UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA

USE OF CONVERSATIONAL SILENCE BY MALAYSIAN SCIENCE AND NON-SCIENCE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

BASHIR IBRAHIM

FBMK 2018 10

USE OF CONVERSATIONAL SILENCE BY MALAYSIAN SCIENCE AND NON-SCIENCE UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS IN ACADEMIC DISCOURSE

By

BASHIR IBRAHIM

Thesis submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

November 2017

DEDICATION

I dedicated this work to my parents, Hajiya Mariya Mudi Mailafiya Dukawa and Alhaji Ibrahim Danbala Zaitawa, and my grandparents, Hajiya Umma Isa, and Alhaji Mudi Mailafiya Dukawa. May The Almighty Allah grant you eternal rest.

Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Chairman : **Professor Ain Nadzimah Abdullah, PhD**
Faculty : **Modern Languages and Communication**

In the last few decades, there has been a renewed interest in the study of silence as a linguistic tool used by humans for communication purposes. Many past researchers on the use of silence, however, concentrated on studying silence in the classroom context. Few studies, if at all available, are on conversational silence in academic discourse. Still, there is paucity of research on the effect of task types or students' field of study on the use of conversational silence. This study sought to investigate the perceptions of Malaysian undergraduates on the use of conversational silence in academic discourse. It examined its use by two distinct groups of Malaysian students - science and non-science - in their academic interactions. It also determined the extent to which different academic task types affect the use of conversational silence by the two groups. In addition, it explored how culture plays a role in the use of conversational silence, and identified factors that contribute to its use by the groups.

Multiple instruments such as observations, focus group interviews, focus group discussions and video/audio recordings were used as tools for data collection. The study was underpinned by Sacks, Shegloff and Jefferson's (1974) Turn-taking theory, and Austin (1967) and Seale's (1969) Speech Act Theory. Conversation analysis using Drew and Heritage (1992) transcription notations and content analysis were used to analyze the data. The conversation analysis mainly concentrated on the analysis of types of silence – gap, lapse, pause, interruption and overlap during conversation, while content analysis was used to analyze the interview data. Content analysis, therefore, has helped determine how culture plays a role in the use of silence, and explore factors which influence the use of silence.

The overall result of the focus group interview indicated that the use of silence depends on the context, situation, and the participants involved. The result of the use of silence in academic discourse tended to indicate that both science and non-science participants of this study were similar in their use of silence, probably due to the similarity of their socio-cultural background. The findings suggest that where students share similar socio-cultural upbringing, their use of silence tends to be similar irrespective of their field of study. The nature of academic activity, however, may affect their use of silence. Future studies may consider the use of silence in 'authentic' academic situations such as during seminars or workshops, and among students at various levels of education.

PENGGUNAAN KESENYAPAN DALAM PERBUALAN OLEH PRA-SISWAZAH MALAYSIA ALIRAN SAINS DAN BUKAN SAINS DALAM WACANA AKADEMIK

Oleh

BASHIR IBRAHIM

November 2017

Pengerusi : **Profesor Ain Nadzimah Abdullah, PhD**
Fakulti : **Bahasa Moden dan Komunikasi**

Semenjak beberapa dekad yang lalu, tumpuan telah diberikan semula terhadap kajian kesenyapan sebagai satu alat linguistik yang digunakan oleh manusia untuk tujuan komunikasi. Kebanyakan pengkaji yang menjalankan kajian dalam aplikasi kesenyapan pada masa dahulu telah memberi tumpuan terhadap kajian kesenyepan dalam konteks bilik darjah. Walaupun sukar diperolehi dan hanya sedikit, terdapat beberapa kajian mengenai kesenyapan perbualan dalam wacana akademik. Namun demikian, jumlah penyelidikan mengenai kesan-kesan jenis tugasan atau aliran pendidikan terhadap kegunaan kesenyapan dalam perbualan masih tidak mencukupi. Matlamat kajian ini adalah untuk memahami persepsi prasiswazah dalam penggunaan kesenyapan semasa menjalankan perbualan dalam wacana akademik. Kajian ini telah dijalankan terhadap dua kumpulan prasiswazah Malaysia yang berlainan – iaitu aliran sains dan bukan sains – dalam interaksi akademik mereka. Kajian ini juga menentukan sejauh manakah jenis-jenis tugas akademik yang berbeza memberi kesan terhadap penggunaan kesenyapan dalam perbualan oleh kedua-dua kumpulan tersebut. Tambahan pula, kajian ini turut meneroka sejauh mahakah budaya memainkan peranan dalam penggunaan kesenyapan dalam perbualan di samping mengenalpasti faktor-faktor yang menyumbang kepada kegunaannya oleh kedua-dua kumpulan tersebut.

Beberapa pendekatan seperti pemerhatian, temuramah kumpulan fokus, perbincangan dalam kumpulan serta rakaman video/audio telah digunakan sebagai alat pengumpulan data. Kajian ini adalah berdasarkan Teori Pengambilian Giliran oleh Sacks, Shegloff dan Jefferson (1974) dan Teori Tindakan Pertuturan oleh Seale (1969). Bagi menganalisis data, analisis pertuturan berdasarkan notasi-notasi transkripsi dan analisis kandungan oleh Drew dan Heritage (1992) telah digunakan.

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Tumpuan utama analisis perbualan adalah pada analisis jenis-jenis kesenyapan – iaitu jurang, keterlanjuran, jeda, gangguan dan pertindihan semasa menjalankan perbualan, manakala analisis kandungan digunakan untuk menganalisis data temuduga. Oleh itu, analisis kandungan telah membantu menentukan sejauh manakah budaya memainkan peranan dalam penggunaan kesenyapan di samping meneroka faktor-faktor yang mempengaruhi kegunaanya.

Dapatan kajian penggunaan kesenyapan dalam wacana akademik jelas menunjukkan bahawa jenis aktiviti yang dilakukan boleh memberi impak terhadap penggunaan kesenyapan, tetapi aliran pendidikan pelajar hanya memainkan sedikit sahaja peranan dalam penggunaan kesenyapan. Dapatan kajian ini juga mencadangkan bahawa persepsi penggunaan kesenyapan adalah berbeza bagi setiap budaya di seluruh dunia. Tambahan pula, peranan kesenyapan berubah secara beransur dalam kalangan generasi tua dan muda. Malahan, dari segi aktiviti akademik, jenis aktiviti turut memberi impak terhadap penggunaan kesenyapan, dan tidak semestinya kerana aliran pendidikan mahasiswa sahaja. Kajian masa depan harus mempertimbangkan kegunaan kesenyapan dalam situasi-situasi akademik 'sebenar' seperti seminar ataupun bengkel.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

All praises be to Almighty Allah for the life and health He bestowed on me for accomplishing this landmark in the history of my life. Thank you, oh Allah, for this priceless gift. I owe sincere gratitude to the Chair of my Supervisory Committee, in person of Professor Ain Nadzimah Abdullah, whose support, guidance and patience made this work successful. Despite her tight schedules, she always had time for me to discuss my work to ensure that my dream came true. Thank you so much. May Allah reward you abundantly.

I will never forget the tremendous assistance of members of my Supervisory Committee – Professor Shameem Rafik Galea, and Dr. Zalina Mohd. Kasim. This journey would not have been successful without your guidance. I am grateful for your assistance in seeing me through.

I would also like to thank the Management of Kano University of Science and Technology, Wudil for their consent to pursue my PhD. I would particularly wish to thank the Director of my Department, Associate Professor Yusuf Maitama Abubukar for his support and guidance. I also have to thank Universiti Putra Malaysia for the Geran Putra IPS. The grant has helped in no small measure in facilitating my data collection, and attending international conferences.

My sincere gratitude goes to Dr. Syamsiah Masohor of Faculty of Engineering, and Dr. Zalina Mohd. Kasim of Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication for allowing me to use their students for my data collection. I thank you all, and all your students who have contributed immensely to my data collection.

I would also want to thank members of my family, particularly my wife Rukayya Nasiru, friends and relatives for their prayers and perseverance during my absence. May the Almighty Allah reward everybody that has contributed to the success of this journey. Peace and Blessing of Allah be upon the Seal of Prophets, Muhammad (S.A.W) his companions and members of his household.

I certify that a Thesis Examination Committee has met on 24 November 2017 to conduct the final examination of Bashir Ibrahim on his thesis entitled "Use of Conversational Silence by Malaysian Science and Non-Science Undergraduate Students in Academic Discourse" in accordance with the Universities and University Colleges Act 1971 and the Constitution of the Universiti Putra Malaysia [P.U.(A) 106] 15 March 1998. The Committee recommends that the student be awarded the Doctor of Philosophy.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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Date:

Declaration by graduate student

I hereby confirm that:
- this thesis is my original work;
- quotations, illustrations and citations have been duly referenced;
- this thesis has not been submitted previously or concurrently for any other degree at any other institutions;
- intellectual property from the thesis and copyright of the thesis are fully-owned by Universiti Putra Malaysia, as according to the Universiti Putra Malaysia (Research) Rules 2012;
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Signature: _____ Date: _____

Name and Matric No: <u>Bashir Ibrahim , GS41579</u>

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Declaration by Members of Supervisory Committee

This is to confirm that:
- the research conducted and the writing of this thesis was under our supervision;
- supervision responsibilities as stated in the Universiti Putra Malaysia (Graduate Studies) Rules 2003 (Revision 2012-2013) were adhered to.

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Description of Drew and Heritage (eds.) (1992) transcription notation used in this study

Left square bracket ([ ): Starting point of overlapping speech.

Right square bracket ( ]): End point of overlapping speech

Number(s) enclosed in brackets (e.g. 2.4): Silence measured in seconds

A single dot enclosed in brackets (e.g.): Pause of less than 0.2 seconds

Upward arrow (↑): Upward shift in pitch

Downward arrow (↓): Downward shift in pitch

Underlined word/phrase: Word/phrase emphasis

Colon (:) within a word: Prolongation of sound

Degree sign (°) at the beginning and end of a word: Section of talk produced in lower volume than the surrounding talk

Capital letters: Section of talk produced in higher volume than the surrounding talk

Hash symbol (#): Creaky voice

Pound Sterling symbol (£): Smile voice

Letter 'h' within a word (h): Laugh particle inserted within a word

A dash (-) after incomplete word: Speech cut off in the middle of a word

Less than symbol(<): Abruptly completed word

Greater/less than symbol (> -- <) at the beginning and end of a word: Section of talk uttered in a quicker pace than the surrounding talk

Less/greater than symbol (< -- >) at the beginning and end of a word: Section of talk uttered in a slower pace than the surrounding talk

Phrase/sentence enclosed in brackets (---): Section of talk that is difficult to hear but is likely as transcribed

Blank square brackets ( ): Inaudible word

A dot and three 'h' (.hhh): Inhalation

Three 'h' (hhh): Exhalation

A dot at the end of a sentence (.): Falling intonation at the end of an utterance

A question mark (?): Raising intonation at the end of an utterance

A comma (,) at the end of a sentence: Flat intonation at the end of an utterance

Equal sign (=) at the end and/or beginning of a word: 'Rush through' without the normal gap into a new utterance.

Comments in double brackets ((----)): Transcriber's comments

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1   Introduction

Silence can be part of a cultural norm acquired along with the attainment of language during childhood and thereby becoming an aspect of linguistic tool which in turn reflects the conversational style of the individual (Scollon and Scollon 1981, Tannen 1985). Despite its role as part of human communication style, researchers tend to avoid study of silence probably because, unlike speech, silence is highly imperceptible as its use depends on the culture being studied, contexts and situations. Realizing the importance of silence and the various functions it performs in communication, its study is beginning to gain prominence. As far as academic situation is concerned, a number of studies have looked at the use of silence mainly in the classroom and seminars (Giles et al. 1992), Hasegawa and Gudykunst (1998), Liu (2002), Nakane (2003, 2006), and Phuong (2014). However, there is paucity of research on how task types or students' field of study affect the use of conversational silence in academic discourse.

Various classifications of silence have been proposed. Kurzon (2007), for example, has classified silence as Conversational – an act of saying nothing where talk is expected, Thematic – refraining from discussing a particular topic due to cultural imposition, Textual – the practice of silence in some institutional settings such as libraries, religious houses, or classrooms by a group of people who were engaged in reading or reciting different or same texts, Situational – the practice of silence during performance of some activities such as remembrance day for the war dead (Kurzon, 2007). Kurzon however, perceived conversational silence as a situation that often occurs in dyadic interaction, i.e. with two participants only' (Kurzon 2007: 1676). This definition however, is considered as incomplete or an omission because in the other three types of silence – textual, situational and thematic proposed by Kurzon (2007) in his typology there is no mention of silence during meetings or tasks execution. Conversational silence, therefore, can generally be understood to be an act of saying nothing in a situation that involves two or more people conversing with each other such as in dyadic or triadic interactions, meetings, or when there are many people involved in doing a particular task with one speaker talking while others are listening.

As for Jaworski (1993), silence can be communicative or non-communicative. Silence is communicative when it can form and structure communication between conversation partners. In a sense, silence is communicative when it is preceded by an act which requires verbal response, but the conversational partner chooses to use silence instead of talk. Most use of silence in social interaction is culture, situation or context dependent. Silence, for example, can be interpreted in several ways i.e. positively or negatively, indication of politeness or impoliteness; a sign of closeness or aloofness, agreement or disagreement. For this reason, "silence is not only

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polysemic but symbolic of logically opposite meanings and emotions" (Lebra 1987, p. 350). A similar use of silence may evoke different interpretations in cultures, situations or settings. Consider the example below:

> A (boy): Please marry me
> B (girl): [Silence; head and eyes lowered]
> (Saville-Troike (1985, p. 9))

In Japanese culture, silence in the above context signifies acceptance, while in the Igbo culture of Southern Nigeria it means rejection if the girl continues to stand there saying nothing. If the Igbo girl runs away, it means she has accepted the marriage proposal. Apart from signifying various meanings, the above example shows that silence is not simply an empty 'locution', but "a potent communicative weapon" (Wardhaugh 1985, p. 72) which can be used in formal and social situations.

On the other hand, silence is non-communicative when it serves linguistic function such as the use of pauses, gaps and lapses during conversation. Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) identified 'gap', 'lapse' and 'pause' as three silence types that can occur during conversation. 'Gap' and 'pause' are the silences which occur when the current speaker stops talking, and no other speaker continues, and 'lapse' – a silence after the next speaker has been selected for a turn but has not started talking. They described these delays as 'classificatory decisions […] of conceiving the appearance of silence in a conversation' (Sacks, Shegloff and Jefferson, 1974, p. 715). Those types of silences are, therefore, linguistic markers with little communicative effect. In conversation, however, gaps, lapses and pauses are considered as significant linguistic markers which tends to indicate that the current speaker has ended his turn, and that any other speaker can take over the floor, or that he has not finished his turn but stops talking to take in air, for example, or he has lost memory. When the current speaker has not finished his turn, any attempt by another speaker to take over the floor is considered inappropriate, and may cause break of communication or breed negative social image.

Sacks, Shegloff and Jefferson (1974) have provided theoretical underpinning for explaining the appearance of silence in conversation and how turn exchange is perceived to have occurred. Their Theory, Turn taking theory, accounts not only for turn exchanges but what constitutes a turn (Turn Construction Unit), how exchange of speakership can be initiated and accomplished (Turn Taking), and the point at which exchange of speakership is considered more appropriate (Transition Relevant Place).

Turn exchanges can occur in both local and foreign language use. In both the local and foreign language use interlocutors are expected to follow certain conventions depending on the situation. Turn exchange protocols are believed to have been acquired during childhood when one learns not only the grammar and lexicon of the language but also the speaking habits (Scollon and Scollon 1981, Tannen 1985). "Thus

understanding turn-taking and its relation to cultural patterning provides a window on the workings of conversational interaction as well as on intercultural communication" (Tannen, 2012, p. 135).

In second language learning situations, the use of silence or long pauses, and sometimes complete avoidance of communication are associated with lack of proficiency on the one hand, and socio-cultural upbringing on the other (Nakane 2003, Liu 2002, Nguyen 2012). In a study of Vietnamese and Japanese students in Australia, Nguyen (2012) and Nakane (2003) discovered that lack of English proficiency has deterred Vietnamese and Japanese students respectively from speaking. Lack of proficiency has been said to have relationship with less opportunity of learning the second language (Piller, 2012, p. 14).

Many other researchers, however, believed that culture plays a major role in Asian silence. Liu (2002), who studied Chinese students in American classrooms discovered that Chinese students practiced silence not because of their incompetence in the use of English, but because of an aspect of Chinese culture which discourages loquacity. Also, Wu (1991), Liu (1989) and Sato (1982) reported that Asians found it embarrassing to raise their hands to answer questions in the classroom because a quick response was considered 'showing off' which their culture discourages. As such, most Asians opt for silence instead of talk in the classroom so as to avoid been considered as arrogant. As studies of silence mainly concentrated on the Chinese and Japanese students in American or Australian classrooms, further research is needed on other Asians, particularly Malaysians involved in some academic discourse.

In an anecdotal account, a friend of mine from Nigeria informed me that his supervisor once asked "why are you 'shouting' at me" when they were discussing his work over the telephone. Above incidence is possible when we consider what Jassem (1994) states about Malaysian conversational style as 'quiet' and 'soft'. Adding to the Malay conversational style, Ali (2000) believes that the concept of 'face' in Malay culture is an important factor that governs their speech. In other words, Malaysians use silence in order to save their face or that of other interlocutor. As such, a study of silence among Malaysians is justifiable considering paucity of research on Malaysians use of silence in academic discourse.

1.2 Malaysian languages and culture

Malaysia is a multiracial nation with 'no less than 70 languages spoken, belonging to different language families of Austroasiatic and Austronesian stock' (Jassem 1994, p. 164). The major ethnic groups are the Bumiputeras who form the majority population (Bumiputeras comprised 68.8 %), the Chinese (23.4 %) and the Indians (7.0 %) (Department of Statistics, Malaysia, 2017). The latter two ethnic groups were attracted by trade that was flourishing in Malay Peninsula, particularly the Sultanate of Malacca, since the fifteenth century (Platt & Weber, 1980, p. 1). Even before their

arrival, however, the Malay Peninsula was a home of several Indigenous languages (Omar, 1992, p. 2). The linguistic scenery of Malaysia was enhanced in 1963 after Sabah and Sarawak joined Malaya to form Malaysia. English language was brought to Malaysia by British traders and missionaries in the 18th century (Doshi, 2012, p. 18). Since then, English became the language of instruction in schools until the 1970s when the National Education Policy (NEP) proposed the use of Malay language at all levels of education. 'As Malay, the national language, was being increasingly used for social purposes, exposure to English began to decline' (Doshi, 2012, p. 19). The decline on the use of English for social and educational purposes, many researchers believe, has had an adverse effect on the proficiency of English among speakers of Malay. Tongue (1974, p. 18) once prophesized that:

> 'The change in status of English in Malaysia initiated in 1967 [when] English is being phased out as a medium of instruction in the educational system [...] in a few years' time will simply serve as the country's foreign language. This is bound to influence powerfully the level of proficiency in English in that country and the kind of English which is spoken there'.

The prediction began to manifest itself when a state in eastern Malaysia announced its decision to include English as an official language. The Sun newspaper reported on Friday, November 20 2015, (p. 2) 'Sarawak Chief Minister Tan Sri Adenan Satem announced on Wednesday that the state had adopted English as the official language of the state administration, apart from Bahasa Malaysia (BM). He argued that 'many graduates in the country were not fluent in English [and that] had significantly hindered their prospect' (Satem, 2015, p. 2). The decision has to do with the low proficiency in English at the state's secondary schools and higher learning institutions. Satem added that 'I do not know who made the decision not to use English in the past, but it has adversely affected other people now [....] I recently read that more than 2,000 doctors in Malaysia gave up their medical careers because of poor English [...] this is very sad' (p. 2).

1.3   Conversational style of Malay speakers

Malay conversational style is characterized by short messages, and quiet and short accent (Jassem 1994, p. 62). In addition, there is a lot of indirectness in Malay speech (Omar, 1992, p. 175). These characteristics are associated with childhood upbringing where Malay children learn the do's and dont's of language use (Omar, 1992, p. 175). Malay children, for example, were taught to speak to elders only when the need be, and that while speaking, they should not look directly into the eyes of the speaker, else they (the children) will be considered *kurang ajar* (rude) (Omar, 1992). Ali (2000) added that that 'face in Malay society is one of the mechanisms at work that enable members of society to understand the constraints governing their [Malay] discourse' (p. 15). He argues further that:

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'Preserving another's face is part of good manners and proper civilities. Those who want to save the face of another would demonstrate it, for instance, by delaying a negative reply or by not communicating negative feedback and embarrassing him'.

The above assertions point to the influence of culture on Malays propensity for the use of silence, and how their conversational style is characterized by indirectness, long pauses and slow pacing. It is therefore not surprising for non-Malaysians to develop negative social stereotype about Malay speakers as 'reserved', 'aloof' and 'solitary'.

1.4   Statement of the problem

Silence is an important linguistic and communication tool that carries lots of meaning. Realizing the importance of silence and the various functions it performs in communication, its study is gaining prominence. Still, little has been done on studying silence in academic discourse. The few available researches by Giles et al (1992), Hasegawa and Gudykunst (1998), Liu (2002), Nakane (2003, 2006), Al-Harahsheh (2012) and Phuong (2014) concentrated on studying silence among English as a Second Language (ESL) students in English speaking countries, and tend to concentrate on classroom silence. Harumi (1999) and Nakane (2003), for example, conducted a research on Japanese learners of English in Australia, Alharahsheh (2012) and Phuong (2014) on Jordanians and Vietnamese students in Australia respectively. Foregoing researches tend to generalize that Asians are quiet in the classroom and tended to strictly follow turn-taking exchange protocols in their formal and informal interactions. These countries – Japan, Vietnam, China and Jordan cannot represent how all other Asians use silence because there may exist cross cultural differences on the use of silence.

In addition, many of those past researches presented contradictory results. While Harumi (1999) suggested that silence among Japanese learners in English language teaching classroom can be associated with the culture of the Japanese, Nakane (2003) believes that lack of competence could explain the silence among the Japanese students. Also, different results were obtained by both Yates and Trang (2012), and Phuong (2014) who studied Vietnamese students in Australia. Yates and Trang believe that cultures of learning, that is, the expectations that both students and teachers bring with them to the classroom concerning expected and appropriate behaviors is a strong factor for students reticence. For example, in Western countries, students' oral participation in the lesson is needed while in many English as a second language classrooms, attention through silence is the expected behavior (Bao 2014). Phuong (2014), however, found that situation or context determine who was expected to be more silent/talkative between Australians and Vietnamese. Surprisingly, the result of his study indicated that Vietnamese prefer talk to silence in certain situations such as "being ignored by a partner" in contrast to Australians who preferred to use silence in that situation. Some other researchers such as King (2011) were ambivalent. He stated that silence cannot be attributed to a single factor but 'actually emerges through

multiple, concurrent routes' (King 2011, p. ii) among which was the consideration of silence as a feature of Japanese classrooms. Aforementioned studies indicated lack of consensus among researchers about the use of silence. Variations among past researchers on Asians use of silence calls for more exploration of silent behavior by other Asians, particularly in academic discourse.

It has also been argued that some reports about the use of silence by Asians are purely anecdotal. Miller (2000, p. 245) criticizes claims which dichotomize Japanese and American communication styles on the basis of accounts from personal experiences or collections of observations made by others, saying these approaches 'do not necessarily describe how speakers actually use language'. There is, therefore, the need for more empirical evidence with regards to the use of silence among Asians, particularly Malaysians.

Furthermore, other studies which were conducted in English as a second language classrooms such as Karim and Shah (2008), and Samar and Yazdanmehr (2013) indicated paucity of research on conversational silence in academic discourse. Also, very few studies, if at all available, consider how task types or students' field of study affect the use of silence in academic discourse. This research, therefore, seeks to investigate the perception of Malaysian undergraduate students in the use of silence in academic discourse, analyze the use of conversational silence in academic discourse by Malaysian undergraduate students, determine whether students' field of study or task type affect their use of conversational silence in academic discourse, and explore factors which contribute to the use of silence in academic discourse.

1.5   Research objectives

This research seeks to achieve the following objectives:

1. To investigate the perception of Malaysian science and non-science undergraduate students on the use of conversational silence in academic discourse.
2. To analyze the use of conversational silence by Malaysian science and non-science undergraduate students in academic discourse.
3. To determine how different academic task types affect the use of conversational silence by:
   i. Malaysian undergraduate science students.
   ii. Malaysian undergraduate non-science students.
4. To explore the role of culture in the use of conversational silence by Malaysian science and non-science undergraduate students in academic discourse.
5. To identify factors that contribute to the use of conversational silence in academic discourse by Malaysian undergraduate science and non-science students.

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1.6   Research questions

1. What is the perception of Malaysian science and non-science undergraduate students on the use of conversational silence in academic discourse?
2. How do Malaysian science and non-science undergraduate students use conversational silence in academic discourse?
3. How do different academic task types affect the use of conversational silence by:
    i. Malaysian science undergraduate students?
    ii. Malaysian non-science undergraduate students?
4. Does culture play a role in the use of conversational silence by Malaysian science and non-science undergraduate students in academic discourse?
5. What factors contribute to the use of conversational silence in academic discourse by Malaysian undergraduate science and non-science students?

1.7   Significance of the study

There are some past studies on the use of silence particularly in classroom context. (Nakane 2003, Harumi 1999, Haugh and Hinze 2003). However, these past studies have said little on what classroom activity resulted in the use of silence by the students, and whether the students' field of study can affect their use of silence. This study will help explore how different academic task types affect the use of silence by the participants, and whether their field of study affects their use of conversational silence in academic discourse.

In addition, some past studies, particularly in native English countries on speakers of English as a second language have identified lack of competence in using the second language as a concomitant of students' silence in the classroom (King 2011, Nakane 2003), culture (Phuong 2014), variations between Asians on the one hand, and Western societies and America on the other on the culture of learning (Yates and Trang 2012). The differing views among researchers on the factors that result in the use of silence calls for further investigation into those factors. This research will help identify factors that contribute to the use of conversational silence in academic discourse by Malaysian undergraduate science and non-science students.

1.8   Procedure for answering the research questions

The following table summarizes the procedure for answering the research questions:

Table 1.1 : Procedure for answering research questions

RQ	PROCEDURE
1. What is the perception of Malaysian undergraduate science and non-science students on the use of conversational silence in academic discourse?	Focus group interviews and audio recordings of responses to the interview questions by science and non-science students.
2. How do Malaysian science and non-science undergraduate students use conversational silence in academic discourse?	Video recordings and observations of two academic activities conducted by both science and non-science students.
3. How do different academic task types affect the use of conversational silence by: i. Malaysian science undergraduate students? ii. Malaysian non-science undergraduate students?	Video recordings and observations of two academic activities conducted by both science and non-science students.
4. How does culture play a role in the use of conversational silence by Malaysian science and non-science undergraduate students in academic discourse?	Focus group interviews and audio recordings of responses to the interview questions by science and non-science students.
5. What factors contribute to the use of conversational silence in academic discourse by Malaysian undergraduate science and non-science students?	Focus group interviews and audio recordings of responses to the interview questions by science and non-science students.

1.9   Scope of the study

This study is limited to conversational silence in academic discourse among science and non-science Malaysian undergraduates because the researcher believes that at university level, students are engaged in numerous academic activities such as group work and tutorials, which require verbal participation of the students, without considering whether the students are from science or non-science fields. None verbal contribution of the students in the academic activity is therefore considered as a problem. It is therefore important to find out how students use silence in those situations. Many past researchers concentrated on the study of silence in the classroom. The researcher believes that the classroom is but a part of the academic

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learning environment. Exploring the use of silence in other academic situations is thought to provide an insight into which learning style – silence or talk, is suitable in the Asian context particularly Malaysia. There has been a claim that Asians are silent (Nakane 2003, Harumi 1999, Phuong 2014, King 2011) and some lecturers particularly in the West perceive learning through silence as problematic because silence in the classroom was considered as a sign of non-learning or lack of attention (Nakane, 2003). It cannot be concluded, however, that learning through silence is problematic in Asian countries unless more is explored on which learning situation is suitable for the needs of the students themselves and the educational system.

The choice of English and Engineering students was done so as to allow comparison to be made between science and non-science students on their use of silence in academic discourse. Many past studies – Harumi (1999), Phuong (2014), King (2011) have not considered how students' field of study can affect the use of silence in academic discourse. Hence, the central objective of this research is to discover whether there is any difference between science and non-science students on their perception about the use of silence, and determine how the students from different fields of study use silence in two academic activities of opinion sharing and verbalizing data. This research, therefore, combines both what the participants say about their use of silence and what they actually practice during the execution of the two academic discourse tasks.

1.10   Theoretical perspective

This research is anchored on Turn taking theory of Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974), and Speech Act theory of Austin (1967) and Seale (1969, 1979). Turn taking theory seeks to account for how turns are initiated, constructed and distributed among conversational partners. Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) proposed a model of how turn taking works in conversation. The model comprised two essential components – Turn-construction and Turn-allocation components. Turn-construction component includes Transition Relevant Place (TRP) (a point where exchange of speakership is expected), and Unit-type (unit of talk such as sentences, clauses, phrases or single words). Turn-allocation component refers to how the talk is allocated among conversation partners, either by the current speaker selecting the next speaker or by self-selection.

Another theory used in this study is Austin (1967) and Seale's (1969) Speech Act Theory which centres on performing some acts which Austin called locutionary act (uttering words in accordance with rules governing pronunciation of the language in question), illocutionary act (uttering the words with certain intention in the mind), and perlocutionary act (the effect which the words will have on the hearer). 'An illocutionary act is successful if the speaker's illocutionary intention is recognized by the hearer' (Bach and Harnish, 1979, p. 15). Austin believes that the intentionality of an act (illocutionary act) falls within one of the following categories:

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i) *Verdictives* (passing judgement)
ii) *Exercitives* (exercising power or influence)
iii) *Commissives* (assuming obligation or declaration of intention)
iv) *Behabitives* (expressing feelings or attitude)
v) *Expositives* (clarification of reason or argument)

As the above acts are based on 'performatives', the effect of doing any of them can be achieved without uttering a word. For example, one can express his/her feelings by simply nodding his/her head. Also, when someone was invited to a party he/she can be silent to indicate unwillingness to attend. Silence, therefore, can be used to perform numerous activities just as speech does or even more. In a study by Dyne, Ang and Botero (2003) on employee silence in an organization, the authors discovered that silence presents greater ambiguity to observers compared to voice (p. 1388). It is little surprise then that Perniola (2010) referred to silence as 'the utmost ambiguity' probably due to the multitude interpretations it will take depending on the context, situation and the participants involved in the interaction.

Many proponents of speech act theory, particularly Seale (1969) concentrated on explaining the illocutionary act, which is performed at the level of intentionality. Each illocutionary act, therefore, performs at the level of intentionality, and the effect that intention could have on the listener. The use of speech act theory to discuss silence in considered relevant because most use of silence in conversation in intentional, and interpretable. The performer of the silent act, for example, can be uninterested or lack knowledge about the topic being discussed. His/her intention in remaining silent in that situation can be interpreted as dislike or unfamiliarity with the topic of discussion.

1.11   Conceptual Framework

The use of conversational silence in academic discourse among science and non-science students was investigated in this study. In order to obtain data of the study, the students were engaged in focus group discussions which were subsequently followed by focus group interview. The focus group discussions were video recorded so as to allow the researcher to observe how the participants used silence in academic discourse. One of the theories that was used in this study is Speech Act theory (Austin 1967, & Seale 1969/1979). It was used to explicate silence as an act that carries meaning, particularly the idea that silence can perform both illocutionary and perlocutionary functions just like speech does. Silence, therefore, is perceives as communicative in situations where it is preceded by an act (illocutionary act) which requires a response, but the conversational partner chooses to use silence instead of talk. In the case where silence is used instead of talk, it (silence) can have perlocutionary effect, which can be subjected to various interpretations depending on the context, situation and the participants involved.

Turn-taking Theory of (Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson 1974) was the another theory used in this study to explicate where silence functions as a linguistic marker, such as how turns are allocated and how they are taken during conversation. Sacks, Schegloff and Jefferson (1974) identified three silence types that can occur during interaction: 'gap', 'pause' – when the current speaker stops talking, and no other speaker continues, and 'lapse' – a silence after the next speaker has been selected for a turn but has not started talking. Those types of silences are considered as linguistic markers that appear in day-to-day conversation. In addition, overlaps and interruptions are considered vital in turn exchanges because they determine turn length, turn distribution and turn allocation during conversation. The following diagram illustrates how the study was conceptualized:
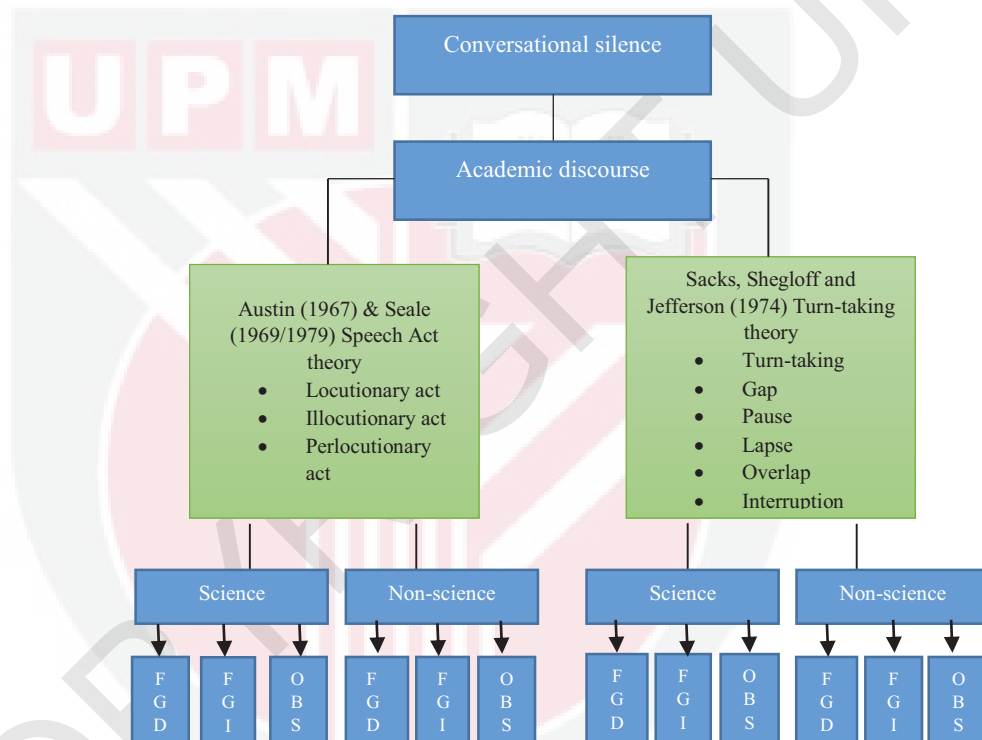
Figure 1.1 : Conceptual framework
Note:
FGD: Focus Group Discussion
FGI: Focus Group Interview
OBS: Observation

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1.12   Definition of terms

1.12.1   Turn-taking

The distribution of talk in conversation including 'the distribution of silences, the sequence in which the talk is shifted from one to another, or was retained by a single party and the way such transfer or retention were coordinated' (Sacks, Shegloff and Jefferson 1974, p. 8).

1.12.2   Transition Relevant Place (TRP)

The juncture where transfer of speakership takes place, that is, a point where the current speaker's talk is assumed to be complete, and as such change of speakership is possible at that point. Therefore, 'TRPs are the sites in conversation in which speaker change can be a 'legitimate next action' (Liddicoat, 2011, p. 90).

1.12.3   Turn Construction Unit (TCU)

This is a unit of the language which structures conversation. Unit-type in English language, for example include sentential, clausal, phrasal and lexical constructions including any utterance that structures talk.

1.12.4   Gap

A delay that occurred when 'a non-selected party self-selects or current speaker continues with a delay' (Knapp, Enninger and Knapp-Potthoff,1987, p. 287)

1.12.5   Lapse

A delay which occurred at a point 'where neither selected next speaker, nor a non-selected party that might self-select, nor current speaker takes the next turn' (Knapp, Enninger and Knapp-Potthoff, 1987, p. 287)

1.12.6   Pause

When the current speaker stops talking, and no other speaker continues (Knapp, Enninger and Knapp-Potthoff, 1987, p. 287).

1.13   Overall structure of the study

This thesis consisted of five chapters. Chapter One introduced the entire research by summarizing the study, background of the study, statement of the problem, research questions and objectives, significance of the study, conceptual framework and overall structure of the study. Chapter Two was divided into two main sections: theoretical and empirical literature. Chapter Three was about methodology – research method, research design, and method of data analysis. Chapter Four presented the results and findings of the study based on the research questions. Chapter Five was the summary of the overall study, contribution of the study and suggestions and recommendations for further research.

1.14   Summary

In this chapter, the background to the study has been presented particularly a brief explanation on the classification of silence into communicative and non-communicative, and how the researcher viewed silence from both linguistic and communicative aspects. Also discussed was a brief overview of Malaysia, and the status of English language in the country in both past and current situations, and how a change from the use of English to Malay language in institutions of learning affects proficiency level of Malay speakers of English. The chapter also discussed statement of the problem, research questions, research objectives, significance of the study, scope and context of the study, theoretical perspective of the research, conceptual framework and definition of terms.

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