

**Silence as Non-Verbal Positive Politeness  
Strategy in August Strindberg's *The Stronger* :  
A Pragma - Stylistic Study**

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Silence can sometimes be eloquent. Conversations consist not only of what is said but what is not said—the cold silence, the disapproving silence, the appreciative silence, the reverent silence, the baffled silence, ( Schmitz,1994: 1).

So, it is not only the complete refusal to speak , but also acts of silence within discourse that are considered meaningful (Baker , 1955: 165 ). The ambiguous act of silence is a source of quite different possible meanings , and it is the source of various

sayings and proverbs , literary inspiration and misunderstandings ( Ibid.).

Yet , silence has been considered as a magic comforter ( Farr , 1962: 96 ) . It has become a precious commodity difficult to afford. Paradoxically , the desire to relax to the sound of silence is contrasted by the fact that at the same time , silence is feared , considered as something negative and undesirable since it impedes communication and distorts the message being conveyed ( Gal , 1989: 25) .

By itself, silence is altogether meaningless, gaining significance only when supplemented by speech .At least at first, it seems that a person who remains silent is passive. He does nothing to work his will on the situation, to create, or to share with others. Silence is not about the striving, aspiration, and connection that we normally associate with human fulfillment. Instead, it is usually about emptiness and loneliness. The ambition of this research is to provide a defense of, and explanation for, a right to silence. Here, my suggestion is that silence protects the freedom to choose between public obligation and private commitment. Surprisingly, though, in this context, silence as freedom does not necessarily translate into a legal right to remain silent. Sometimes when the law requires speech, it forces the choices that make us free. Silence is a right, but it also comes with an obligation: to speak quietly or not at all in the face of doubt and mystery.

Accordingly , silence sometimes is considered only unwanted , meaningless ,nonvaluable and nothing else . But , silence does contribute to conversations ( Bruneau ,1973 :40).Thus, silence can be considered as an equally important element of conversation as speech despite the fact that it is speech that is a primary communicative category ; a superior information carrier ( ibid.: 42).

**" One can utter words without saying anything."  
( Searle ,1969: 24).**

**"Without the polarity of silence , the system of  
language would fail ."  
( Sontag ,1969:19).**

**" Silence is used as a means to an end."**

( Gilmore , 1985: 140 ).

" Silence helps to save their privacy and respects

The privacy of others. "

( Bruneau, 1973 :20 ).

"Silence may be regarded as a sign of someone's

Power or control . "

( Jaworski,1993: 83).

### 1. Introduction

Silence has been established as a means of communication expressing a variety of function ( Farr,1962 ; Bruneau ,1973; Jensen , 1973; Johansson ,1974; Gilmore , 1985 ; Maltz , 1985 ; Tennan , 1985 ; Sounders ,1985 ; Gal ,1989; and Jaworski ,1993). It was demonstrated that the nature of silence by itself has various functions . Positive and negative functions of silence include respect , a sign of positive social rapport among intimates , aviodance in the sense of omitting to say something negative, ( Tennan ,1985: 97), politeness, (ibid.: 97-106), thoughtfulness , shyness, self-control , management of strong but problematic emotions ,( Sounders,1985: 165 ), hostility , anger ,deferred action , defensiveness , aggression , anxiety , submission to an authority , consent , approval ,and disagreement ( ibid.).

Such studies evidently indicate that part of understanding the process of communication or the message being conveyed is the awareness of the variety of social functions demonstrated via silence experienced in a given

interactional discourse . Consequently , for us , to be able to develop and acquire communicative competence or communicative patterns in various settings and in different human languages , we should be aware of the social rules governing the process of communication transmitted not only verbally but also non-verbally; by the act of silence , ( Hymes,1972:289; Umiker- Sebeok ,1980:300).

One setting among others is the setting of August Strindberg's **The Stronger** in which silence is practiced to express a variety of meanings and functions by **Miss Y** ( Amelia ) . Such functions are as respect for **Mrs. X** as well as curiosity, avoidance , self –control and others . The play was written in (1888), on the model of the short , serious sketch and requiring only two actresses ( the waitress who pops in for a second to place a cup of chocolate on the table is quick redundant) . Like other plays of that phase in Strindberg's career , **The Stronger** represents, in a realistic setting , a powerful , highly concentrated dramatic action in which two women are bound in an intense of love-hate relationship and locked in a deadly conflict . The two women here **Mrs. X** and **Miss Y** , both actresses , are at once friends as well as professional rivals . But , the really intriguing feature of this amazing sketch is the absence of dialogue in the usual sense .The play unfolds like a dramatic monologue delivered by **Mrs. X** at **Miss Y** who keeps completely silent throughout the play ,i.e. she maintains her share in the development of the action by pantomime , facial expression and an occasional laugh ,( **Miss Y**: roars with laughter,**The Stronger** ,P.22). So , who is the stronger ? Is **Mrs.X** the stronger because she has the power of speech ? And what about **Miss Y**'s eerie silence ? What does it conceal ? What does it reveal ?

## 2. Politeness Phenomenon

Politeness is at once a language phenomenon and a social phenomenon ( Fraser ,1990: 220). Elen (2001: 128) explains that social norms are related to the level of culture and they are part of the sociolinguistic system of which politeness is a subsystem . He adds that communicative success relies on the right amount and type of politeness applied at the right time to the right speech act , as determined by social norms that stipulate what is appropriate for specific interactional situation ( *ibid.*: 129).

Hence , there is a need for a basic exploration of fundamental notions attached to this area of study . First of all , the main notion is that , politeness can be " **Face – Boosting** ",( Bayraktaroglu& Sifianou , 2002: 171) ; where sociability overpowers respectability at time . Thus , as " **Face** " and " **Honour** " have considerable overlap , they can be considered as conceptual equivalents ( Mao ,1994: 454 ) .

The concept ( or notion) of " **Face** " is seen as a cognate concept , the equivalent of " **honour** " , a key notion for the interpretation of social conduct and values. It is generally agreed that the study of " **Politeness** " is closely linked to the notion of " **Face** " .

Accordingly , Brown & Levinson (1978: 66) define politeness as " **Face** " maintaining . That is , letting the hearer feel unimpeded and approved of respects. **Face** refers to "wants" , and Brown & Levinson (*ibid.*: 67) expound that we have two types of wants : Ego-preserving wants and Public-self preserving wants , that refer to the desire to be considered as

contributing member of society . The former generates **Negative Face**, whereas the latter generates **Positive Face** .

### 2.1. Face and politeness strategies

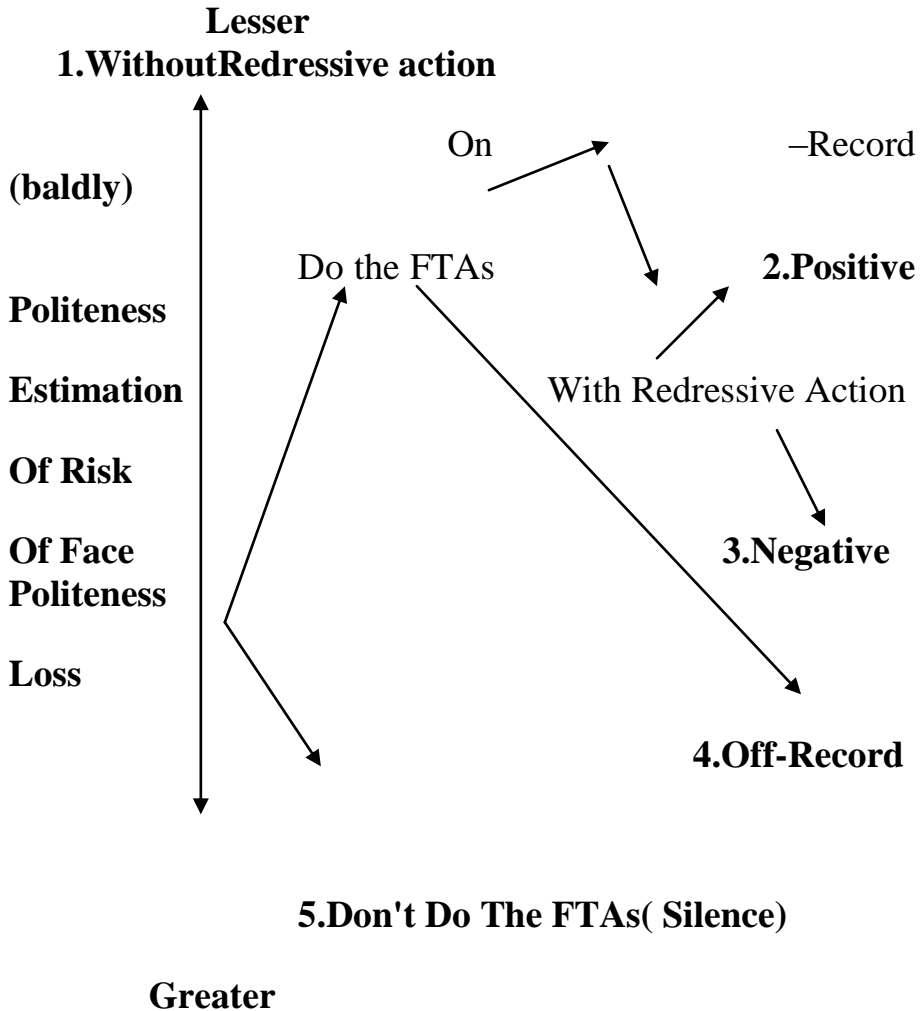
“**Face**” refers to a speaker's sense of linguistic and social identity. Any speech act may impose on this sense, and is therefore face threatening. To illustrate , **Face-Threatening Acts**, ( henceforth **FTAs**), are acts that infringe on the hearer's need to maintain his\herself –esteem , and be respected( Ibid.) . Politeness strategies are developed for the main purpose of dealing with these **FTAs** . And , speakers have strategies for lessening the threat. Perhaps the most thorough treatment of the concept of politeness is that of Penelope Brown and Stephen Levinson, which was first published in 1978 and then reissued, with a long introduction, in 1987. In their model, see figure No. ( 1 ) , politeness is defined as redressive action taken to counter-balance the disruptive (**FTAs**). In their theory, communication is seen as potentially dangerous and antagonistic. A strength of their approach is that, they explain politeness by deriving it from more fundamental notions of what it is to be a human being. The basic notion of their model is “**Face**”. This is defined as “the public self-image that every member (of society) wants to claim for himself”. In their framework, face consists of two related aspects.

- One is **negative face**, or the rights to territories, freedom of action and freedom from imposition - wanting your actions not to be constrained or inhibited by others.

- The other is **positive face**, the positive consistent self-image that people have and their desire to be appreciated and approved of by at least some other people.

The rational actions( people take to preserve both kinds of face for themselves and the people they interact with) are added up to politeness. Brown and Levinson(1987) argue that in human communication, either spoken or written, people tend to maintain one another's face continuously. In everyday conversation, we adapt our conversation to different situations. Among friends we take liberties or say things that would seem discourteous among strangers. And, we avoid over-formality with friends. In both situations we try to avoid making the hearer embarrassed or uncomfortable. Face-threatening acts (**FTAs**) are acts that infringe on the hearer's need to maintain his/her self-esteem, and be respected. Politeness strategies are developed for the main purpose of dealing with these **FTAs** ( *ibid.*). Brown and Levinson ( *ibid.*) sum up human politeness behaviour in five strategies, which correspond to these examples: bald on record, negative politeness, positive politeness, off-record-indirect strategy , and don't do the **FTAs** or Silence Strategy . Consider the following diagram :

**Circumstances Determining Choice Of Strategy**



**Figure No.( 1 )**



**Strategies for Doing FTAs (Taken from  
Brown&Levinson,1978:65)**

- 1 .The bald **on-record** strategy does nothing to minimize threats to the hearer's "face"
- 2 . **Positive politeness** means being complimentary and gracious to the addressee (but if this is overdone, the speaker may alienate the other party),i.e.the positive politeness strategy shows that, you recognize that your hearer has a desire to be respected. It also confirms that the relationship is friendly and expresses group reciprocity.
- 3 . **Negative politeness** is found in ways of mitigating the imposition ,i.e. the negative politeness strategy also recognizes the hearer's face. But, it also recognizes that you are in some way imposing on them. Some other examples would be to say, "I don't want to bother you but..." or "I was wondering if..."
- 4 .**Off-record** indirect strategies take some of the pressure off of you. You are trying to avoid the direct **FTA** of asking for something. Instead it would rather be offered to you once your hearer sees that you want one.
- 5 . **Don't do the FTAs** . The estimation of risk of **Face** loss is much greater here ,so , you should keep silent instead of communicating the **FTAs**. Consequently , silence strategy has been termed " **Don't Do the FTAs** , which is employed when the risk loss is judged extremely high and the speaker wishes to avoid the threat .

All these five hierarchically- ordered choices are said to minimize the risk of face loss . Therefore, they are useful devices for maintaining politeness, (cf.1978;1987).

### 3. Silence and Politeness strategies

According to Brown & Levinson's ( 1978:1987) theory of politeness strategies , remaining silent is the most polite manifestation since the speaker avoids the **FTAs** altogether .Tennan ( 1985: 107) considers silence as a manifestation of **positive politeness** ; for, it relates to be understood without using any word . This form of silence can be displayed by , for example , not asking questions , or letting the speaker say as much as he\she wants to , such as the case in **The Stronger** .

**Negative politeness** can be expressed with silence , when it reflects recognition and respect ; for, the hearer's negative face needs to have undisturbed , freedom and be protected from intrusion (Mao, 1994: 460).Furthermore, and as Sounders (1985: 173) avers that "**through silence and formal courtesy,people preserve emotional neutrality .**"

Also, silence can be connected with **Off-record politeness strategy**. Tennan ( 1985: 100) advocates the idea and puts that " **Silence is the extreme manifestation of indirectness** " since it is not a matter of saying one thing and meaning something else . So, silence is the case of saying nothing and meaning something else , such as in **The Stronger**. Thus , there are some similarities that can be drawn between silence and Off-record devices. Firstly ,silence , just as **Off-recordness** , is a highly ambiguous form of communication . Secondly, silence and Off- record utterances encompass , in most cases , a high degree of

politeness ; for, silence permits the actor or the doer ( the one who keeps silent just like **Miss.Y** in **The Stronger** ) to evade responsibility for having committed a particular act and at the same time to diminish the degree of imposition . Thus , the interpretation of silence is left to the hearer , or reader ( Myers ,1975: 50 ) .

To sum up , silence can be viewed as a useful manifestation of different kinds of politeness strategies . That is , despite the long lasting tendency to diminish the importance of the multifaced role of silence in interactions, it has been proved that silence is a significant act of communication which displays all kinds of politeness strategies( **vis., On-record politeness , Positive politeness , Negative politeness, and Off-record politeness** ) in a way just as verbal expressions do .

To account for the silence as positive politeness strategy it is sufficient to stress the fact that cultural norms concerning its politeness regulate the amount of silence produced by speakers and shape its reception as an act of tact and respect or utter ignorance or rudeness . And, to know the fact that within the English culture , people treat silence with the feeling of acute " **self –consciousness** ," being careful in order not to sound " **dumb**" or " **stupid**"; i.e. people treat silence as a virtue which encodes a high degree of politeness and respect .Additionally , Maria Sifiano( 1992: 75) argues that English society , with positive politeness orientation , will value silence more than others . Laver (1981: 290) explains that routine behaviour is polite behaviour . He adds linguistic routines can be represented verbally as well as by the act of remaining silent

.And , silence as routine behaviour is frequently used in **acts** that are **face-threatening** .

Such a use of silence , understood by a customary act of saying nothing to specific stimuli , is , in turn , defined as formulaic silence . Its function boils down alleviating the **face threat** inflicted by the hearer him\herself (ibid.). For example , if a person has committed a social guilt ( just like **Miss.Y** in **The Stronger**); said something stupid or inappropriate, the only avoidable formula in situations like this, is to remain silent .Unless one wants to be rude or ridicule someone , one can say something , but it will not be formulaic, thus, impolite.

#### **4.Silence as Non-verbal communicative Act**

Nonverbal communication is usually understood as the process of communication through sending and receiving wordless messages(Farr,1962:96). Such messages can be communicated through gesture, body language or posture, facial expression and eye contact, object communication such as clothing, hairstyles or even architecture, symbols and infographics. Speech may also contain nonverbal elements known as paralanguage, including voice quality, emotion and speaking style, as well as prosodic features such as rhythm, intonation and stress ( Poyatos , 1981: 20 ) . Likewise, written texts have nonverbal elements such as handwriting style, spatial arrangement of words, or the use of emoticons .

**5. Functions of Silence as Non-Verbal communicating Act**

Gilmore ( 1985: 151 ), Tennan (1985: 97 ), Sounders ( 1985: 165) and Argyle (1988: 5) expound that the nature of silence by itself has various functions and meanings(needless to say that functions and meanings of silence are synonyms , here) in human communication such as :

**Table No.1: Functions and Meanings of Silence**

1	Express emotions	11	Management of strong , but problematic emotions
2	Express interpersonal attitudes	12	Self-Control
3	To accompany speech in managing the cues of interaction between speakers and listeners	13	Anxiety
4	Self-presentation of one's personality	14	Defensiveness
5	Rituals (greetings)	15	Aggression
6	Respect	16	Submission to an authority

7	A sign of positive social rapport among intimates	17	Consent
8	Avoidance, in the sense of omitting to say something negative	18	Approval
9	Thoughtfulness	19	Disagreement
10	Shyness	20	Curiosity

**6. The Pragma-Stylistic Analysis and Interpretation of *The Stronger***

Silence as an intended act of not speaking is common in many situations. It is important, then, that audience becomes aware of the different meanings and functions of silence, and proving that silence has multiple manifestations in the literary realm would be easy. In other words, what is uttered and what is kept silenced should be interpreted as a type of indirect discourse that needs to be actively deciphered by the audience. In **The Stronger**, silence also has few functions to do ( See **Table No.2**). As an example, **The Stronger** is dedicated to two actresses; besides, the task of the uncanny power for the analysis of the female mind exists. This situation is not that simple context as it appears to be. The conversation is carried on with speaking and silence, based on the decisions as to who speaks and who will remain silent. This decision signifies the status of the individuals and importance of content, among other things. There are well laid criteria in many contexts within a language community as regards who would initiate the conversation by breaking the silence, who would maintain it, who would speak more and who would end the

conversation. If we interpret the word disappearance as an empty space that leads to silence , the vanishing of utterances and their voices is precisely the leitmotif of the play.

And , yet, in this one simple scene Strindberg creates an episode of incredible , poetic power – a shot of life so intense and so powerful.

" *The Stronger* 's Silence is rich in allegory and lends itself to many layers of interpretations ( see **Table No.2**).

**Table No.( 2 ): Silence as Non-Verbal Positive Politeness Strategy in The Stronger**

<b>Functions &amp; Meanings of Silence</b>	<b>The Acts of Silence In <u>The Stronger</u></b>
<b>1. Self-Control</b>	<b>1. Miss Y : Looks up from her magazine ,nods and goes on reading ( The Stronger,P.: 21).</b> <b>2. Miss Y.: Gives her a disdainful glance ( The Stronger , P.: 22).</b>
<b>2. Curiosity</b>	<b>3. Pause.Miss Y .: Looks up from her magazine ,with cynical curiosity ( The Stronger,P.:23).</b> <b>4. Pause .Miss Y.: Gazes curiously at MrsX( The</b>

<p><b>3. Avoidance, in the sense of omitting to say something negative</b></p>	<p><b>Stronger ,P.: 23).</b></p> <p><b>5. Miss Y.: Seems about to speak( The Stronger ,P.: 24).</b></p> <p><b>6. Miss Y. Moves her things to the other table ( The Stronger , P.: 24) .</b></p>
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**6.1.Silence as Self –Control in *The Stronger***

Poyatos (1981:15) stresses that in some contexts, the person with superior status breaks the silence ; so, **Mrs X** considers herself as a person with superior status ; for, she is the married one . Also , a person in greater need always takes the initiative to break the silence,( Ibid.). A lengthy silence on the part of one engaged in conversation with another may signify that one is cautious and careful; a close emotional relationship between the two could also be signified.

On the other hand , **Miss Y** considers herself as a leader person , since **Mrs X** always takes her as her own model ( **Mrs X: .... that's why my boy is named Eskil--because it's your father's name; that's why I wear your colors, read your authors, eat your favorite dishes, drink your drinks--chocolate, for instance; that's why--oh--my God--it's terrible, when you think about it; it's terrible. Everything, everything came from you to me, even your passions. Your soul crept into mine, like a worm into an apple, ate and ate, bored and bored, until nothing was**



left but the rind and a little black dust within. I wanted to get away from you, but I couldn't; you lay like a snake and charmed me with your black eyes ( *The Stronger*,P.:24) , and (Thank you, Amelia, for all the good lessons you've taught me. Thank you for teaching my husband to love! Now I am going home, to love him" (*The Stronger*,P.:24).

So, leaders, often , do not talk during discussions and meetings because whatever they say might be taken as a decision. In order to enable discussions to continue, these leaders remain silent and this what has been happened :

1. **Miss Y : Looks up from her magazine ,nods and goes on reading .( *The Stronger*,P.: 21).**

Also , silence is frequently used by members to obtain and maintain power over others, especially in situations involving information( **Mrs X : Why are you silent? You haven't said a word this whole time, but you have let me go on talking! You have sat there, and your eyes have reeled out of me all these thoughts which lay like raw silk in its cocoon--thoughts--suspicious thoughts, perhaps ( *The Stronger*,P.: 23).** If access to and control of information is power, then not sharing information is a way to gain and retain power( Davies, 1988: 120):

- 2.**Miss Y.: Gives her a disdainful glance ( *The Stronger* , P.: 22).**

Goffman( 1955: 250) declares that " **individuals in positions of power frequently torture their inferiors under the rules of silence ."** Furthermore ,it is assumed that a silent member does not talk about actions he \she has

taken because silence means "**I did it, therefore I don't need to say it**". In this instance, the persons assume that their actions convey the message and therefore words are not necessary. The meaning is in their behaviour, not in words, (Bruneau, 1973: 20 ). Therefore , **Miss Y** is considered as a person who possessed a high self – controlled personality that is defined as the discriminative restraint of the adverse inclinations of the senses and the mind with a view to self purification in life( Suller ,1998: 5). Besides , a wise person is a self-controlled person. He\She keeps a tight reign on his emotions, actions, and words lest they foolishly go and gallop off a cliff with him\her on their backs( *Ward,2003 : 6* ) . So, a wise person turns his\her emotions, actions, and words( that is why **Miss Y** remains silent ) to his\her own advantage.

## **6.2. Silence as Curiosity in *The Stronger***

Curious people have an ongoing, intrinsic interest in both their inner experience and the world around them(Lowenstein,1994:81). Curiosity benefits our social and romantic lives. Curious people are often considered good listeners and conversationalists. Curiosity is associated with intelligence and problem-solving ability,( *Ibid.*).

That is why communication in face-to-face interactions is expressed through a number of channels, including the body, the voice, the face, and the eyes. While talking, people's faces are rarely still. They not only use their lips to talk, but raise their eyebrows, move or blink their eyes, or nod and turn their head (Poyotas 1981:21). Facial signals seem to help to regulate the flow of conversation in much the same way as intonation does. Signalling means emphasis and contrast, as well as information related to

turn-taking and control of the floor during an interaction. Facial signals also express affectual signals, which may be used communicatively to influence the other participant's behavior [Argyle ,1988:22):

**3. Pause.Miss Y .: Looks up from her magazine ,with cynical curiosity ( the Stronger,P.:23).**

Curiosity betrays emotional passion. It is a state of being involuntarily gripped by something that is difficult to ward and for which, since one cannot act otherwise, one is accountable only in a limited sense( Nowotny,2006: 2). Curiosity is an eager desire to know, to search. But, in the first sense it underlies the fundamentals of acquiring **wisdom**. Note that being curious is equivalent to being interested. Interest all too often implies a follow up of judgment ( Umiker-Sebeok,1980:300). So, when a crisis develops and people are trying to contain the situation , lots of directions and advice are often afford , thus , curiosity requires someone to intentionally focus on the speaking person to understand what is being said :

**4.Pause .Miss Y.: Gazes curiously at MrsX( The Stronger ,P.: 23).**

Therefore , curiosity is about listening and responding to the speaker.This does not mean that the listener agrees with the speaker necessarily , but rather , understands what is being said (Arlow,1961: 50).So, **Miss Y's** ability to listen to **Mrs X** is influenced by how **Miss Y** thinks and what she thinks about **Mrs X's** motives and actions . **Miss Y** is a good listener who tries to understand thoroughly what **Mrs X** is saying ; for, curiosity is a subjective quality of persons

whereby they are eager to know . Hence , **Miss Y** is eager to know and learn more about **Mrs X's** true personality and character .

**6.3. Silence as Avoidance, in the sense of omitting to say something negative ,in *The Stronger***

There are those who believe that "**if you don't have something nice to say, don't say anything at all**" (Messina & Messina,2007: 8). In fact, many people are taught this by their parents who are attempting to install in them the inappropriateness of saying the harmful things. Silence can be used as a form of social control . A person who has violated a social norm treats or welcomes others with silence:

**5. Miss Y.: Seems about to speak( *The Stronger* ,P.: 24).**

Therefore, "talking back", "report" and "rebuttal" are considered showing disrespect and/or disobedience in many situations, even reply in certain contexts which involve matters on interpersonal relations between members of different status ( Jaworski,1993: 55). While some of the latter contexts may be due to the separation of functions between different members , the addressee( **Miss Y**) simply does not reply, even in areas generally approved as the rightful domain of the addressee, as silence is treated as concurrence/agreement and which, when broken through utterances, is treated as disrespect to the other person( **Mrs X**).

Thus, silence, when addressed, is considered as showing respect and response. Silence is viewed as a virtue in more

ways than one. Many times those who choose silence as a way to express/avoid the expression of the feelings are fearful that they will say/do something that is over the top,i.e. something negative, thus, impolite .So, the more you fear appropriate self-expression, the more you avoid self-expression, and the more likely you are to feel unable to express ,i.e. keep silent( Messina & Messina,2007: 10) & ( Bell, 1986: 70):

**6. Miss Y. Moves her things to the other table( The Stronger , P.: 24) .**

Silence, then , receives importance as a means of communication, though , Non-Verbal .

**7.Concluding Remarks**

In the light of the above pragma-stylistic analysis, the researchers have reached the following conclusions :

1. The play is based on the literary strategy denominated as  
  
Rhetoric of Silence .
2. The immediate effect of the play is to make the audience be  
  
engaged in a process of decoding ; to position the audience

within the symbolic order presented by **Mrs.X** (or **Miss Y**) .As

a counterpart to silence , this invitation appears throughout

the play , thus turning it into a literary isotope.

**3.** Strindberg gives the reader the choice to choose who is the

stronger ? As readers , the researchers have found that the

stronger is **Miss Y** who chooses to maintain her silence

against **Mrs X's** accusations , in her independence and

politeness . Therefore, she denies the seriousness of **Mrs.**

**X's** accusations .

**4.** As far as linguistics is concerned , once silence is examined

more closely , the aspects we found in language

can also be found in silence ; i.e. silence plays an integral

part in human interactions as it is carried out in different

fields of linguistics ; it can be interpreted in various ways.

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الصمت بوصفه دراسة استراتيجية تأدب ايجابية في مسرحية  
أوغست سترن بيرغ ( أكوا ) : دراسة براغماتية

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المخلص:

يكون الصمت بليغاً في بعض الأحيان . فالحوارات تتطوي على ما لا يقال فضلاً عن ما يقال . وما لا يقال هو مثل الصمت البارد ، والصمت الراض ، والصمت المقدر ، والصمت المفعم بالأحترام والإعجاب ، والصمت المربك ( شولتز ١٩٩٤ ، ١ ) .

إذ أن ليس الرفض الكامل مقتضراً على الكلام ، ولكن فعاليات الصمت في ثنايا الخطاب تعد ذات مغزى ( بيكر ١٩٥٥ ، ١٦٥ ) . إن الفعل الغامض للصمت هو مصدر لكثير من المعاني المختلفة الممكنة ، وهو مصدر لإقوال وأمثال متنوعة ، وإلهام أدبي .

ومع هذا ، فالصمت يعد مريح سحري . فقد أصبح سلعة ثمينة من الصعب تحملها . وعلى نحو مخالف ، إن الرغبة للراحة لصوت الصمت تناقضها



حقيقة ان الصمت في الوقت عينه يخافه الناس ، بوصفه فعلاً سالباً وغير مرغوب فيه طالما أنه يعيق التواصل ويشوه الرسالة المرسله .  
وعلى وفق هذا ، فأن الصمت يعد في بعض الأحيان غير مرغوب فيه فحسب ، وعديم المعنى ولا شيء آخر . وأن الصمت لا يسهم في الحوار .  
ولهذا فأن الصمت يمكن أن يكون عنصراً مهماً في الحوار بالرغم من حقيقة كون الكلام صنفاً اتصالياً أولياً ، حامل متفوق للمعلومات .