional in Jordanian society with regard to deaths, wedding parties and engagement occasions as well as in Jordanian classrooms. The function of silence can be changed according to context and social settings. Silence is also practised by Jordanians "to avoid confrontation, thoughtfulness, ignorance, safety and security, resistance to an authority figure, embarrassment, respect, patience and wisdom"(Al- Sahawneh, 1996, p. 80).

One of the limitations of Al-Sahawneh's (1996) study is that it does not explain how silence is perceived and practised on these social occasions. In addition, there is no real context of situation. Moreover, his study doesn't tackle the relationship between silence and politeness. He asks his participants to fill in a questionnaire. His results can be therefore simplistic and superficial. He conflates the study of silence in social settings with silence in classrooms, which are two different fields of studying silence. Furthermore, these occasions are formal. His study is mainly focused on silence in the context of Jordanian classrooms. Nevertheless, this study is distinctive, because it investigates how Jordanians perceive and practise silence as a politeness strategy, particularly in social settings. In other words, it studies silence in an informal setting

i.e. casual conversation. As a result, this study fills this linguistic gap. It is also more comprehensive than the previous studies in terms of the methodology. Al-Sahawneh used the quantitative approach, but this study is qualitative and ethnographic in its approach; it also sheds light on gender differences in Jordanian society.

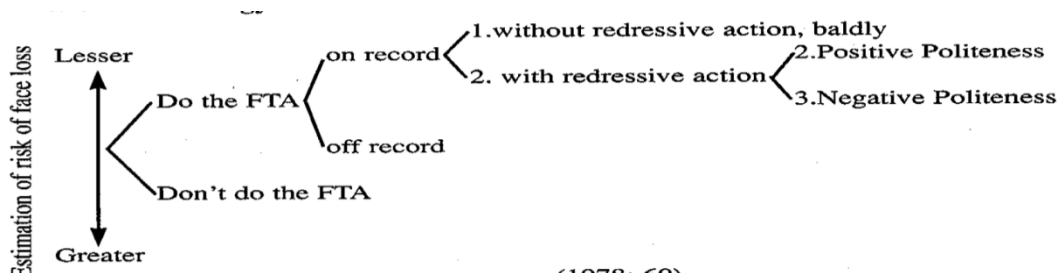
This study deals with three types of silence: first, intra-turn silence, silence within a turn. This silence usually occurs before TRP. Second, inter-turn silence occurs at TRP. This silence is firstly a gap, when it is extended; it becomes a lapse, which is the third type of silence, where neither the current speaker nor the recipient takes the floor. It is clear that silence has various meanings in human communication. It is a communicative and a cultural phenomenon. So, it serves different meanings among different cultures. For this reason, this study investigates this blurred phenomenon.

### **Silence and Politeness**

Politeness can be defined as “the means employed to show awareness of another person’s face” (Yule, 1996, p.60). The idea of politeness is based on face which is a technical term that is related to the public self-image of a person (Yule, 1996). Silence can be used as a politeness strategy in social interaction to avoid confrontation and disagreement (Jaworski & Stephens, 1998; Sifianou, 1997, Nankane, 2006; Jaworski, 1993, 1997). Silence is also not preferable in communication (Sifianou, 1997). Following Brown and Levinson's (1987) politeness theory, Sifianou (1997) elaborates on how silence expresses politeness in interaction cross-culturally with regard to Greek and English societies. Brown and Levinson (1987) do not concentrate on silence in their model, as they refer to it as "Don't do the FTAs" without including it in their politeness theory. To elucidate, Brown and Levinson (1987) propose a model for politeness theory, which is based on the notion of face that has two specific types of desires or ‘face wants’: first, ‘positive face’ the desire to be acceptable and liked by others. In this case, the relationship between interlocutors is friendly and reciprocal. Second, ‘negative face’, which is ‘the desire to be unimpeded in one’s action’ (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 13).

Brown and Levinson (1987) suggest that all verbal activities or speech in general imply a positive or a negative face threat to either the speaker or the hearer. They call this strategy "Face Threatening Acts" or (FTAs). FTAs mean that a person may say something against the expectation of another speaker who concerns with saving his/her public self-image or his/her face wants. This can be considered as a threat to his/her face (Yule, 1996, p.61). In order to decrease the potential threat, the speaker can say something which is called "face saving act" (Yule, 1996, p.61). According to Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 14), FTAs are controlled by three social variables or factors: 'social distance' between the interlocutors, the ‘relative power’ and the status of imposition that are involved in FTAs. They propose five strategies in dealing with FTAs; they can be illustrated by Figure (1):





**Figure 1.** Possible Strategies for Doing FTAs. Adapted from (Brown & Levinson, 1987, p. 60)

To explicate these strategies, on-record strategy (Bald) is a direct request between two friends who are intimate, i.e. "Close the window". On-record strategy could be expressed by both positive politeness and negative politeness. The former means the speaker thinks that the listener wishes to be respected; it is a friendly and a reciprocal relationship, i.e. "Could you please close the window?" The latter, means that the listener wishes to be respected and the speaker may impose on him/her by asking him/her to do something, i.e. "I am sorry to bother you, I just want to ask you if you could close the window?" Jordanian society, like Arab society, is a positive politeness society (Al-khatib, 2001). Off-record strategy is an indirect strategy by which someone asks for something indirectly, i.e. "It is cold here".

Brown and Levinson (1987, p. 72) ignore the fifth strategic choice "Don't do the FTAs", since it provides "no interesting reflexes". Sifianou (1997) criticises Brown and Levinson for neglecting "Don't do the FTAs" strategy. According to Sifianou (1997), Brown and Levinson (1987) discover the relationship between silence and politeness, but they consider silence as lacking in politeness. Tannen (1985, p. 97) indicates that 'silence is the extreme manifestation of indirectness', because the speaker says nothing but means something. Thus silence is correlated with off-record politeness, "because both positive and negative politeness are usually enacted through the elaboration of redress action" (Sifianou, 1997, p. 73). Sifianou (1997) claims that it is wrong to ascribe silence to the highest degree of "Don't do the FTAs", as silence has many functions in interaction. Silence also manifests positive, negative or off-record politeness (Sifianou, 1997). Yule (1996, p.62) refers indirectly to the relationship between silence and politeness through "self and other: say nothing" strategy. In other words, when a person asks for something without uttering a word s/he depends on other to recognise his or her want i.e. when someone is searching in his or her pockets or bag for a pen and the other person who sits next to him or her offers him/her a pen. In this event, this person employs silence to avoid a face threatening act.

### Turn-Taking System

Sacks et al (1974) refer to the turn-taking system in conversation as a speech exchange system. They study the turn-taking system from a sociological perspective; they confirm that a turn has an important role in social organization. Accordingly, they study the shape of the turn organisation device, and how it affects the allocation of "turns for the activities on which it operates" (Sacks et al., 1974, p.696). They also

explain that the turn-taking system is used to organise many social activities. A good illustration of this is when the investigator in turn-taking activities decides the types of activities that are adapted to, or restricted by the specific form of turn-taking, which operates on it. Sacks et al (1974) demonstrate that there is one speaker at a time in a conversation; the speakership is changed and turns are allocated between participants by a certain technique. They therefore concentrate on studying the materials of turn-taking organization and the techniques of the construction of turn-taking (Sacks et al., 1974). Suffice it to say that conversation can adapt to many situations and interactions in which persons of different identities are conversing; it can be sensitive to various combinations as well and it can adjust to a change of situation within a situation *per se* (Sacks et al., 1974). Conversation therefore should be context free in its operation and sensitive to different parameters of social reality (Sacks et al., 1974).

Sacks et al (1974) verify that turn-taking is the basic element of conversation, and it is allocated to parties of the conversation. In addition, any variations that the participants may adopt will be accommodated within the change system of turn-taking. Sacks et al (1974) contend that the turn-taking system of conversation can be explained by two crucial components, or rules: first, the Turn-Constructional Component (TCU) or the unit type, i.e. sentence, clause, phrase and lexical constructions, and Turn-Allocation Component, which are divided into two groups: turns distributed by current speaker selects next speaker and the ones in which next speaker self-selects. The useful unit types are those that allow a projection of the unit type under way. However, the unit types that do not have the feature of projectability may not be useful. To illustrate, projectability is the case where the second speaker provides an appropriate sequential start, which may be composed of a single word, single phrase, single clause with no gap, or no waiting for the possible sentence completion (Sacks et al., 1974). They postulate that, at the end of each unit-type, or the possible completion point, there is a transfer of speakership point, which is called the Transition-Relevance Place (TRP).

To conclude, a conversation is a generative machine process. When one starts talking, the next is preparing him/herself for a new turn. However, there is an inconsistency with this argument because there may be periods of silences between turns or even between the TCU's *per se*. These silences or gaps are conversational techniques employed by speakers to serve a certain communicative function. It can be a strategy of thinking of what has been said or what will be said next.

### Participants

The sample for this study was 24 speakers of Jordanian Arabic from Yarmouk University (Irbid- Jordan) (12 Females and 12 Males). The number 24 was chosen to ensure gender balance. In each conversation, there were two participants. Their ages were between 18-26. They were recruited by advertising on campus. The purpose of the study was explained to them only in general terms to make sure that they did not try to become silent during the conversation, and to keep to mainstream communication. The participants were divided into two groups: Twelve friends and 12 strangers, who did not know each other.



## Methods and Procedures

The methodology of the present study was qualitative in nature; an ethnographic approach was applied to answer the questions of study. The study adopts the micro-socio-ethnographic technique which involves analysis of small-scale events and processes, such as dyadic communication in social settings. Dyadic Conversations lasted for 30 minutes each and they were video recorded. The researcher met the participants in a staff room inside the university. The researcher showed them the room to reduce their unease in a strange environment. Then the researcher asked them about the suitability of the room to make sure that they were in a comfortable environment. After they were seated in two padded chairs, in front of each other, they were asked to fill in an information sheet about their age, sex, year of study, subject of study and their contact details. Then they were asked to sign the consent form. The researcher also told them that the conversation was audio and video recorded. The researcher asked them to talk about any topic they wished and the researcher provided a piece of paper which had two suggested topics as a kind of assistance in case the participants hesitated to choose a topic: 'talk about university life', and 'talk about your future career'.

The stationary video camera was positioned about three meters away from the participants. The participants were asked to talk with each other for 30 minutes; the researcher left the room during the conversation to avoid any influence on the main stream of communication. After 30 minutes, the researcher came back to switch off the recording devices.

## Data Analysis

The data used in the study comprised 12 dyadic conversations in Jordanian Arabic. These conversations consisted of two groups: the first group was the friends' group which consisted of female-female dyads, male-male dyads and male-female dyads. The second group was the strangers' group that also consisted of female-female dyads, male-male dyads and male-female dyads.

The researcher used *Nvivo 8* software to transcribe these conversations. It was a difficult task, because it needed more concentration to grasp what the interlocutors were saying. There were some difficulties in transcribing them as some participants speak in a fast pace. Ninety seconds from the beginning (minutes 1:00-2:30), 90 seconds from the middle (minutes 12:00- 13:30) and 90 seconds from the end (minutes 23:00-24:00) of each conversation were considered in data analysis. These periods were selected from each conversation in order to have a comprehensive overview of the whole conversation, and they represent the whole conversation. In addition, the researcher tried to be systematic in selecting these periods. *Praat* Software was used to detect the length of silences. Data analysis took nearly seven months. After detecting the length of silence periods, Conversation Analysis approach was used to analyse these data.

## Findings of the Study

Politeness is necessary in conversation, because it represents the strength, or the depth of social rapport between speakers. Conversation in general is based on respect

between participants. The degree of politeness between people who are strangers is higher than between friends. Strangers tend to produce more assessment or acknowledgment backchannels than friends do, to show more respect and interest in each other. However, in conversations between friends, the participants have more intimacy or familiarity and stronger relationships, so they don't feel the need to produce additional assessment backchannels. Silence is therefore tolerated and acceptable between friends. It is more awkward between strangers, because they are distant and they do not have a strong social rapport. Silence is therefore uncomfortable or awkward and the speakers avoid it. Apparently, in conversations between friends, there are longer periods of silence than in conversations between strangers.

The findings of the study indicate that silence might be used to serve some politeness strategies in conversation, such as waiting for the other speaker to complete his or her turn, keeping silent before saying something awkward and so on. This section sheds light on the practice of silence in conjunction with these strategies which aim to maintain the conversation flowing, and they exhibit the social class of the speaker, and the recipient. These politeness strategies are derived from cultural norms, and the politeness etiquette of that society. Silence is perceived and practised in Jordanian society to perform the following polite functions:

The findings of the study demonstrate that silence can be used to serve several politeness functions. Silence has a denotative meaning, as it is polite to be silent while the other speaker is talking. Interruption is also dispreferable, because it seizes the other speaker's right to complete his or her turn. Jordanian speakers may express their annoyance about verbal interruptions, especially between friends. They may say to the other speaker something like *'meħna: binso:lif'* (I am still speaking), or *'billah latga:t'ni'* (by God, do not interrupt me). In conversation between unacquainted people, the interrupted speaker remains silent, as s/he is hesitant to express his or her displeasure about the interruption. In addition, silence is used when the current speaker is hesitant, particularly when s/he does not have an adequate knowledge about the topic raised. Being silent while the other speaker is talking is socially required, since this helps to extend the conversation. This section will explore the perception and practice of silence as a politeness strategy in the following areas: saving face, social courtesy, expressing feelings, embarrassment, criticism and swearing.

### 1. Silence and Saving Face

One of the more significant findings to emerge from this study is that silence can be used as a face-saving strategy. The recipient tends to be silent before saying something that could be embarrassing to the current speaker. This silence is significant, because the recipient is selecting his or her words carefully in order not to discomfit the current speaker. In extract (1) below, **ʃAbdullah** is telling **ʃana:n** that he is very shy about showing himself among his genuine friends, and he feels embarrassed when someone looks at him while he is speaking. **ʃana:n** asks him whether he thinks this behaviour is genuine or not. She is selecting her words carefully in order to avoid hurting his feelings, and to avoid humiliating him. Once again, **ʃAbdullah** is trying to hide his embarrassment in line 13, when he remains silent for 1.0 second. This silence is significant because it is preceded by lengthening the cause particle *'ʔinno:::'* (because)

and it is also followed by lengthening the pause filler 'ʔe::h', and then *Mmm*. Actually, this silence serves as a means of exhibiting his awkwardness, since **ʔana:n**'s question is direct and unexpected. He is therefore looking for a way to escape from the topic in order to save face. Once again, he is trying to escape from the topic by saying, 'as I said earlier' in line 13.

**Extract (1)**, ʔana:n & ʔAbdullah (Female-Male, Strangers)

10 **ʔana:n**: ʔe::h bitʃo:f ʔinno ha:d ʔilʔifi s<sup>ʕ</sup>eh wala ʔalat<sup>ʕ</sup>(0.7) bidfaʕak lilʔama:m ʔaw  
11 bishabek lalxalfʔ

12 (1.2)

13 **ʔAbdullah**: ʔe::h ha:ð<sup>ʕ</sup>a ilʔifi ʔe::h mmm ʕa:di wesat<sup>ʕ</sup> (0.3) yeʕni la ho bidfaʕni  
14 lilʔama:m wala illa ilxalf(0.2) bad<sup>ʔ</sup>el maḥeli miθil ma:ʔana bes ʔinno::(1.0) ʔe::h  
15 Mmm ke:f bidi ʔahki:ha: zai ma ḥake:tlik banḥeridʒ ikθi:r maθalan lema bebga  
16 ga:ʕid maʕ iffabab lema ʔaso:lif ʔifi (0.2) kolhom

17 **ʔana:n**: ʔahhuh

18 **ʔAbdullah**: kolhom intiba:hom ʕalai bebat<sup>ʕ</sup>il ʔaso:lif.  
(1.4)

**ʔana:n: ʔe::h, do you think this thing is right or wrong? (0.7) does it push you forward or backward?**

(1.2)

**ʔAbdullah: ʔe::h, This thing is Mmm usual (0.3) like, it does not push me forward or backward (0.2), I will be in the same situation, but because (1.0) ʔe::h Mmm, how can I say it? I feel embarrassed, for example, when my friends look at me while I am talking**

(0.2)

**ʔana:n: huh huh**

**ʔAbdullah: I stop talking.**

## 2. Silence and Social courtesy

The current study reveals that silence seems to be utilised by interlocutors, when they are waiting for the recipient to remember what s/he is going to say. During a conversation, a speaker can be suddenly silent while telling a story in order to remember information related to the story. The other speaker therefore remains silent so as not to interrupt, especially in conversations between strangers. This silence is significant, because it indicates the other speaker's interest in the current topic. In some cases, the other speaker may interrupt the current speaker co-operatively, especially in conversations between friends. In extract (2), **Yasir** is talking about his argument with his girlfriend and how the relationship between them has ended. During his turn, **Yasir** pauses several times and the periods of silence vary in length. The most important silence is 1.8 seconds in line 171. **Yasir** is emotionally affected by this story. **Salman** therefore tolerates **Yasir's** silences by remaining silent during this period and by avoiding interrupting him. **Salman** plays the role of an active listener, since he is paying attention to **Yasir's** turn.

**Extract (2), Yasir & Salman (Males, strangers)**

- 170 **Yasir:**FPP→↑ biðʕabtʕ ʔawal ʔibʔawal lama tarakna baʕudʔ, batʕalat itrin hi ʔo:  
 171 betʕalit ʔarin↓ (0.5). ↑merrat ilʔayya:m,(0.5) ʔaɖʒi:t lage:tha ga:ʕdih maʕ jeb ʕa:ni,  
 172 ibyu:m ʕa:ni ↓(1.8) °↑tʕale:t bidaʕ isʕsʕidig ʔinbes atʕit↑ ‘Yallah xale:ha itlagi:lha  
 173 wa:had ʕa:ni ʔana la xalasʕ, laʔnuh miʕ ʔilha:↓ (0.4) ↑ʔana miʕ ha:s ʔilha: ʔifi  
 174 ibgalbiʕ(0.4). fataʕakitha (0.9) bilfatreh ilʔaxe:reh yumkin sʕurit ʔaʕa:kis bana:t ʔu ʕifit  
 175 ɖʒaw he:k ʔakʕar hurriyih (0.4) ya hilo: habi:bian ʔahibak.  
 176 **Salman:** SPP→ Heh heh heh heh

**Yasir:** We stopped ringing each other gradually after finishing our relationship. (0.5) After several days,(0.5) I saw her sitting with another man on a different day. (1.8) I looked at her. Frankly, I was happy, and I said to myself ‘let her find someone else, I am not for her (0.4) I am not for her, I do not feel that I love her’.(0.4) So, I left her (0.9). I have recently started flirting with women, so I have great freedom now (0.4). Oh, sweetie! Oh, darling! I love you!

**Salman:** heh heh heh heh

Silence can be used by the recipient as a means of waiting for the current speaker to complete his or her turn. The recipient remains silent and s/he does not interrupt the current speaker. In addition, s/he may produce continuers and acknowledgments to the current speaker. The findings of the current study support Lehtonen and Sajavaara (1985) who find that when one speaker takes the turn, the second practises the role of a listener. Listening does not mean that the listener is silent, simply because this is a type of backchannel behaviour. For example, a recipient may nod or shake his or her head, purse lips, raise eyebrows or s/he may utter continuers or backchannel such as "Mm, Yeah, Okay, cool". Moreover, the speaker is trying to check whether his or her speech is understood by asking the recipient questions such as, "Do you understand what I mean?"

In extract (3) below, **Nami:r** is criticising the study plan for her field of study, Geology. She thinks that there is no need to study chemistry, physics, and mathematics, since these courses are very difficult, and they have affected her average. In her turn, **Nami:r** has nine silences. The longest one is of 2.6 seconds in line 42. Again, there is another silence of 1.7 seconds in line 38. **Nami:r** is looking for reasons to support her judgement. Interestingly, **ʔAsma:ʔ** does not interrupt her during this period, because she is trying to give her enough time to complete her turn, before she initiates. In addition, she saves **Nami:r**'s face by not interrupting her. This can be seen from the next turn, when she tries to convince **Nami:r** that she will use calculations in her field of study, Geology. Therefore, **ʔAsma:ʔ** remains silent in order to avoid embarrassing **Nami:r**.

**Extract (3), ʔAsma:ʔ & Nami:r : (Females, Friends)**

- 31 **ʔAsma:ʔ:** FPP→↑ reh tistaxdimi alhisabat rah tistaxdmi.↓  
 32 (1.0)

33 **Nami:r** :SPP→ ↑hai alhisabat nefisha eða kanat mat<sup>l</sup>lu:beh reh nid<sup>t</sup>ar  
 34 nistaxdimha: fi: kol mesa:q↓.(0.5) ↑ yaʕi iða ihna maθalan istaxdemna hisaba:t  
 35 ma:dit ↑ilhydu:lu:gya. ↑ʔke:d reh nodroha d<sup>l</sup>min almasa:q maʕ nefis idektu:r(0.3)  
 36 he:k biku:n.↓  
 37 **ʔAsma:ʔ** : Post Exp→↑ʔah=  
 38 **Nami:r** : =↑ʔhsan (0.5) ʔhsan ma ʔnik tudrsi ryadyat 101, ʔða Jo: rah ʔstafe:d min  
 39 altakamol waltefa:d<sup>l</sup>ol ʔila ʔiða ʔinnoh nazzal moʕadali (0.5). bes ʔkθar(1.7),  
 40 ↑ʔofti Kemanʔihna mwa:d ilke:mya(1.5) t<sup>l</sup>ab ʔhna hai almawad kuna nudrisha xila:l  
 41 ʔyam ilmadrash, xilal 12 saneh ʔhna darasna ke:mya, darsna fi:zya, derasna  
 42 riyadyat (0.3) le:ʃ tanʕiedhin biljamʕa :? Seħ ʔaw laʔ ? ʔhna axaðna ilfikrah  
 43 ʕanhom,(0.4) yʕani ha:liyan ʔna maxðeh fikrah ʕan ilke:mya(0.6). lakin mutat<sup>l</sup>elab  
 44 mini ʔadros masa:qe:n, moxtabare:n ki:mya↓ (2.6) fi: ʔilʔafya:ʔ (1.0) ʕan yeʕni ʕan  
 45 jad hi ili nezalat moʕedali.

**ʔAsma:ʔ**: You will use formulas. You will use them.

**Nami:r**: If these formulas, themselves, are required, we will use them in every course. That means, for example, we use the formulas in Hydrology. Sure, we will study them within the course with the professor himself.

**ʔAsma:ʔ**: Yeah

**Nami:r**: It is better, it is better than studying Maths 101. What is the benefit that I will get from Integration and Differentiation? They bring down my average (1.7). You see. The chemistry courses are also not useful. Okay, we studied this course at school for 12 years. We studied Chemistry. We studied Physics. We studied Maths, why must we study them again at university? Am I right or not? We studied Physics, Maths and chemistry, but I must take two chemistry labs (2.6). These things (1.0) like, really, they reduce my average.

Silence may also be used when one speaker asks the other speaker to start the conversation as an indication of politeness. In this sense, both speakers hesitate to start speaking. This is why they select each other as the next speaker, especially in a mixed-sex conversation. In extract (4) below, **Saʕad** selects **ʔIxla:s<sup>l</sup>** as the next speaker by uttering the utterance ‘*t<sup>l</sup>ayib ma:fi*’ (Okay) and then he remains silent for 1.0 second in line 1. When **ʔIxla:s<sup>l</sup>** does not take the floor, he utters the continuer ‘*ʔah*’ (yeah) and then he is silent for 1.6 seconds in line 2. Again, **ʔIxla:s<sup>l</sup>** selects him as the next speaker by using the continuer ‘*ʔaywa*’ (Okay), and she remains silent for 1.2 seconds in line 4. This is an indication to him to start the conversation, as the pragmatic meaning of ‘*ʔaywa*’ is ‘keep talking, I am listening to you’.

**Extract (4): ʔIxla:s<sup>l</sup> & Saʕad ( F-M, Friends)**

- 1 **Saʕad**: FPP→↑ t<sup>l</sup>ayib ma:fi(1.0) ʔah ʔah↓  
 2 (1.6)  
 3 **ʔixlas<sup>l</sup>**: SPP→↑ʔaywa  
 4 (1.2)  
 5 **Saʕad**: ↑yeʕni ʔena:::: kont imfikir ʔe::h (1.4) beʕid ittaxaroʕʕ.  
 6 (0.3)  
 7 **ʔixlas<sup>l</sup>**: ↑ʔah  
 8 **Saʕad**:↑ is<sup>l</sup>ehe:h ʔ:ʃ bidik tiʕmeli beʕd ittaxaroʕʕ? ↑meθelan heke:na: bihalmawdʔu:ʕ ?

**Safad:** Okay (1.0) yeah yeah

(1.6)

**?ixla:s':** Okay

(1.2)

**Safad:** Like, I was thinking ?e::h (1.4) after graduation.

(0.3)

**?ixla:s': Yeah**

**Safad:** Right, what will you do after graduation? Have we talked about this subject

### 3. Silence and Expressing Feelings

The findings of the study bring to light the possibility that silence might be used in conjunction with surprise. Surprise occurs when the recipient hears an unexpected utterance from the current speaker. S/he therefore tends to be silent after exhibiting his or her surprise. This silence is noteworthy, because it functions as a means of eliciting a response from the other speaker. In extract (5) below, **ʕana:n** is talking about the advantages of the communist system. She explains that this system provides people with food, accommodation and everything they need in life. However, **ʕAbdullah** seems to be unconvinced, because he asks her what people will pay for these things. She exhibits her surprise by uttering *'muq: bil ?e:f !'* (The price of what?), and then she is silent for 0.5 seconds in line 374. This silence serves as either a means of showing her discomfort about what she has heard from him, since she is enthusiastic about communist views, or it functions as a way of thinking of a response to support her point of view.

**Extract (5), ʕAbdullah & ʕana:n ( Male- Female, strangers)**

372 **ʕAbdullah:** FPP→↑ tʕab muqa: bil ?e: f ha:ð? ?↓=

373 **ʕana:n :** =SPP→↑ muq: bil ?e: f ! ↓

374 (0.5)

375 **ʕAbdullah:** Post Exp→↑ wela bidu:n moqa: bil ?innoh meθelan bi [ʕu: ki] jeyla: t ha:i? ↓

376 **ʕana:n :** [ ] ↑ ma

377 hu: ?inta ibtifeyl (0.4) ibtifeyl moqa: bil mebley zahe:d.

378 **ʕAbdullah:** ↑ la? ?innoh ibtifeyl? (0.5) ʕidhom bia? amnu: lek wad? e: fi h? ↓=

379 **ʕana:n:** =↑ ?ah

**ʕAbdullah:** Okay, what is the price that I will pay for that?

**ʕana:n:** The price of what?

(0.5)

**ʕAbdullah:** Do they give you these things for nothing?

**ʕana:n:** No, You have to work (0.4) for a small amount of money.

**ʕAbdullah:** No, do you work? (0.5) Do they offer you a job?

### 4. Silence and Embarrassment

The findings of the study demonstrate that silence can be used in conjunction when speakers are embarrassed, since the interlocutors are exhibiting their discomfort by being silent. This



section explores some cases where Jordanian speakers use silence in order to exhibit awkwardness.

#### 4.1. Silence and Hesitation

The study finds that silence may accompany hesitation. In this sense, the speaker is hesitant about speaking because of an unexpected question or situation. For example, when the current speaker asks him or her an unanticipated question. The recipient is silent for a while, because s/he does not know what to say, because s/he is preparing an answer to that question. In this case, the speaker tends to lengthen the pause filler 'ʔah' or the last syllable of the last word before s/he is silent in order to have much time to think of what to say, or to escape from the topic. The speaker may produce a spate of talk in order to avoid answering the question directly. In extract (6) below, **ʔana:n** is asking **ʔAbdullah** whether he would like to nominate himself for the students' Guild election. **ʔana:n**'s question is unanticipated by **ʔAbdullah**. This is why he lengthens the pause filler 'ʔah' before saying 'laʔ' (No) in line 5. Again, he is silent for 0.6 seconds in line 8 after lengthening the particle 'laʔinuh' (because). This silence comes after the unexpected question from **ʔana:n** 'le:f' (Why). This can be seen from his facial expressions and body language, since he does not keep eye contact with her and his voice tone is turbulent. He aims therefore to minimise the period of silence and to look for a logical reason for this question. He has five periods of silence in his turn; all these silences function to display his embarrassment. The longest silence of 0.8 seconds is in line 10. This silence occurs after prolonging 'ʔo' (And). This silence is meaningful, because it also occurs after saying that 'I sometimes feel embarrassed when some people look at me'. He produces increments of talk in order to provide an indirect answer.

**Extract (6), ʔana:n & ʔAbdullah( Female-Male, Strangers)**

- 4 **ʔana:n:** FPP→ ↑laʔ ʔinti:xaba:t ildʒa:mʕ, ʕomrak fekarit tinzil laʔintixa:ba:t ʔ↓=  
 5 **ʔAbdullah:**SPP→= ↑ʔa:.....h laʔ↓  
 6 (0.3)  
 7 **ʔana:n** :↑ le:fʔ  
 8 **ʔAbdullah:** ↑laʔanu:....↓ (0.6) ↑itrabe:t ʔino:: ma ʔaʕʒlob ilʔintiba:h ikʕi:r lalʕe:lih↓ (0.3)↑  
 9 yaʕni:.... lal laʕaxsʕi ʔana mabaʕhibif ʔaʕʒlob ilʔintiba:h laʔino:....↓ (0.5) ↑ʔahya:nen  
 10 ʔiða hasi:t ʔino:: fi na:s ikʕi:r ibtintabihli benħaridʒ ʔo:....↓ (0.8) ↑min innawʕiyih  
 11 illi ma itʕawatiʕ, maʕalan yeʕni ʔino:↓(0.3) ↑ʔatʕlaʕ ʕala ittliʕizu:n ʔaw ʔatʕlaʕ ʔifi  
 12 fe: mustaħi:l↓.

**ʔana:n: No! The university's election, do you think of nominating yourself to the election?**

**ʔAbdullah: aʔ:.....h , no!**

(0.3)

**ʔana:n: why?**

**ʔAbdullah: because (0.6) I was brought up not to draw attention to my family.(0.3) like, I don't like to draw attention to myself, because (0.5) I sometimes feel embarrassed when people look at me, and (0.8) I am from those who do not, for example, like to (0.3) appear on Television, or something like that. It is impossible.**

#### 4.2. Silence and Interruption

Interruption is common in casual conversation, and occurs when one speaker cuts off the flow of the speech of the other speaker. This is called intrusive interruption. In addition, one speaker may interrupt the other speaker's turn co-operatively in order to help him or her to remember something or to correct some information that s/he produces in his or her turn. Interruption violates the current speaker's right to complete a turn (Zimmerman & West, 1975). Zimmerman and West (1975, p. 124) also observe that, "when the interrupting man completes his utterance, the woman pauses before she speaks again". They do that to show "points at which the foci of topic development must be recollected after interruption" (Zimmerman & West, 1975, p.124). The results of the study indicate that silence may be used in conjunction with intrusive interruption, seizing the other speaker's turn. This silence is purposeful, because it serves either to change the topic of the conversation, or to exhibit the speaker's annoyance due to seizing his or her right in completing the turn. In addition, it functions as a positive strategy, as the interrupted interlocutor aims to indicate his or her resentment of being interrupted. Interruption therefore plays an important role in shaping this silence. In extract (7) below, **ʕAbdullah** is trying to tell **ʕana:n** that he believes in a saying about Hitler. She interrupts him before he says this saying by asking him 'Have you read Hitler's book, 'My Struggle'? Next, he is silent for 0.8 seconds in line 411, since her interruption is unexpected. He is therefore thinking of a response to her question, or his train of thought has been cut off because of interruption. This is why he is silent. Moreover, he is trying to save. This is why he says that 'but I know many things about Hitler' in line 412. This is a positive politeness strategy to save his face.

**Extract (7), ʕAbdullah & ʕana:n (Male-Female, strangers)**

406 **ʕAbdullah:** FPP → ↑ʔana fi:h fikreh ga:lha wa:hed (1.3) Hitlar

407 **ʕana:n:** SPP → ↑ʔa:h

408 (0.7)

409 **ʕAbdullah:** Post Exp → ʔinnuh ʔill

410 **ʕana:n:** qareʔit kita:b Hitler Kifa:hi ?

411 → (0.8)

412 **ʕAbdullah:** ʔe:h laʔ Bes baʕrif ʕan haya:t Hitler ikʕi:r.

**ʕAbdullah: There is an idea said by someone (1.3) called Hitler.**

**ʕana:n: Yeah**

(0.7)

**ʕAbdullah: Like**

**ʕana:n: Have you read Hilter's book, 'My Struggle'?**

→ (0.8)

**ʕAbdullah: No! But I know many things about Hitler.**

#### 5. Silence and Criticism

Another significant result to emerge from the data is that silence seems to be employed when criticising someone or something or when someone criticises him or herself. Silence serves as a means of substituting the most suitable words, while the speaker is considering the other

speaker's feelings or his or her point of view. In addition, Jordanian speakers, as mentioned before, try to avoid saying words which may provide evidence against them in the future. In other words, Jordanian society is a positive politeness one where people try to save the face of other interlocutors during conversation in order to avoid being rude. In addition, Jordanian speakers tend to make criticism in an indirect way. In extract (8) below, **Xa:lid** is criticizing some students who are careless and cause trouble on campus. During his turn, **Xa:lid** pauses several times. One of the most significant silences is of 0.8 seconds in line 193. This silence occurs after the contrastive particle 'bes' (but). This silence serves the purpose of selecting the appropriate word. This can be seen from his following utterance, when he says, 'this university is for intelligent students'. Again, he keeps silent for 0.8 seconds in line 193 after uttering the ironical word 'ilʔaḏkiya:ʔ' (intelligent). The most important lapse is 4.9 seconds in line 194. This lapse is meaningful, since it indicates the speaker's bewilderment that these kinds of students are at university, according to **Xa:lid**'s point of view. Once again, this lapse indicates that silence is more eloquent than words in this situation. That is to say, whatever the speaker wishes to say will not convey or explain the whole idea. In addition, this lapse can be a positive politeness strategy to save the face of **Dʔiya:ʔ**.

**Extract (8), Xa:lid & Dʔiya:ʔ: (Males, Friends)**

189 **Xa:lid**: FPP → ↑wi muθaqafi:n, (0.5) ↑lakin ↑wallah sʔadiqni ya sʔadi:qi↓ (0.6), ↑ʔini fofit  
 190 bidʒamʕa ha:i, (0.3) ↑na:s la yastaḥiqu: inhum yikwnu: tʔula:b ↓(0.2). ↑min  
 191 dʔiminhum (0.4) ↑min ʕindana min nafis↓ (0.2) ↑ilmaka:n illi ana sa:kin fi:h (0.4).  
 192 ↑ʔa:h maʕru: fi:n (0.3) ↑ilba:t ma biduxlu: h ila: iθalaθih isʔsʔubuh (0.6). ↑ʔw maʕ  
 193 ḏa:lik (0.5) ʔa:h (0.4) ↑ʔw hama:lih ↑daraʔjih ʔwla:h, ↑ʔw kθi:r ho:n bilʔʒa:mʕa  
 194 (0.3). ↑la:kin itfa:ʔʒaʔit ʔinnuh tʔab ʔana ha:i ilʔʒa:mʕa: bitku:n bes↓ (0.8)  
 195 ↑bifu:tu:ha lala ʔa::h ilʔaḏkiya:ʔ (0.8), ↑lakin itfa:ʔʒaʔit sʔareḥatan (4.9). ↑yaʕni,  
 196 bilmarḥalih ilaʔxe:rah lama bitquli ʔa::h↓ (0.5). ↑ilmaja:kil ilʔʒa:miʕiyih illi ho:n  
 197 bitsʔi:r↓ (0.8) ʔe::h (0.7) ↑ʔaʕlab ilaḥya:n.

198 **Dʔiya:ʔ**: SPP → ↑zuʕra:n kulhum lamam ka sʔa:rat yeʕni ↓(0.3) ↑lamam zuʕra:n↓=

199 **Xa:lid**: ↑zuʕra:n  
 200 (0.5)

201 **Dʔiya:ʔ**: ↑yeʕni ʔʒad batʔlat fi:ha θiqah, ↓(1.1) ↑fi:h ʔala:t ḥa:dih qa:ʕdi:n bifi:lo:ha  
 202 bifauto:ha ʕalʔʒamʕa:t.↓

**Xa:lid**: And they are well-educated (0.5) but, Oh God, believe me, my friend, (0.6) I saw in this university (0.3) some people who don't deserve to be students. (0.2) Some of them (0.4) are from the same (0.2) place where I live (0.4). Ah, they are well-known (0.3). They do not get back home until 3:00 a.m. (0.6) However, (0.5) ah, (0.4) and they are morally decadent. There are many of them at our university, (0.3) but I was surprised that this university is only for (0.8) for clever people, (0.8) but, honestly, I was astonished (4.9). Like, you told me in the previous days, ah (0.5) the conflicts that occurred between students at university (0.8) a::h (0.7) most times.

**Dʔiya:ʔ**: Decadent people

**Xa:lid**: Decadent people

**Dʔiya:ʔ**: Like, really, there is no trust (1.1) as they bring sharp tools to university.

Moreover, silence appears to be practised when the speaker is making self-criticism. This silence serves as a face-saving strategy, because the speaker is talking directly about him or herself. The other speaker remains silent during this period in order not to utter a word, which may be rude. In addition, silence is required in this situation and agreement is a dispreferred response. In extract (9) below, **?Ari:dʒ** is criticising herself because she does not have a good enough voice and appearance to help her to be a successful presenter. In addition, she suffers a lot in order to be accepted to present a news brief at Yarmouk Radio. She is silent for 0.2 seconds in line 12. This silence is preceded by lengthening the negative particle 'ma:' (Nothing). Again, she is silent for 0.2 seconds in line 12. This silence is also preceded by a false start and a hesitation 'mif hada:k ill mm' (Not that Mm). These silences exhibit her reluctance to criticise herself.

**Extract (9), T<sup>a</sup>:riq & ?Ari:dʒ:** ( Male-Female, strangers)

10 **T<sup>a</sup>:riq:** FPP → ↑t<sup>a</sup>ab le:f yeʕni le:f ?↓

11 (0.3)

12 **?Ari:dʒ:** SPP → ↑laʔanu hata lama daxalit iliða:ʕeh ↑ma: (0.2) mif hada:k ill mm (0.2) yeʕni  
13 is<sup>u</sup>:t illi ʕindi mif hada:k is<sup>u</sup>:t iliða:ʕi yeʕni itʕibit kθi:r hata s<sup>u</sup>rt ʔt<sup>a</sup>laʕ mawa:dʒiz  
14 biiða:ʕit ilyarmu:k (0.6) mmm mif yeʕni ʕa:di fakli ʕa:di yeʕni mif hada:k iʕʕakil  
15 ilmat<sup>o</sup>lo:b biliða:ʕah (0.4) binafs ha:sih ʔinnuh(0.2)? ana bimunta:dʒ ʔaʕt<sup>a</sup>ar.

**T<sup>a</sup>:riq:** Okay why?, that is, why?

(0.3)

**?Ari:dʒ:** because, when I started working in the Radio (0.2) not that Mmm (0.2) that is, my voice is not like that the one which is required in the radio, that is, I suffered a lot I got the chance to present news briefs in Yarmouk Radio(0.6). Mmm, my appearance is usual, that is, I do not have that appearance which is required as a presenter (0.4). I feel that (0.2) I am better in doing montage.

Silence can also be used when the current speaker criticises the recipient. The current speaker tends to be silent before uttering the criticising utterance, because s/he is thinking of the appropriate words to say in order to save face for the recipient. In addition, this utterance may be uttered with a rising intonation contour and in a form of question. In extract (10) below, **ʕana:n** is telling **ʕAbdullah** that he should strengthen his character. He tells her that it is still early to do that. Next, she asks him about his age, and he says that he is 22 years old. Subsequently, there is a silence of 0.9 seconds in line 26. This silence is reflected in **ʕana:n**'s turn, because she is thinking of the best words to say to him. Her response is a criticism of him i.e. he is 22 years old and he has a weak personality, and he should do it now, because it will be too late for him as a man. Her silence is significant, since it heralds the criticising utterance.

**Extract (10), ʕana:n & ʕAbdullah** ( Female-Male, strangers)

24 **ʕana:n:** ʔadi:f ʔomrek ?

25 **ʕAbdullah:** ʔiθne:n ʔoʕiʕre:n saneh

26 (0.9)

27 **ʕana:n:** fi d<sup>a</sup>al waʔit ʔinnak bidak ʔitʔaowi ʕaxs<sup>i</sup>iytak !

**ʕana:n:** how old are you?

**ʕAbdullah:** I am 22 years old

(0.9)

**ʕana:n: Do you still have time to develop a strong character?**

Silence seems to be employed when the current speaker is trying to avoid saying something discomfiting, such as cursing, or criticising something or somebody. The current speaker utters part of the critical word, and then s/he remains silent. S/he then draws back and compliments that person or that thing. In extract (11) below, **ʕissa** is criticising a writing course, because he is upset over it. This can be seen from his turn in line 21, when he starts cursing this course as ‘Allah yinʕan’ (damn). Next, he is silent for 0.8 seconds in line 21. This silence is significant, since he recognises that he is saying something awkward. This is why he remains silent. He then recoils and compliments this course in order to adjust what he has said.

**Extract (11), ʕissa & ʕAbdullah (Males, friends)**

- 21 **ʕi:ssa:FPP**→↑ ʕu: hasabu:lak? ʔint? writing ya zam Allah yiʕan (0.8) ↑bes mali:h  
 22 [ mali:h wallah ʔinhā ] mali:ha  
 23 **ʕAbdullah: SPP**→wallah bitʕzanin wallah ʔarwaʕ minha ma fi:h ʔilma:dih ya zammih  
 24 ʔaqulak 90, ʔaqulak breh ti dʕibithin.  
**ʕissa: Which course did they consider for you? Oh, mate! Writing course, damn. (0.8) but it was Okay, it was Okay. By God, it was okay.**  
**ʕAbdullah: By God, it was very nice. By God, it is fantastic. Oh, mate! I will tell you, I will tell you, I got 90 easily**

Silence may be also used when talking about a political issue, because Jordanian people think that talking about politics is risky, despite the fact that the Jordanian constitution guarantees freedom of speech. Silence plays a pivotal role in political conversations, since each speaker tends to choose his or her words carefully. In extract (12) below, **ʔAhmad** is asking **ʕAbdulna:sʕir** about his opinion of the Jordanian government. **ʕAbdulna:sʕir** remains silent twice for 0.5 seconds in line 235 after saying ‘what shall I say about the government?’ He is selecting his words carefully, and he is trying to avoid saying a word that could be inappropriate. Again, **ʕAbdulna:sʕir** keeps silent for 1.4 seconds in line 236 after saying ‘Jordan is a sick body which is dying’. It seems that he recognises that he is saying something which is politically sensitive. Then he is silent for 0.9 seconds before explaining that there is financial corruption in Jordan. He also remains silent for 0.3 seconds in line 237. Once again, he utters the false start, ‘we do not like this’, and then he remains silent for 0.9 seconds in line 237. **ʕAbdulna:sʕir** is trying to avoid talking about this issue. This is why he tends to be silent from time to time. In addition, **ʔAhmad**’s question is unexpected to him, as he finds himself in a situation that he cannot avoid.

**Extract (12), ʔAhmad & ʕabdulna:sʕir (Males, strangers)**

- 234 **ʔAhmad :FPP**→ ↑ʔw qa:dit ilraʔi fi ilmudʕtamaʕ ʕu:raʔyak bilhukw:mah ʔ↓=  
 235 ʕabdulna:sʕir:SPP→= ↑ yeʕni ʕu:bidi ʔaqulak ʕan ilhukw:mah ↓(0.5)ð ilhukw:mah(0.5)  
 236 ↑yeʕni ilurdun kulya:tha dʕasad mari:dʔ qarab yxlusʕ(1.4) ↑yeʕni lazim inyyir ʔant  
 237 bitqw:l tʕa:lib bitayy:r↓ (0.9) ↑ya zamih ʔilfasa:d wa:sʕil↓ (0.3) ↑yeʕni ma bina:f  
 238 haðʕa↓ (0.9)↑ bes ʕindana fasa:d ikØi:r ihna



**?Ahmad: Or the opinion leader in the society, what is your opinion of the government?=-**

**?abdulna:s'ir: Like what can I say about the government (0.5) the government (0.5) Jordan as a whole is like a sick body that is dying (1.4) like we should change, you said I should call for change.(0.9) oh, mate! There are many cases of corruption (0.3). That is, we do not like this (0.9) but we have a lot of corruption.**

Silence may also co-occur with counter argument, especially between friends. The recipient keeps silent for a while before starting his or her counter argument against what has been said in the prior turn. This silence is noticeable, since the speaker is waiting for the current speaker to complete his or her turn in order to re-evaluate the idea that was initiated in the prior turn. In extract (13) below, **?Ixla:s'** is telling **Sa?ad** that she is thinking of having a job after graduation, because of the negative social view toward females who graduate and do not find work. However, **Sa?ad** thinks that a woman should not work after graduation. Instead, she should stay at home taking care of her children and her husband. **Sa?ad** remains silent for 2.2 seconds in line 295 before he starts his counter argument. This silence is essential, since it functions as a means of thinking of the best words to show his counter argument. In addition, he is selecting his word carefully in order to be polite with her.

**Extract (13), ?Ixla:s' & Sa?ad :( Female-Male, friends)**

- 288 **?Ixla:s':FPP**→↑ ye?ni ma?alan ?ana mafru:d' ?atxaradz↓(0.5) ↑ma: ?aftaylif ?ala ?asa:s  
 289 ?innuh ?qtana?it ibkala:mek okay=  
 290 **Sa?ad : SPP**→↑?a:h=  
 291 **?Ixla:s': Post Exp**→↑ma ?ad ye?ni (0.2) ↑law kont ?ana befi:d illi ?awa:lai, ?aw he:k,↓↑ mij  
 292 ilkol he:yifhamni illi ?intah ?am ti?ke:h bi?ko:↑ 't?il dersat ?w qa?dat mailha:f wa  
 293 ?e:fi? ma: ?ilha:f ?ai ?i?i' ↑?ifhimit ke:f?(0.4) ↑ye?ni he:k ilmud?utama? ?ina ?ihna  
 294 lazim illi bitxaradz yi?tayil sewa:? Ka:net binit ?aw ?eb.↓  
 295 (2.2)  
 296 **Sa?ad:** ↑?ahuhh na?re? xat'i?ah ba?tabirha ye?ni ?inu: illi bitxaradz.↓

**?Ixla:s' : Like, I will graduate. (0.5) I will not work because I am convinced by what you have said. Okay**

**Sa?ad:Yeah**

**?Ixla:s': Like nobody. (0.2) I will do something useful for people, or like this. Not all people will agree with you. They will say, 'look, she studies and she does not have a job, she has nothing to do'. Do you understand?(0.4) like, this is the society's view, when you graduate, you should work whether you are a man or a women.**

(2.2)

**Sa?ad: Yeah, I consider it to be wrong, like when you graduate**

## 6. Silence and Swearing

Jordanian speakers may use silence in conjunction with swearing. Culturally speaking, when someone swears by God or by honour (especially men), it is a blasphemy but also indicates that s/he is honest. People tend to swear in order to confirm what they have said. They



therefore tend to keep silent after swearing in order to get the attention of the other participant. In addition, it is an opportunity to watch the other speaker's reaction. In extract (14) below, **¶I:sa** is telling **¶Abdullah** about a hard-working instructor who is dedicated to his work. **¶I:sa** is silent for 1.5 seconds in line 268 after swearing by God, '*wa Allahi il¶ad'e:m*' (By God Almighty). This silence is common in Jordanian society, since it functions as a means of informing the other speaker that what will be said will be the truth.

**Extract (14), ¶I:sa & ¶Abdullah ( Males, friends)**

268 **¶I:sa:FPP**→ ↑ya zamih (0.3) ↑¶a:h wa Allah ¶azi:z S'ubhi (0.4)↑ ya: ¶i:ni (0.2)↑ wa Allahi  
269 il¶ad'e:m (1.5) (Yawn). ↑bitla:qe:h bi¶re¶ min kol galb ¶wrab.↓

270 (1.1)

271 **¶Abdullah:SPP**→↑ t'ayib ye¶ni ha:¶'a xu:f rabuh bixa:f.↓

**¶I:sa: Oh, mate! (0.3) yeah, by God ¶azi:z S'ubhi(0.4) is very nice(0.2) by Almighty God (1.5) (yawn) he explains the lesson very well.**

(1.1)

**¶Abdullah: Okay, this man feels that God is controlling him.**

### Conclusion

The analysis of data shows that silence may be employed by Jordanian speakers in order to exhibit positive politeness (Al-harashseh, 2012). It can be used when one speaker is waiting for the other in order to complete his or her turn. Silence is required while the current speaker is talking. Silence is practised in conjunction with embarrassment to indicate hesitation and interruption. Interruption is unwelcomed by Jordanian speakers in casual conversation, whether the interlocutors are friends or strangers as Jordanian society is a positive politeness society. The interrupted speaker may ask the interrupter to give him or her chance to complete his or her turn. For example, s/he may say, '*meħna binso:lif*' (I am still speaking), '*?ismaf*' (listen), '*billah la ?iga:t'iħni*' (by God, do not interrupt me). Silence is therefore an indication of politeness to the current speaker while s/he is talking. In addition, silence is practised to allocate turns between speakers i.e. the current speaker gives the turn to the recipient by remaining silent. Silence may be also used when someone criticises him or herself or another speaker.

In addition, silence in Jordanian society can be accompanied by politeness strategies in order to show respect and strengthen social rapport, as well to guarantee the continuity of the conversation (Al-Harashseh, 2012). Moreover, the speaker may not have the desire to repeat him or herself, or s/he is trying to attract the other speaker. This enables the current speaker to think of what to say next. Interestingly, the recipient tolerates these silences and hesitations, which are better than dealing with errors. Again, silence can be used in conjunction with hesitation to avoid errors that may disrupt the conversation or disrupt the recipient *per se*. The current speaker is therefore silent before expressing ideas about which s/he may not be sure, because s/he aims to produce a planned and processed discourse, which is faultless. Following Hieke's (1981) assumption, the production process is the most complicated process, as the current speaker may discover some errors in his or her own speech. S/he then utilises silence as a face saving strategy to repair these errors. S/he switches from a prospective to a retrospective process. As a result, s/he has to remain silent for a while or s/he employs a hesitation strategy. Therefore, silence can also be used as a politeness strategy in social interaction to avoid confrontation and disagreement (Jaworski & Stephens, 1998; Sifianou, 1997). More importantly, silence between strangers is uncomfortable in Jordanian society. It could be an indication of impoliteness, especially at the beginning of the conversation.

Silence may be used to exhibit embarrassment, such as hesitance, to avoid talking about the topic raised, because of fear of the camera and to express feelings. The current speaker sends an obvious message to the recipient that s/he is uncomfortable to talk about this issue, or that s/he is trying to escape from the topic. In addition, this is reflected in controlling the floor, since the speaker who tries to escape from the topic loses the floor domination. In addition, body movements play a pivotal role in expressing the real psychological state of the current speaker. They also help the recipient to understand what the current speaker has in mind. This is why the recipient tends to change the topic when s/he feels that it is embarrassing to the current speaker, or s/he may help him/her to withdraw from the topic.

### About the author:

**Dr. Ahmad Mohammad Ahmad AL-Harashseh** has a PhD in Applied Linguistics from Edith Cowan University, Western Australia. Currently, I am working as an Assistant professor at Yarmouk University in Translation Department. I am teaching graduate and undergraduate courses. My research interest areas include sociolinguistics, pragmatics, semantics, discourse analysis, conversation analysis, translation, and ESL.

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