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“Reading silences”

Enhancing paralinguistic sensitivity related to the field of Applied HR Counselling

Academic objectives

An estimated 60 to 65 percent of interpersonal communication is conveyed via nonverbal behaviours.¹ Unfortunately, the emphasis in counselling is disproportionately placed on verbal interactions.² The majority of nonverbal behaviours are unconscious and may represent a more accurate depiction of a patient's attitude and emotional state.³ Being responsive to unspoken subtleties can offer a counsellor valuable information that a client may be unwilling or unable to put into words. Since its birth counselling has always been an oral action. Listening, responding and giving feedback are auditory and verbal interventions by which the counsellor facilitates the clients' self-inventory process. Non-verbal interactions swathe the field of proxemics (behaviour are changed by the distance between two people), kinesics (signs of body moves), and paralanguage (prosody, rate, rhythm, volume, tone, and pitch of speech). This paper brings to the fore the latter, i.e. paralinguistic patterns. Hence I argue that via analysis of written texts students and practitioners can be facilitated with the rhetoric of para-verbal and non-verbal interactions. “Para-verbal” is an invention of mine, meaning “verbal interactions” in literary texts such as dialogues, monologues and narrative techniques with special regards to first-person narration.

Methodology

In order to take a different, less clinical perspective, introducing literary texts in the practice of HRC can serve two purposes. On the one hand analytical counselling skills can be enhanced via investigation of texts since eliminating the personal (client-counsellor) level from the interaction by introducing a third party, that is the literary text. I. e. readers can interpret the texts as being clients if texts themselves are calling for this action. In other words, students of counselling can distant themselves from the process of counselling by merely enjoying the pure aesthetics of the texts as well as looking for the paralinguistic signs (prosody, rate, rhythm, volume, tone, and pitch of speech). The latest Nobel Prize

¹ Burgoon, J.K., Guerrero, L.K., Floyd, K. *Nonverbal Communication*. Boston, MA: Allyn and Bacon; 2009.

² Philippot, P., Feldman, R., Coats, E. The role of nonverbal behavior in clinical settings. In: Philippot P, Feldman R, Coats E, editors. *Nonverbal Behavior in Clinical Settings*. New York, NY: Oxford University Press; 2003. pp. 3–13.

³ Foley, G. N. & Gentile, J. P. Nonverbal Communication in Psychotherapy. *Psychiatry (Edgmont)*, 2010. 7(6), 38–44.

Winner for Literature 2017, Kazuo Ishiguro's novels are all written from a perspective of a protagonist. Reading the Japanese-British author's first person narrators' deflections, circumlocutions and silences as a means of avoidance and defence.⁴ Nevertheless, critics' aim is to avoid the pitfalls of psychoanalytic literary criticism, since the temptation theorists of psychoanalytic approach should resist is "to analyse" the author, the fictitious persons (characters) of the texts.⁵ In counselling practice, though it is maybe rightful to view protagonists as clients and interpret their narration as psycho texts.

A critical example of reading for paralinguistic sensitivity: key concepts of silence, gaps and absence in contemporary British literature (Kazuo Ishiguro's first triad)

*In contemporary British novels many authors have been experimenting with excessive speech or silence 'covering the whole spectrum from verbal overflow to aphasia, from effusiveness to muteness'*⁶ following the footsteps of Samuel Beckett and Henry Miller'. Vanessa Guignery states in *Voices and silence in the contemporary novel in English* (2009) that the purpose of the book was 'to examine the mechanisms involved in the purification and the contamination of silence by analysing ellipses and reluctance in narration and dialogue, but also typographical blanks which literally inscribe silence on the page.'⁷ *Contemporary literary theories* (in post-structuralist narrative and psychoanalytic literary theory) have been working with this model in order to decipher the rhetoric of paralinguistic signs as distortions and denials by which the stories told (e.g. silences, gaps).⁸

In previous research assignments I examined place that "gaps" and "silences" occupy in Ishiguro's novels. Focusing on first-person narrators I argued that gaps and silences act as defensive tools for hiding, deflecting and distorting stories recounted. In Freudian terms omissions, gaps and silences are related to memory-gaps preventing painful and therefore repressed material from becoming conscious. I argue, that Ishiguro via his first person narrators' gaps and silences reveals more than the reader would anticipate first. In addition to this the writer invites critical readers to contribute to the ongoing process of revealing and concealing. Having created a method (following Patricia Oudek Laurence's concept)⁹, employing various aspects of re-construction of the stories in the presentation of first-person singular narrators, I venture that their provocative denials invite different interpretations. On the one hand, they can be viewed as deliberate calls indicating the individual's begging for attention. On the other hand, Ishiguro's main characters' deflective storytelling, the omissions and gaps in narration, readers can be provoked about what they are told.

Basic to my analysis, this model interprets narration as a perception of the "self." In other words, I examine how narrators not only perceive but interpret their character by positioning themselves in front of an imagined audience, i.e. the reader. Via constructing a topical gap between their personae, their stories offer various vantage points from where reinterpretation can be structured. Also I claim that through stereotypical biography tropes first person

⁴ Szederkényi, E.K., "The Provocative Silence of Kazuo Ishiguro's Characters" in *Reverberations of Silence. Proceedings of The Sounds of Silence Conference*. ed. Márta Pellérdi and Gabriella Reuss, (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Cambridge Scholars Publishing. 2013. pp. 203–216.

⁵ Brooks, P. *Psychoanalysis and Storytelling*. Oxford: Blackwell, 1994. p. 20.

⁶ Guignery, V. *Voices and silence in the contemporary novel in English*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009. pp. 1-2.

⁷ Guignery, V. *Voices and silence in the contemporary novel in English*. Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2009. pp. 1-2.

⁸ Szederkényi, E.K., *Deciphering gaps and silences in Kazuo Ishiguro's early novels – The provocative nature of denial*. Saarbrücken: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2015. p. 10.

⁹ Patricia Oudek Laurence, *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993.

narrators of Ishiguro are continuously reworking their narrative by the objectification of the self, i.e. talking about the “what” (breakdowns, misconceptions, failed missions of professions and families) rather than the “who.”

Therefore the research questions that are posed in this reading example are the following: to what extent silence is provocative by deflecting injurious details of the past and how does Ishiguro’s artistic craft construct the layers of his protagonists’ distorted narration? In other words, how does silence assist injurious details by becoming oblivious? The main line of inquiry is to examine how protagonists are trapped by their first-person narration. I also elaborate on the question of how first person narration provokes the idea in psychoanalytical terms, that the protagonists use their self-reflective narration as a “talking cure.” It will be clarified how first person narrators build up their private myth by the application of narrative gaps and silences and what the function of reticence is in distorting their public or private past.

In Ishiguro’s art, protagonists’ pondering, evading, and deflecting reality, their silence about facts, their under or over-explanation reveal the uneasiness of narrators. The main narrators of *The Remains of the Day*, an *Artist of the Floating World* are experts in circumlocutions and exaggerations while the first person narration in *A Pale View of Hills* is mastering her narrative with confusing plots, characters and chronology, and yet evades talking about war traumas. Ishiguro’s texts repeat, modify, transform, rework and invest ideas to achieve a self-modifying creation of “a new home” where protagonists find consolation. Evaluating a premise stated earlier, namely that first person narrators in the examined Ishiguro novels are “displaced” being either absent or only virtually present, maybe it is not far-fetched to say that these physical and psychological absences are carefully explained by the first person narrators’ over-talking (*The Remains of the Day*) or by circumvention (*A Pale View of Hills*, *An Artist of the Floating World*,).

Paralinguistic models for deciphering silences

For interpreting Ishiguro’s “silenced” texts, Patricia Ondek Laurence’s model was employed for locating and analyzing psychoanalytically interpreted “silences”. Using Patricia Ondek Laurence’s description of psychoanalytical models of *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition* (1993), I explored the narrative methods in first-person texts. I also subscribed to Dorrit Cohn’s *Transparent Minds. Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness*.¹⁰ My method of regarding “silences” in order to detach pauses integrated into self-quoted, self-narrated monologues and self-narrated dialogues or silences surrounding them in order to determine the qualitative measure of these silences and their substance can in all probability be utilized in counselling practice. Ondek Laurence’s characterizes different “modalities” of silence in order to distinguish between “keeping silence about something,” “refusal to enact a subordinate position,” and “signalling exclusion” with special focus on reading silence as “ritual of truth” and “self-resistance.”¹¹ My inquiry also pays attention to ellipses, pauses and silences and to the role of the inarticulate or taciturn (see Table 1.1). My method was to scrutinize one text in order to isolate gaps incorporated into narrated monologues and dialogues or silences surrounding them to determine the qualitative and quantitative nature of these silences and their content. I also focused on ellipses, narrative

¹⁰ Cohn, D., *Transparent Minds. Narrative Modes for Presenting Consciousness*. New Jersey, Princeton University Press. 1978. pp. 143–268.

¹¹ Patricia Ondek Laurence, *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993. p. 58.

gaps facilitated by flashbacks and proleptic hoops, as well as on the role of the inarticulate and taciturn.

Table 1: The map of gaps and silences in the examined Ishiguro texts via an adopted model of Patricia Oudek Laurence¹² (author's own editing)

I. Silence and Time: relates to the auditory including music, repetition, rhythm.	A Pale View of Hills – 1982 (PVH)	An Artist of the Floating World – 1986 (AFW)	The Remains of the Day – 1989 (RD)
Harmony: silence, pause, quiet, rest;	quiet, silence (154-155, 174)	quiet, silence (48)	pause, silence (182)
Disharmony: beat, gaps, gulfs, broken syllables, negation, fragments;	gaps, gulfs, negation “we shouldn’t keep looking back to the past” (111)	information gaps (17, 81, 85), gaps related to silence (18), gulfs (85)	awkward silence (218-219)
Suspension (relates to simultaneity): suspense, fixed moment, moment of being; gaze;	suspense/suicide = being hanged on a rope (84)	suspense = bridge (7, 27-28, 99), corridor (11)	fixed moment (under the arch: 115)
Repetition: incarnation, echoes, simultaneity;	incarnation – the other woman as magical character (159)	simultaneity (bridge – between past and present)	repetition (plot-wise: vagrant, man on the pier, emphasizing his “triumph”)
Degrees of auditory silence: mute, quiet pauses, interruptions, gaps, murmur;	interruptions	interruptions (in the Kuroda student and Ono dialogue ,113)	interruptions in communication (between Miss Kenton and Stevens, 229)
Punctuation of suspension: use of ellipses and dashes to present incompleteness, haste and hurry as a theme or aspect of voice;	ellipses (between the two stages of Etsuko’s pre-war and post-war life)	ellipses (Sasaki is punished and called a “traitor”, 144)	ellipses (Miss Kenton’s and Mrs Benn’s life)
II. Silence and Space via Psychoanalytic Concepts: relates to the visual, the spatialization of thought, and the body.			
Degrees of spatial silence: pale, night, absence, emptiness, nothingness, blank, blank space, void/abyss, beat, gap/fading;	absent mothers and fathers, night (83), abyss, fading(135),	absent/ghost like mother (44-45), absent deceased relatives (son of Ono)	a butler as manservant must balance between “attentiveness and the illusion of absence” (75)
Movement in space (duration):			
Positive: surface, rise, up;	erected apartment blocks (11)	erected apartment blocks (99)	Stevens’ rushing up to the room of his father in the attic (111)
Negative: sink, fall, drop, down, deep;	bomb fell on Nagasaki: “charred ruins” (11), deep mud, dirty river (168)	bomb fell on Ono’s family, ruins (99)	the metaphorical fall of Lord Darlington

¹² Patricia Oudek Laurence, *The Reading of Silence: Virginia Woolf in the English Tradition* (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 1993), 112–113.

Visual repetition: mirror, shadows, simultaneity;	shadows (doubles), i.e. Sachiko/Etsuko, Mariko/Keiko (27)	doubles of Ono/Matsuda	doubles of the vagrant (24)
Punctuation: ..., (), [], “ ”;	About Mariko: “Well, she ran outside...” (85)	About Kuroda: “I haven’t been in touch with him since ... since the war.” (95)	
Body silence: dream, immobility, paralysis, death, sleep, illness, disease, inertia, peace, rest, still, quiet, lost in space and time.	suicide of Keiko (88), inertia of Etsuko (99), “wasteground” (99), uncanny dreams (47, 55, 95)	illness of aging Matsuda and Ono, death of Ono’s son and wife, “exaggerated shadows” (146)	Stevens is lost “down narrow, twisting lanes” (127) (169-172)

Summarizing the strata “silences” occupy in the narratives, deflecting injurious details of the past was marked by “silences” configured by Ondek Laurence on lexicon, punctuation, metaphor and space, while absences were regarded as being manifested in textual gaps. Ishiguro, who has been receiving great critical acclaim yet, is able to continue his mastery with modesty. The writer emphasized at the beginning of his career is still profoundly true:

[w]riting is a kind of consolation or therapy... The best writing comes out of a situation where I think the artist or writer has to some extent come to terms with the fact that it is too late. The wound has come, and it hasn’t healed, but it’s not going to get any worse; yet, the wound is there.¹³

In my interpretation not one of the first person narrators of Ishiguro’s first three novels finds consolation in listening to the sounds of silence of their empty future. Yet by telling their stories may heal their wounds by a “talking cure.”

Summary and achievements

Upon utilizing the method of “reading for silence”, students will be able to understand the principles of basic paralinguistic skills (e.g. locating gaps, decipher silences, looking for the strata in stories told) and apply these skills in role play and class exercises, including developing the relationship, conducting an intake interview and accurately observing behaviour. On the other hand by “reading for the plot”, i.e. linguistic awareness can be developed by which students as future practitioners can interpret para-verbal and non-verbal signs with special regard to silence and gaps in narration.

Having been assessed analytical skills based on primary texts related to literary genres (novels, drama) will demonstrate knowledge of how to design intervention strategies, including approaches to facilitate clients’ orientation to wellness and prevention as desired counselling goals. I argue that via analysis of written literary texts students and practitioners can be facilitated by the rhetoric of para-verbal and non-verbal interactions. Having been able to identify non-verbal signs, students will have a profound knowledge of psychological first aid strategies while demonstrating the ability to select appropriate primary counselling interventions, and communicate this conceptualization effectively.

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¹³ A. Vorda and K. Herzinger, “Stuck on the Margins, An Interview with Kazuo Ishiguro,” In *Face to Face, Interviews with Contemporary Novelists*, ed. Allan Vorda and Daniel Stern, Houston: Rice University Press. 1993. p. 34.

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