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THE LINGUISTIC POWER OF CONNOTATIONS: THE CASE OF *SILENCE* IN ENGLISH AND ITS BULGARIAN COUNTERPARTS

Abstract: The paper explores the power of connotations to convey and shape meaning with reference to the English lexeme *silence* and its Bulgarian counterparts – the lexemes *тишина* and *мълчание*. These lexemes denote situations of silence but also connote people's subjective interpretation of such situations. In extralinguistic reality, situations of silence, associated mostly with the lack of events, activities, sounds or speech, have the power to trigger the experiencer's intellectual appraisal and emotional reactions due to the number of possible subjective interpretations of the respective situation. Linguistically, the lexemes under consideration demonstrate shades of implied meanings, which are in the spotlight throughout the study. The research focuses on the analysis of connotations of silence explicated mostly by collocations and structural patterns headed by the respective lexemes denoting silence in English and Bulgarian. The study demonstrates how the conceptual world picture based on human shared experience is encoded in language and how the experience of situations of silence accounts for the connotations of the respective lexemes. The linguistic analysis provides explanation of the prevailing unfavourable connotations of silence mostly in view of human anxiety about the unknown. The research is based on the application of the Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach put forward by Wierzbicka and Goddard to the study of the linguistic and extralinguistic dimensions of silence, which can be explicated by means of universal semantic primes. Since the emotional response to situations of silence is encoded linguistically mostly within collocations, the major structural patterns of collocations containing *silence* and its Bulgarian counterparts are explored as well. The study highlights the common connotations of the analysed lexemes presented by mind maps and also points some differences between them mostly with reference to the lexico-grammatical properties of English and Bulgarian. As a whole, the paper sheds light on the power of silence and its connotations in both verbal and non-verbal communication.

Key words: silence, connotations, semantic primes, collocations, explicit meaning, implicit meaning, shades of meaning

1. Introduction

Human verbal interaction employs both lexical denotation and connotation to convey meaning. With denotation, the meaning of words is conveyed explicitly while

with connotation the meaning is mostly implicit with the potential to unlock a number of subjective interpretations, thus facilitating or hindering communication. Usually, lexemes denote concrete entities that exist in the extralinguistic environment or abstract notions at the level of human mind. In both cases, words name items that are physically present or more complex concepts, formed on the basis of human experience. However, apart from the presence of something, words can also designate the absence of a person, thing or activity. In human anthropological development, it has been easier to perceive and name concrete objects that are physically present rather than abstract entities, which can be experienced but not perceived through visible, auditory or tactile sensations. In order to reach the idea of absence, people need to process the idea of presence first. The implicit lexical meaning of absence or nothing happening relies heavily on connotations activated in the context of use of lexemes such as *deficiency*, *loss*, *omission*, *shortage*, *want*, etc. The connotations have the linguistic power to shape lexical meaning, thus encoding the subjective perception of the respective situation.

The present study focuses on the idea of meaningful absence and its various connotations exemplified by situations of silence and the linguistic collocations that designate such situations in English and Bulgarian. Natural silence refers to situations of meaningful lack of sounds where no audible voice or noise can be heard, no ongoing activities are observed, seemingly nothing happens and the quiet prevails over a longer time period. The meaning can be extended to also denote intentional silence referring to situations of meaningful lack of words in human relations in the case of nobody speaking or deliberately demonstrating unwillingness to communicate verbally. However, both situations of natural and intentional silence are invested with implicit meanings. Such situations trigger various human emotions conveyed mostly through connotations. Just like intentional silence, long-lasting periods of silence in the environment, which would initially be interpreted as tranquility, might also cause uncertainty, apprehension, anxiety, tension and frustration. Anthropologically, people have long experienced situations of silence, which have left their cognitive imprint on the human mind. The lack of something happening in the case of natural silence or of any kind of information communicated verbally with intentional silence are both considered indicative of a potential threat, which arouses the feeling of insecurity and activates a reaction of avoiding danger or a mechanism of self-defense. Longer periods of silence are largely felt to be disheartening, oppressive, and alarming. Thus, the power of silence is widely employed as a non-verbal communicative strategy to convey explicit meaning or implicit connotations in order to urge to action. The same goes for silence as power to modify social trends and prevent backlash in society.

1.1. Motivation of the Study

The multifaceted functions of silence as a powerful communication tool are encoded in a number of sayings reflecting folk wisdom such as: *silence is better than unmeaning words* (Pythagoras)¹, *meaningful silence is better than meaningless*

¹ Listed in Wood (1893: 391).

words, silence speaks louder than words, silence is the most powerful scream, silence is golden, etc. Such sayings illustrate the significance of silence in human communication, conveying a host of possible meanings and interpretations, mainly the attitude of the speaker towards the topic of conversation, avoiding miscommunication, refusing to provide information, etc. Generally, failure to express meaning through words results in silence, which might be more meaningful than words themselves. Remaining silent is a powerful communicative strategy to express strong disagreement, avoid verbal interaction and personal involvement in cases of predicament and disconcerting circumstances. The power of silence is a non-verbal communicative strategy applied in the interaction between the speaker and the addressee. Communicating information through silence does not convey meaning explicitly but relies rather on evoking the most general idea of complication in the mind of the addressee. The speaker might employ silence intentionally or unintentionally, both of which trigger a deliberate or spontaneous subjective reaction in the addressee to the objective communicative situation.

The study is motivated by the need to explore the linguistic aspects of communicative silence and its potential to convey meaning in social interaction. The research focus is placed on the linguistic means denoting the impact of the manipulative strategy of silence on the addressee and their personal interpretation and/or reaction in relation to the speaker's communicative stance. Semantically, the connotations of the speaker's communicative silence and/or the addressee's intellectual or emotional response to it are expressed by various linguistic devices containing the lexeme *silence*, the most common of which are nominal modification, verb–noun and noun–noun collocations, perceiving silence as the doer of an activity in the syntactic function of subject, etc. It is the correlation between the subjective perception of silence and the connotations of the lexeme *silence* expressed by various linguistic devices that lie in the spotlight of attention throughout the study. The analysis is expected to shed light on the interaction between the communicative power of silence as a social strategy of manipulation and the linguistic power of connotations to shape the meaning of the lexeme *silence* within various structural patterns. In order to provide in-depth study of the multifaceted phenomenon of silence and its impact on people, the study also considers silence perceived mostly as environmental stimulus not directly related to human communication. All in all, the research findings based on a contrastive study of empirical data in English and Bulgarian are expected to refute the positive expectations that might occasionally be ascribed to situations of silence in both nature and society.

1.2. Study Objectives and Tasks

Linguistically, silence dwells in the interplay between semantics and pragmatics. Pragmatically, the communicative power of silence comes to the foreground. It can be explored with reference to interpersonal communication as a kind of speech act where the speaker is at a loss for words, overpowered by emotions, declines involvement in the communicative situation or refuses to convey information in

order not to cooperate, to remain tactful, avoid offence and unwanted communication failure or is just indecisive and afraid of the addressee's reaction. The pragmatic study of silence in communication would focus mostly on the communicative intention of the speaker with reference to their choice to remain silent. Semantically, the lexeme *silence* can be explored with reference to its vague abstract meaning, which can be fully interpreted in view of the particular context of situation. The semantic study of silence would focus mostly on the communicative effect of silence on the addressee as the target of the respective communicative strategy. The lexeme *silence* forms a number of collocations, which contain modifiers or intensifiers conveying the various connotations of the studied lexeme. Syntactically, its major functions are that of subject with verbs denoting events or object with verbs denoting a willingness to terminate the event. The major goal of the paper is to provide an in-depth semantic analysis of the lexeme *silence* and the linguistic power of its various connotations to shape its meaning based on a study of collocations and structural patterns of the studied lexeme.

Another objective of the study is to provide a contrastive analysis of the English lexeme *silence* and its Bulgarian counterparts in order to find similarities and differences in the perception of silence and its linguistic expression in both languages. The English lexeme has broader lexical meaning denoting silence in both nature and communication while in Bulgarian there are two separate words – *тишина* denoting a lack of sounds in nature and *мълчание* denoting intentional silence or the lack of words in communication. Both Bulgarian lexemes functioning as semantic and functional counterparts of *silence* are studied with reference to the connotations they denote as powerful means of constructing meaning. The analysis also aims at constructing mind maps in order to illustrate the collocations of *silence* and its Bulgarian counterparts. By doing so, the analysis is expected to outline the subjective interpretation of situations of silence in English and Bulgarian.

In order to accomplish the objectives of the study, a number of tasks need to be set and accomplished. A theoretical framework needs to be selected which is applicable to the present study. Empirical data for both languages need to be collected and processed in order to compile a corpus, which is to be employed for the study of the respective lexemes. A separate analysis for each of the languages is required prior to conducting the contrastive analysis proper. Since the notion of silence is both language-independent and culture-specific, it is appropriate to validate the analysis of the linguistic data with informants. The analysis benefits from a survey conducted among bilingual informants who are native speakers of Bulgarian and near-native speakers of English, in order to examine the connotations they naturally ascribe to the lexemes that are in the focus of attention in the present study.

1.3. Research Hypothesis

The study has been largely spurred by the discrepancy between people's potential assumption of silence as a period of tranquility and the shared human experience of silence as a distressing period of solitude and isolation. Actually,

languages have various lexical ways of distinguishing between the positive and negative connotations associated with the lack of sounds in nature and the lack of communicative exchanges respectively. In English, the collocation *peace and quiet* denotes the positive experience of silence while in Bulgarian the respective collocation is *тишина и спокойствие* (literally *silence and quiet*). The use of synonymous lexemes in both collocations has the emphatic function to express the intensity of the favorable experience. The positive connotations of such collocations refer mostly to desirable situations of varying duration, which are beneficial to people. It should also be pointed out that the stated English collocation does not contain the lexeme *silence* while the Bulgarian one contains *тишина* intensified by its synonym *спокойствие*. In the case of negative connotations, the lexeme *silence* is used on its own without a synonymous intensifier. In human cognitive experience, the perception and subjective interpretation of silence can be accounted for with reference to its duration as shorter time periods presuppose a mostly positive experience of silence while longer time periods of a lack of sounds or verbal communication prove to be distressful being beyond volition, intention, and control.

In view of the above, the initial research hypothesis to be tested in the study is that the negative connotations of *silence* and its Bulgarian counterparts naturally prevail over the positive ones. Therefore, linguistically the modification of *silence*, which encodes its connotations, are mostly lexemes denoting the unpleasant subjective experience associated with fear, anxiety, distress, etc. The clearly stated initial hypothesis tends to be substantiated by human anthropological development in which situations of comfort by default function as the prototype, while discomforting situations seem to be rather peripheral, highly marked and cognitively salient. However, it is the periphery that merits special attention as it is less familiar, potentially perilous, and exemplifies human fear of the unknown. The conceptual (cognitive) world picture correlates with the linguistic one (Wittgenstein 1961, Weisgerber 1963: 7–8, Humboldt 1988, Кубрякова 1988: 144–146, Пенчева 1998: 30–34, Маслова 2004, Попова и Стернин 2007: 52). In the former, the unfamiliar is perceived to be the most peculiar, which is naturally encoded in the linguistic picture of the world as well. By providing modifiers collocating with the lexeme *silence*, people tend to ascribe their own experience of the world onto language.

1.4. Empirical Data

The research hypothesis is tested against empirical data retrieved from electronic corpora of English and Bulgarian by employing a corpus-driven approach to study the collocations and context of use of the English lexeme *silence* and its Bulgarian counterparts. English collocations containing *silence* are retrieved from the *Coronavirus Corpus* (CC), which contains linguistic units referring to the ongoing pandemic situation worldwide. The corpus provides the proper thematic environment to study the connotations activated when silence functions as a strategy to handle people's inability to cope with complicated extralinguistic situations. Due to a number of lockdowns in the years of the pandemic, people have been affected

by states of isolation and solitude experienced in grave periods of silence. The selection of a corpus containing segments on the topic of the pandemic provides the necessary linguistic background to study the connotations of the lexeme *silence* in English. The collocations with this lexeme in the *British National Corpus* (BNC) are also examined in order to find out whether there is any significant difference in the premodification of *silence* in non-pandemic texts.

Since there is no Bulgarian equivalent to the *Coronavirus Corpus*, the Bulgarian counterparts of *silence* are explored on the basis of empirical material extracted from the *Bulgarian National Corpus* (BulNC) and *BulTreeBank* (BTB). Both Bulgarian corpora provide representative examples of the collocations containing the respective lexemes and their inferred connotations. For both languages two major structural patterns are analyzed – *silence* / *тишина* / *мълчание* being used on their own or in noun phrases, with the lexemes in question functioning as the head preceded or followed by modifiers. The examples retrieved for the present study are processed statistically in order to find out the most common usage of the respective lexemes in both languages. Empirical data is also provided by one hundred bilingual informants participating in a survey on the meanings of *silence* in English and Bulgarian.

The present empirical study has been conducted on the basis of a quantitative analysis of 5 000 most common collocations and structural patterns for each of the analyzed lexemes, namely corpus units containing the English lexeme *silence* and its Bulgarian counterparts – the Bulgarian lexemes *тишина* and *мълчание*. The number of extracted items is representative of the semantic and syntactic properties of the studied lexemes. Formally, the statistical analysis of both corpora reveals some fixed structural patterns containing the respective lexemes. The patterns presented in the analysis of empirical data in Section 3 and Section 4 are listed following the statistical data for each of the languages. For English, the statistical data on structural patterns is as follows:

- Noun Phrases with Premodifier plus *Silence* – 56%
- Noun Phrases with *Silence* plus Postmodifier – 16%
- Verb Phrases with *Silence* as Object – 13%
- Coordinate Noun Phrases with *Silence* – 12%
- Simple Sentences with *Silence* as Subject – 3%

Semantically, the lexeme *silence* explored on the above structural patterns exhibits predominantly negative connotations and unfavorable experience in 75% of the corpus data.

Structurally, the statistics for the Bulgarian lexemes *тишина/мълчание* are as follows:

- Noun Phrases with Premodifier plus *Тихина/Мълчание* – 52%
- Noun Phrases with *Тихина/Мълчание* plus Postmodifier – 14%
- Verb Phrases with *Тихина/Мълчание* as Object – 13%
- Coordinate Noun Phrases with *Тихина/Мълчание* – 12%
- Simple Sentences with *Тихина/Мълчание* as Subject – 9%

Just like in the English sample, semantically, the lexemes *тишина/мълчание* exhibit mostly negative connotations manifested in 80% of the units in the corpus data. For both languages, the subtypes within each of the structural patterns explored in the study are also listed following the statistical analysis of the corpus.

2. Explicating Meaning Through Natural Semantic Metalanguage

The phenomenon of silence is deeply grounded in human cognitive experience. In the extralinguistic world, silence subconsciously triggers tense anticipation and mostly negative emotions due to a lack of information and possible (mis)interpretations in the mental processing of such situations. Linguistically, connotations of silence convey implicit meanings, which are mappings of the perception of silence in the extralinguistic world. In order to study the meaning of connotations, a linguistic framework is needed, which focuses on key notions perceived as basic in human anthropological development and as fundamental in construing the meaning of lexemes and collocations. Such notions are conveyed by means of basic vocabulary items denoting space, time, location, people, activities, quantification, qualification, causality, etc. The approach adopted in the study is the Natural Semantic Metalanguage (NSM), which has been developed for over fifty years mainly by Anna Wierzbicka and Cliff Goddard. It focuses on decomposing basic notions in human cognition into fundamental primes, which function as explicit or implicit components of meaning. The NSM approach studies meaning by exploring universal semantic constituents in order to find out the basic objective and subjective properties of an entity in relation to human conceptualization. Such an approach can be used to account for both explicit meaning constituents and implicit shades of meaning; therefore, it is considered an apt framework to explore the linguistic power of silence and its connotations in the study. What is more, culture-specific vocabulary is of special interest to NSM research, so it is applicable to a contrastive analysis as well.

The Natural Semantic Metalanguage approach to the study of meaning builds upon the alphabet of human thought, an approach originally proposed by Leibniz (1903: 244, 430, 435), following Descartes (1701/1931: 324), which focuses on universal elementary components constituting meaning based on human experience and conceptualization of the world (Wierzbicka 1993). Leibniz's major idea is that an infinite number of concepts can be constructed in terms of a finite number of components. This is one of the earliest decompositional semantic approaches, the main idea being that meaning consists of a limited number of smaller constituents employed when people make sense of the world. According to Leibniz, it is the range of those elementary concepts that constitute the alphabet of human thought making it possible to construct mental images of the extralinguistic world and encode those images in the vocabulary stock of language thus making communication possible. Just like the letters in an alphabet combine to constitute words, so do those basic

concepts combine to construct complex notions, which convey meaning. The approach also credits the work of Bogusławski (1966, 1970) who provided a similar approach to the study of linguistic semantics.

Wierzbicka (1993: 24) claims that what is needed in linguistics is “a universal framework for the description and comparison of languages [...], in which both the language-specific and the language-independent aspects of meaning can be adequately described”. It is also stated (ibid.) that the Natural Semantic Metalanguage meets the requirements of such an approach as it features a set of semantic primitives or primes, which are universal as they exist in most of the world languages. Such an approach is both language-independent and culture-free; moreover, it is applicable to the study of culture-specific vocabulary in any language. Leibniz (1903: 281) introduced the idea of “atoms of human thought” to refer to the elementary constituents of meaning. In her work, Wierzbicka makes an analogy with atoms and molecules to refer respectively to the primes and the complex notions they constitute. The analogy is further elaborated on by Goddard (2010: 131) who contrasts semantic primes as simple, basic and irreducible “atoms of meaning” with semantic molecules as complex concepts, which are decomposable into a combination of semantic primes and which can in turn constitute other, more complex concepts. Some semantic molecules are body-part terms – *hands, legs, mouth*, physical descriptors – *flat, hard, long, round, sharp, straight*, physical activities – *drink, eat, sit*, life-form words – *animal, bird, fish, tree*, environmental terms – *day, fire, ground, night, sky, sun, water*, basic social categories – *children, father, men, mother, women*, and cultural concepts – *book, color, money, number* (Goddard 2015: 824–826). Wierzbicka (1993: 26) points out a major feature of the primes, namely that they have been lexicalized and exist as separate lexemes in all the languages of the world. As such, they function as a kind of minimal language and can be used for basic communication.

The notion of semantic primes (primitives) is proposed by Wierzbicka (1972) and defined as a set of semantic concepts that are supposedly innate and undecomposable; they are familiar to all people but cannot be explained or paraphrased in simpler terms. A key feature of primes is that they can hardly be defined concretely since they function as the smallest components of meaning and are used to explicate lexical meaning. Goddard (2015: 817) defines primes as “simple indefinable meanings which appear to be present as word-meanings in all languages”. By employing the NSM approach, which uses semantic primes, whatever is unfamiliar and unknown is accounted for with reference to the familiar and well-known. The underlying assumption of the NSM approach to semantics is that complex and obscure meanings are explicated in terms of simple and self-explanatory ones (Wierzbicka 1996: 10–11). A key feature of primes is that they function as language universals since they can be found in any natural language; they constitute the shared semantic core of all natural languages (ibid. 13, 22) and linguistically can be used as a kind of metalanguage, considered to be the “intersection of all languages” (Goddard and Wierzbicka 2014: 13). Goddard (2015: 818) states that “the mini-language of semantic primes embodies the fundamentals of linguistic cognition”. As concepts, semantic primes are employed in construing the cognitive image of the world; as

lexical exponents they function in rendering the corresponding linguistic image of the world. The lexical exponents of primes constitute morphosyntactic constructions, which convey meaning in language (Goddard 2015: 831).

Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014: 2) claim that “to successfully decode complex and culture-specific meanings, for example *country*, *nation*, and *society*, one needs to decompose them into simple concepts which can be found in all languages”. In NSM the decomposition of meaning is based on semantic explication, which is “a formal mode of meaning representation” (Goddard 2015: 818). It employs reductive paraphrase, which explicates meaning “in the metalanguage of semantic primes” (Goddard 2015: 818, see also Goddard 2010). The explication decomposes the meaning of a lexeme into its primes and at the same time explicates human conceptualization of the respective item so that it functions both as linguistic analysis and as conceptual analysis. In view of the above, Goddard claims that the reductive paraphrase functions as a conceptual model itself. Studying meaning in terms of paraphrase through primes ensures explication, which, unlike dictionary definitions, avoids circularity (ibid.: 123–124). The reductive paraphrase uses minimal language in order to explicate the conceptualization of an entity or event in human mind. Though conceptualization and explications might be culture-specific, they invariably employ primes, which are universal. Goddard (2015: 818) considers the NSM metalanguage “an invaluable descriptive tool for the analysis and contrastive study of meaning-related phenomena in all languages: a *tertium comparationis* for crosslinguistic study and language typology” (see also Wierzbicka 1996: 16). It is also defined “as a tool for cross-cultural analysis” (Wierzbicka 1996: 34), hence the applicability of NSM to the present contrastive study.

The total inventory of sixty-five universal semantic primes is presented by Goddard and Wierzbicka (2014: 12) and Goddard (2015: 820). The ones, which are relevant to the present study, are listed below:

- substantives – I, YOU, SOMEONE, SOMETHING~THING, PEOPLE, BODY
- determiners – THIS, THE SAME, MUCH/MANY, OTHER~ELSE
- evaluators – GOOD, BAD
- descriptors – BIG, SMALL
- mental predicates – KNOW, THINK, WANT, DON’T WANT, FEEL, SEE, HEAR
- speech – SAY, WORDS, TRUE
- actions, events, movement, contact – DO, HAPPEN, MOVE, TOUCH
- location, existence, possession, specification – BE (SOMEWHERE), THERE IS, BE (SOMEONE’S), BE (SOMEONE~SOMETHING)
- time – WHEN~TIME, NOW, BEFORE, AFTER, A LONG TIME, A SHORT TIME, FOR SOME TIME, MOMENT
- space – WHERE~PLACE, HERE, ABOVE, BELOW, FAR, NEAR, SIDE, INSIDE
- logical concepts – NOT, MAYBE, CAN, BECAUSE, IF
- intensifier, augmentor – VERY, MORE
- similarity – LIKE~WAY~AS

To illustrate the application of NSM, Goddard (2015: 821) provides the explication of *ask* in *X asked Y something* as ‘X said something to Y, because X wanted to know

something; X wanted Y to say something because of this'. Exploring meaning by NSM has been applied extensively to the study of culture-specific vocabulary, emotions, mental states, activity verbs, speech acts, physical qualities with focus on contrastive analysis (see Wierzbicka 1992, 1997, 1999, 2006, 2010, 2014, Goddard 2005, Goddard and Wierzbicka 2014, 2016). The present study employs NSM to explore the common perception of silence as having the power to activate negative intellectual and emotional states, which prevails over its power to ensure positive experience. So far, the language of silence has been previously explored by Kurzon (1998, 2007, 2011), Zuo (2002), Jaworski (1993, 2006), Ephratt (2022) mostly in its socio-pragmatic aspects. The linguistic analysis below explores the connotations encoded in the lexical meaning of *silence* in English and its Bulgarian counterparts exemplified by major collocations and structural patterns in both languages.

3. Explicating the Connotations of *Silence* in English

The emotions caused by prolonged silence have been briefly touched upon by Wierzbicka (1999: 125, quoting Nuss 1993: 188–189), namely “for a German, the endless silence [...] express[es], in a striking way, the nameless *Angst* that is felt by every human being and that one can never quite grasp [...] The German fears not so much physical danger [...] as the unknown”. The analysis of the linguistic data in the present study reveals a close empirical connection between situations of silence and the emotions such as anxiety and tension caused by the unknown, which in turn trigger a host of disquieting interpretations in the human mind. The extralinguistic situation of silence is mapped on the conceptual picture of absence, which embodies implicit interpretations instead of notional components in constructing the meaning of the respective lexical collocations. As shown in Fig. 1, the connotations of *silence* are substantiated by their semantic function as implicit means of conveying interpretations and emotions matched with the explicit lexical meaning of absence in language.



Fig. 1 The implications of *silence* and its linguistic connotations

As can be seen in Fig. 1, the linguistic connotations of *silence* are mappings of the various interpretations of the corresponding extralinguistic situation of intricacy, which is seemingly devoid of meaning but is actually laden with emotional content.

The implicit connotations of *silence* are explored on the basis of the following explicit structural patterns in which the lexeme is employed:

- noun phrases with premodifier plus *silence*;
- noun phrases with *silence* plus postmodifier;
- verb phrases with *silence* as object;
- coordinate noun phrases with *silence*;
- simple sentences with *silence* as subject.

The selection of structural patterns is based on the statistical analysis of the corpus but also demonstrates the potential of the lexeme *silence* to combine with nouns, verbs, adjectives, and prepositions. By exploring the range of patterns above, the various connotations of the lexeme *silence* come to the foreground. Such an approach also makes it possible to select the relevant primes and provide the explication of *silence* with reference to the natural semantic metalanguage.

3.1. Noun Phrases with Premodifier plus *Silence*

The (un)favorable human experience with situations of silence is encoded linguistically by the premodifiers of the lexeme *silence*, which explicate the connotations of the respective lexeme. The broad subdivision of connotations into positive and negative is based on the experiencer's subjective interpretation and emotional response to such situations in social communication or the environment. Statistically, the most common premodifiers collocating with *silence* in the corpus can be classified semantically in view of the speaker's communicative intention, the addressee's interpretation and the peculiarities of the situation itself as follows:

- premodifiers conveying negative connotations – *awful, awkward, brooding, chilling, cold, curious, dark, dead, dreadful, eerie, embarrassing, empty, fearful, fraught, frightening, frosty, gloomy, grim, heavy, horrified, hostile, hushed, lockdown, meditative, ominous, oppressive, painful, peculiar, pregnant, shameful, sinister, solemn, somber, stoic, stony, strained, strange, stunned, sullen, tense, terrible, uncanny, uncharacteristic, uncomfortable, uneasy, unnatural, unusual, etc.*;
- premodifiers conveying positive connotations – *awesome, blessed, blissful, companionable, compassionate, contented, dignified, elegant, noble, respectful, etc.*
- premodifiers denoting intensity – *absolute, complete, deafening, deep, dominant, global, loud, relative, resounding, pin-drop, profound, sphinx-like, total, utter, etc.*;
- premodifiers denoting duration – *brief, continuing, ensuing, lengthening, long, momentary, one/two/three-minute, ongoing, prolonged, short, etc.*;
- premodifiers denoting intent – *deliberate, enforced, self-imposed, strategic, studied, etc.*
- premodifiers denoting explicitness/implicitness – *apparent, conspicuous, eloquent, enigmatic, inner, official, perceived, seeming, virtual, etc.*;
- premodifiers denoting dimension – *collective, general, national, public, etc.*

Since the speaker uses connotations to convey meaning implicitly, the addressee's competence is activated in order to provide proper interpretation of the speaker's communicative intention. In the case of the premodifiers listed above, the greatest number of them denote intentional silence and have mostly negative connotations implying anxiety,

dejection, desolation, fear, foreboding, frustration, solitude, stress, tension, uneasiness, etc. Such connotations are strengthened by the duration, intensity, intent and dimensions of silence, cf. *two-minute silence*, *a moment of silence*. Supposedly communicative situations, which are actually situations of prolonged silence, further reinforce the negative connotations and their respective interpretations. Very few modifiers imply positive emotions, mostly in shorter periods of natural silence with clear interpretations. Thus, the immense communicative power of silence is embodied by the explicit meanings of its adjectival modification and the implicit meanings of its connotations, both of which correlate to encode human subjective interpretation and evaluation of meaningful silence. In view of the premodifiers stated above, it can be pointed out that the very few premodifiers conveying positive connotations per se denote mostly the perception of silence in the environment while the large number of premodifiers conveying negative connotations denote mostly the interpretation of silence in social communication.

3.2. Noun Phrases with *Silence* plus Postmodifier

The most common phrase following the pattern is *the silence of*, which is indicative of the connotations of *silence* since the postmodifier directly exemplifies a case in point. The most typical situations are:

- negative connotations – *the silence of acquiescence / compliance / doubt / emptiness / fear / guilt / isolation / lockdown / loneliness / prison / seclusion / solitude*, etc.;
- positive connotations – *the silence of the forest / nature / the night*, etc.

The general trend outlined so far in the study of the negative connotations of *silence* prevailing over the positive ones has been elucidated by the cases of postmodification as well. The negative connotations are again associated with states and emotions triggered by lack of proper communication while the few cases of positive connotations exemplify natural silence without human intervention.

3.3. Verb Phrases with *Silence* as Object

The connotations of the lexeme *silence* can also be inferred from the meanings of the verbs that combine with it in the function of object. The following groups of verbs can be outlined:

- verbs of discontinuation – *break, cut, disrupt, disturb, end, fill, interrupt, pierce, puncture, shatter, smash, stop*, etc.;
- verbs of sense-perception or mental states – *accept, feel, hear, keep, know, mind, monitor, notice, observe, understand*, etc.;
- verbs of emotions or dis/like – *appreciate, condemn, criticize, endure, enjoy, fear, embrace, hate*, etc.

The use of causative verbs of rupture and cessation is indicative of the negative connotations of *silence* and the willingness for such situations to be terminated. They evoke apprehension, dislike, forbearance or mere preventive perception. The three verbs denoting

a positive attitude to silence – *appreciate, enjoy* and *embrace* – refer mostly to situations of natural silence with shorter duration. In this structural pattern the linguistic power of the connotations of *silence* is exemplified mostly by the lexical meaning of the head verb. The implied meaning of the structural pattern has to do mostly with observing situations of prolonged silence, trying to terminate them or at least to come to terms with them.

3.4. Coordinate Noun Phrases with *Silence*

The nouns constituting coordinate phrases with the lexeme *silence* are largely the ones listed as postmodifiers in pattern 3.2 above, which demonstrates the full range of connotations and stable collocations of the lexeme under study. The pattern exhibits two subtypes – *silence* + noun and noun + *silence*, the range of nouns employed in both subtypes being similar. In the corpus the most common nouns in coordination with *silence* are: *calm, contemplation, darkness, despair, discomfort, emptiness, fear, inaction, indifference, isolation, meditation, reflection, sadness, secrecy, solitude, stillness, submission, tension, tranquility, uncertainty*, etc. The general trend of the lexeme *silence* to exhibit mostly negative connotations is evidenced by the structural pattern of coordinated noun phrases as well. The analysis demonstrates a few cases of nouns denoting thinking or placidity, both of which again refer to natural silence.

3.5. Simple Sentences with *Silence* as Subject

The analysis of this structural pattern makes it possible to study the connotations of *silence* with reference to the events that are regularly associated with it. The most common verbs employed in the pattern are: *creep, deepen, descend, envelop, fall, grow, hang, pervade, prevail, reign, settle, spread*, etc. All of them designate natural phenomena with unforeseen consequences and highlight the dreary connotations of the lexeme *silence* in English.

The power of connotations as a linguistic means of conveying meaning with reference to the lexeme *silence* are illustrated in Fig. 2 below:



Fig. 2 The mind map of *silence* and its connotations

The analysis shows that due to the fear of the unknown, the human mind invariably associates situations of silence with uneasiness and discomfort. This perception is mapped onto the connotations of the lexeme *silence* in various phrases and collocations. The studied lexeme has no particular denotatum as a result of which the selected modifiers function as major units of compositional meaning. As silence is related to basic innate emotions, its meaning can be explicated through semantic primes in the following manner:

People don't hear words for some time [and] don't want [to] say words.

People can think like this:

Someone know[s] something good [and] say[s] good words.

Maybe something bad can happen because there is not much [to] see, hear [and] say [for] a long time.

Something bad maybe big [or] small. People don't want [to] say true words.

If people [do] not know, people feel bad because something bad can happen.

People know something bad happene[d] many time[s] before now [and] the same can happen now.

People don't want something bad [to] happen here now.

The explication of *silence* above demonstrates how semantic primes as basic units of meaning convey similar connotations to the ones expressed by the linguistic patterns in 3.1. – 3.5. above. In this case, the linguistic power of connotations is closely related to primary emotional experience and does not vary significantly with reference to the peculiarity of the situation or the complexity of the corresponding linguistic structure. Deliberately enforced situations of silence such as the ones denoted by the causative verb *to silence somebody* or *to frighten / intimidate / pressure / threaten somebody into silence* again convey the negative connotations of fear, apprehension, and constraint, which are employed as a powerful communicative strategy to prevent people from initiating discussions, speaking their mind, or expressing disagreement.

4. Explicating the Connotations of the Bulgarian Counterparts of *Silence*

The Bulgarian language exhibits two lexemes as counterparts of the English lexeme *silence* – *тишина*, which denotes unintentional lack of sounds and *мълчание*, which denotes intentional lack of verbal communication. Their connotations are studied on the basis of the same structural patterns as the ones outlined in Section 3, since both English and Bulgarian demonstrate similar patterns of nominal combinability and also in view of corpus data. In Bulgarian there is also the cognate *затишие*, which is of limited use mostly in the expression *затишие пред буря* (the calm before the storm), generally in line with the predominantly negative connotations of silence.

4.1. Noun Phrases with a Premodifier plus *Тишина/Мълчание*

Following the criteria in 3.1. above, the premodifiers collocating with *тишина/мълчание* can be classified semantically as follows²:

- premodifiers conveying negative connotations – *болезнено* (painful), *враждебна* (hostile), *гробна/о* (deathly), *зловеца/о* (sinister), *злокобна* (ominous), *лъжовна* (deceptive), *мрачно* (gloomy), *мъртва* (dead), *мъртвешка* (deadly), *мъчителна* (awkward), *напрегнато* (tense), *неловка/о* (uneasy), *неодобрително* (disapproving), *непоносима* (unbearable), *потискаща* (oppressive), *скръбна/о* (sorrowful), *смазваща* (crushing), *смразяваща* (chilling), *страховито* (eerie), *страшна* (awful), *тревожна* (disturbing), *тъжна* (sad), *тягостна/о* (heavy), *ужасна/о* (dreadful), etc.;
- premodifiers conveying positive connotations – *дружеско* (companionable), *нежна* (tender), *тържественно* (solemn), *уважително* (respectful), *чудесна* (wonderful), etc.;
- premodifiers denoting intensity – *абсолютна* (absolute), *глуха* (deaf), *дълбока* (profound), *ледена/о* (icy), *напрегната* (tense), *неумолима* (inexorable), *оглушителна* (deafening), *смразяваща* (chilling), *тежка* (heavy), etc.;
- premodifiers denoting duration – *дълга/о* (long), *известно* (some), *кратка/о* (brief), *продължителна/о* (prolonged), etc.;
- premodifiers denoting intent – *принудително* (enforced), *умишлено* (deliberate), etc.;
- premodifiers denoting explicitness/implicitness – *красноречиво* (eloquent), *загадъчно* (enigmatic), *многозначително* (meaningful), *подозрително* (suspicious), etc.;
- premodifiers denoting dimension – *безкрайно* (infinite), *всеобщи* (total), *пълна/о* (complete), etc.

The general trend, outlined for English, that the premodifiers of *silence* convey mostly negative connotations, is observed with the premodifiers of *тишина/мълчание* in Bulgarian as well. The very few premodifiers conveying positive connotations refer to situations of natural and occasionally intentional silence denoting mostly unintentional experiences of lesser intensity, shorter duration, and smaller dimension. The Bulgarian collocation *минута мълчание* can also be pointed out as an instance of meaningful silence on ceremonial occasions to honor somebody's memory.

4.2. Noun Phrases with *Тишина/Мълчание* plus a Postmodifier

The most common postmodifiers that exemplify the connotations of the analyzed lexemes in Bulgarian are prepositional phrases, following the pattern *тишината на/мълчанието на*. Here the semantic distinction between the two lexemes comes to the foreground. Being associated with natural silence, *тишина* exhibits mostly positive connotations while *мълчание* refers to intentional silence and exhibits mostly negative connotations. Typical prepositional phrases functioning as postmodifiers of the two lexemes are:

² The gender of the adjective denotes whether it refers to *тишина* (feminine), *мълчание* (neuter) or both.

- positive connotations – *тишината на вечерта / гората / покоите / полята / природата / ноцта / утрото* → *the silence of the evening / forest / chambers / fields / nature / night / morning*, etc.
- negative connotations – *мълчанието на жената / залата / командира / мъжа / приятеля / семейството / хората* → *the silence of the woman / hall / commander / man / friend / family / people*, etc.
- The connotations conveyed by the Bulgarian prepositional postmodification of *тишина/мълчание* are related to the distinction between animate (human) and inanimate (non-human) as well. The positive connotations expressed by postmodification of *тишина* refer mostly to natural phenomena (inanimate, non-human) while negative connotations are expressed mainly by people's (animate, human) deliberate speech acts of silence.

4.3. Verb Phrases with *Тишина/Мълчание* as the Object

In this structural pattern the connotations are expressed mostly by the lexical meanings of the verbs collocating with *тишина/мълчание*. Here the following groups of verbs can be outlined:

- verbs of discontinuation
тишина – *запълвам* (fill), *избягвам* (avoid), *нарушавам* (disrupt), *прогонвам* (dispel), *прорязвам* (pierce), *процепвам* (rend), *раздирам* (tear), *разкъсвам* (break), *разчупвам* (rip); *мълчание* – *запълвам* (fill), *нарушавам* (disrupt), *прекъсвам* (interrupt), *разсейвам* (dispel), etc.;
- verbs of sense-perception, mental states, continuation or emphasis
тишина – *въдворявам* (bring), *възстановявам* (restore), *забелязвам* (observe), *запазвам* (keep), *подчертавам* (accentuate), *слушам* (hear), *усещам* (feel); *мълчание* – *приемам* (accept), *разбирам* (understand), *разтълкувам* (interpret), *чувам* (hear), etc.;
- verbs of emotions or dis/like
тишина – *наслаждавам се* (enjoy), *обичам* (love); *мълчание* – *издържам* (bear), *мразя* (hate), *предпочитам* (prefer), etc.;

The negative connotations of the English causative verbs of rupture and cessation as well as verbs of dislike demonstrated in pattern 3.3. also hold for the corresponding Bulgarian verbs which collocate with *тишина/мълчание*. Some verbs of mental states designate attempts to understand intentional silence and the apprehension that it causes. Here again positive connotations of enjoyment are to be found with very few verbs referring mostly to silence in the environment.

4.4. Coordinate Noun Phrases with *Тишина/Мълчание*

The most common nouns constituting coordinate noun phrases with *тишина* are: *мрак* (gloom), *отчаяние* (despair), *покой* (peace), *празнота* (emptiness), *пустота* (desolation), *самота* (solitude), *спокойствие* (tranquillity), *тайнственост* (secrecy), *тъмнина* (darkness), etc. Additionally, common nouns collocating with

the lexeme *мълчание* are: *непокорство* (disobedience), *скръб* (sorrow), *смут* (confusion), *усамотение* (seclusion), etc. The linguistic power of connotations to convey the experiencer's predominantly negative sensations of situations of natural or intentional silence are carefully tailored by the choice of coordinating lexemes. The general trend of analysis so far outlines very few positive connotations of the studied lexemes attributed mostly to instances of silence in nature. This trend is substantiated by the current structural pattern as well.

4.5. Simple Sentences with *Тишина/Мълчание* as the Subject

When functioning as subjects, the two lexemes collocate with similar verbs denoting mostly continuation of the event over a longer period with unforeseen consequences, such as: *възцарявам се* (reign), *изпълвам* (fill), *надвисвам* (hang), *наставам* (fall), *последвам* (ensue), etc. These verbs connote peril as the experiencer might be affected by an awkward course of events.

The linguistic power of connotations to convey meaning with reference to the lexemes *тишина/мълчание* are illustrated in Fig. 3 below:

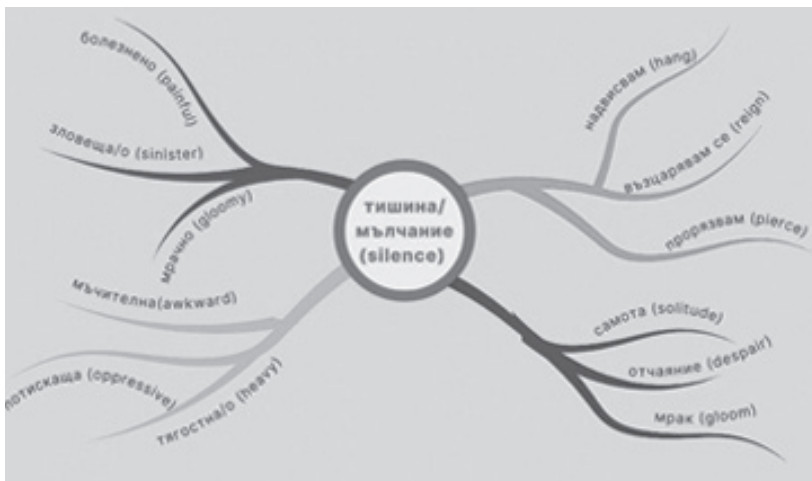


Fig. 3 The mind map of *тишина/мълчание* and its connotations

The comparison of the mind maps of the English lexeme *silence* and its Bulgarian counterparts *тишина* and *мълчание* is indicative of the fact that the three of them share similar connotations of anxiety, despair, and solitude associated with the metalinguistic perception of silence. Those connotations are exhibited in the collocations and structural patterns of the respective lexemes. The explication of the lexeme *silence* with reference to semantic primes is also valid for its Bulgarian counterparts since the natural semantic metalanguage is supposed to be universal. The Bulgarian language also has a number of verbs correlating with *тишина* and *мълчание*, which are mostly non-causative and denote events unlike the English *to silence somebody*, which is a causative verb. Such prefixed verbs are: *замълчавам*

(keep silent), *затихвам* (grow quiet), *помълчавам* (keep silent for a while), *премълчавам (си)* (remain silent), *притихвам* (grow quiet), *смълчавам се* (fall into silence), *стихвам* (subside), *умълчавам се* (lapse into silence), *утихвам* (abate). They exhibit similar connotations to the corresponding nouns – the ones referring to *тишина* denote natural silence of the environment or connote anxiety associated with forthcoming events while verbs referring to *мълчание* connote tension in communication.

5. Informants' Interpretation of *Silence* and Its Bulgarian Counterparts

The research hypothesis of the study has so far been substantiated by the linguistic analysis in Section 3 and Section 4 above. However, it has also been tested in a survey administered electronically from April to June 2022 and completed by 100 bilingual informants – 68 female and 32 male respondents aged 23–50. The respondents in the survey are actively involved in communicative interaction personally and professionally; they are native speakers of Bulgarian and near-native speakers of English – mostly English language professionals as well as graduate and undergraduate students majoring in English at the University of Veliko Tarnovo. Participation in the survey was anonymous and voluntary. The aim of the survey was to verify the empirical data from the corpus against the linguistic awareness of the respondents and their perception mostly of intentional communicative silence but also of situations of silence in general. The survey consists of 15 questions – 13 multiple choice and 2 open-ended questions ordered from questions generally related to silence as a social and natural phenomenon followed by questions focusing on the interpretation of the connotations of the lexeme *silence* and its Bulgarian counterparts *тишина/мълчание* in phrases and collocations. The survey consists of two parts, on English and Bulgarian data respectively. The English part consists of 7 questions while the Bulgarian parts includes 8 questions due to the need to distinguish between the two Bulgarian lexemes under study. The core of the survey is identical for both languages, but it also takes into consideration language specific uses. The survey is processed statistically yielding significant findings for English and Bulgarian, but also with reference to the contrastive analysis of both languages. In the comment section of the survey 12 of the respondents expressed their satisfaction with spending fifteen minutes on pondering over the significance of silence in various communicative situations and human social interaction.

The answers to the questions focusing on the general interpretation of silence indicate that the respondents perceive situations of silence in communication mostly as not indicative of a potential problem (37%) or as something definitely being wrong (23%)³. The discrepancy in the answers is probably due to the subjective interpretation of the duration of silence and the supposedly intentional longer

³ The percentage is below 100 since only the most relevant answers have been considered.

periods of silence, which might be indicative of a potential problem. In order to study the connotations of *silence*, the respondents were asked to select the adjectives they associate with the lexeme in question. The most relevant choices are: *soothing, relaxing, stimulating* (44%), *cooling, eye-opening, balancing* (30%) and *ominous, oppressive, deadly* (19%). In the general questions section of the survey the positive attitude towards situations of silence seems to prevail; however, the negative expectations are also considered. This probably has to do with the predisposition of the human mind to foreground the favorable interpretation of silence while also anticipating an unfavorable course of events. Linguistically, the seeming discrepancy is also due to the lexical meaning of *silence* referring both to natural phenomena and human communication.

In the answers to the connotation-related questions of the survey the respondents' linguistic awareness of the negative connotations of *silence* prevails. The act of silencing somebody is accurately interpreted by the respondents as an attempt to keep people uninformed (47%) as well as calm and unemotional (38%). The decision to keep silent instead of replying to a comment is considered to be a strategy to avoid tension in communication (40%) or to imply unwillingness to communicate (29%). Silence between close people is justly interpreted as designating conflict (35%) and communication failure (23%). The respondents participating in the survey consider anxiety (40%) and sorrow (32%) as common feelings associated with silence. Their subjective appreciation of silence has been explored by asking them to finish the comparison *as silent as*, the most common answers being *the dead, a feather in the wind, a ghost, the grave, a lake, a lamb, a (church) mouse, the night, the night sky, a snowflake, a stone, a tomb*, etc. As a whole, the English section of the survey reveals how the human mind is initially prone to perceiving silence as stimulating mostly in reference to silence in the environment. However, with specific features of situations of silence coming to the foreground, the negative connotations of anxiety, apprehension, and dejection prevail. The linguistic power of connotations is also demonstrated in units of comparison where associations with nature clearly indicate the positive connotations of silence while associations with death are indicative of the negative connotations of the lexeme under study.

The general trend outlined so far for the Bulgarian language concerning the possibility to attribute positive connotations to *тишина* while investing *мълчание* with predominantly negative connotations has been substantiated by the survey as well. However, negative connotations are to be found with *тишина* too, but initially they do not top the list. The respondents tend to perceive *тишина* as *отпускаща* (relaxing), *зареждаща* (refreshing), *стимулираща* (stimulating) (34%), *желана* (coveted), *нужна* (needed), *необходима* (necessary) (32%) and *мъчителна* (awkward), *тягостна* (heavy), *гробна* (deathly) (28%). Common feelings caused by *тишина* are *радост* (joy) (42%), *безпокойство* (anxiety) (33%) and *тъга* (sorrow) (16%). The answers reveal how the respondents tend to focus on the positive connotations of silence; however, negative connotations, although in the background, cannot be disregarded in the conceptual world image. The respondents indicate an unwillingness to communicate (41%), communication failure (29%),

and intent (23%) as the major factors, which render *тишина* into *мълчание*. The adjectives selected as collocating with *мълчание* in the survey are *тягостно* (heavy), *едноминутно* (one-minute), *неловко* (uneasy) (52%) and *загадъчно* (enigmatic), *невъзмутимо* (imperturbable), *красноречиво* (eloquent) (22%).

The respondents' feedback confirms the research findings about Bulgarian prefixed verbs correlating with *тишина* and *мълчание* in section 4.5. above. The ones related to *мълчание* are associated with attempts to avoid conflict (46%) and unwillingness to communicate (37%). Being the only verb which refers to *тишина* as preceding something about to begin, *притихвам* (grow quiet) connotes anxiety (42%) and thrill (35%). The respondents' common feelings caused by *мълчание* are anxiety (64%) and sorrow (21%). In the survey, the Bulgarian unit of comparison *мълчи като* (keep silent as) is completed in the following manner: *агне* (lamb), *гроб* (grave), *камък* (stone), *нукал* (owl), *пън* (log), *риба* (fish), *теле* (calf). Some parallels in the comparison of silence between English and Bulgarian can be pointed out, such as likening it to a grave, lamb, or stone. As a whole, the general trend in the conceptual world picture, and hence in language, of intentional silence connoting mostly anxiety, apprehension, and fear to prevail over silence in the environment connoting peace and tranquility has been substantiated by the respondents' interpretation as well. Thus, the quantitative analysis of the respondents' responses yields results, which substantiate the findings outlined by the statistical analysis of corpus data.

6. Conclusion

The findings of the analysis conducted in the study confirm the initial hypothesis that the negative connotations of the English lexeme *silence* and its Bulgarian counterparts prevail over the positive ones. Duration is a relevant parameter to explore the power of silence especially with reference to human social interactions. Linguistic expressions with the lexeme *silence*, denoting instances of both intentional silence in communication and silence in the environment with longer duration connote accumulating anxiety, tension, and distress. In view of intentional silence in particular, the longer the duration, the more intense the respective intellectual interpretation and emotional state is. However, collocations denoting events of natural silence with shorter duration seem to connote peace of mind, tranquility, and enjoyment. People initially tend to associate silence with positive emotions; actually, it is prolonged silence that brings about a negative experience. Semantically, the lexeme *silence* is void of explicit content; its shades of meaning are expressed by the linguistic power of connotations to convey meaning implicitly. The analysis of the connotations of silence by the Natural Semantic Metalanguage reveals how they can be explicated through semantic primes, which is indicative of their universal status and fundamental role in human communication. Structurally, the linguistic power of connotations is also activated by various patterns of *silence* and its collocating lexemes. The study of both semantics and structure makes it possible to conduct an

in-depth analysis of the variety of meanings of *silence* and its related connotations. The findings have also been confirmed by bilingual respondents who highlight the complexity and diversity in the shades of meaning of the analyzed lexemes in view of their various connotations.

In a comparative perspective, the English lexeme *silence* and its Bulgarian counterparts – the lexemes *тишина* and *мълчание* exhibit similarity in structural patterns and connotations substantiating the universality of semantic primes. The range of connotations of *silence* is wider since it covers the scope of connotations of the two corresponding Bulgarian lexemes. Unlike English, Bulgarian exhibits a clear distinction between natural silence (*тишина*) with both positive and negative connotations and intentional silence (*мълчание*) mostly with negative connotations. However, in both languages, the connotations reveal the experiencer's subjective evaluation of situations of silence both in nature and society. Since the lexemes in the study are explored with reference to the natural semantic metalanguage, which is universal, it is just common to demonstrate a number of similarities including the linguistic power of connotations to convey meaning. On the one hand, the English lexeme *silence* demonstrates a wider range of premodifiers with both literal and figurative use that it collocates with; the same goes for its abstract postmodifiers, which enhances the implicitness of the linguistic expression. On the other hand, the Bulgarian lexemes *тишина* and *мълчание* collocate with a number of prefixed lexemes, which favors the explicitness of the linguistic expression. Both languages also contain semantically related words with positive connotations – *peace, quiet* and *покой, спокойствие* respectively. As a whole, the lexemes in question in English and Bulgarian highlight the linguistic power of connotations to convey and shape meaning in accordance with the lexico-grammatical properties of each language and the communicative intention of the speaker.

The conducted semantic study of the lexeme *silence* and its Bulgarian counterparts paves the path for future research. A pragmatic study of various communicative situations exhibiting the communicative power of the speech act of silence would naturally build on the findings of the present semantic analysis. Conducted in a comparative perspective, such a study would demonstrate the significance of silence at the crossroad between semantics and pragmatics both with reference to one particular language and crosslinguistically.

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Corpora

English

The British National Corpus (BNC) <https://www.english-corpora.org/bnc/>

The Coronavirus Corpus (CC) <https://www.english-corpora.org/corona/>

Bulgarian

BulTreeBank (BTB) <https://bultreebank.org/bg/>

The Bulgarian National Corpus (BulNC) <http://search.dcl.bas.bg/>

<https://www.sketchengine.eu/>

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ЛИНГВИСТИЧКА МОЋ КОНОТАЦИЈА: СЛУЧАЈ ЛЕКСЕМЕ *SILENCE* У ЕНГЛЕСКОМ ЈЕЗИКУ И ЊЕНИХ БУГАРСКИХ ЕКВИВАЛЕНАТА

У раду, на примеру енглеске лексеме *silence* и њених бугарских еквивалената – лексема *тишина* и *мълчание*, истражујемо моћ конотација да пренесу и обликују значење. Фокус је проучавање процеса којим наведене лексеме, које немају експлицитно лексичко значење, заправо преносе широк спектар значења, углавном кроз колокације које праве и кроз своје структурне обрасце. Истраживање показује како се концептуална слика света, заснована на заједничком искуству човечанства, пресликава на лингвистичку слику света и како искуство стања тишине објашњава конотације одговарајућих лексема. Лингвистичка анализа објашњава преовлађујуће негативне конотације ћутања, углавном из перспективе људске анксиозности у сусрету са непознатим. Спроведено истраживање заснива се на

примени приступа природног семантичког метајезика Вјежбицке и Годарда на проучавање лингвистичких и екстралингвистичких димензија тишине, које се могу експлицитирати помоћу универзалних семантичких простих бројева. Пошто се језички конотације углавном активирају унутар колокација, детаљно су истражени главни структурни обрасци енглеске лексеме *silence* и њених бугарских еквивалената. Истраживање потцртава заједничке конотације анализираних лексема представљених помоћу мапа ума и такође указује на неке разлике међу њима, углавном везане за лексичко-граматичка својства енглеског и бугарског језика. Анализа открива да је људска перцепција тишине уско повезана са њеним трајањем и да заправо дужи периоди тишине изазивају анксиозност, стрепњу и напетост. У оба језика проучаване лексеме деле исту експликацију кроз природни семантички метајезик, што указује на заједничку, општу перцепцију тишине у људском уму. Анализа података из анкете спроведене међу билингвалним говорницима енглеског и бугарског језика такође поткрепљује налазе истраживања. Опште гледано, рад осветљава моћ ћутања и њених конотација у вербалној и невербалној комуникацији.

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