The Pragmatics of Silence: A Comparative Study of Communicative Absence in Stephenson, Chiazor-Enenmor, and Braithwaite's Selected Works.

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Abstract

This paper looks at the pragmatics of silence as a deliberate communicative strategy by a few characters going through different stages of domestic violence in these three contemporary works: Shelagh Stephenson's *Five Kinds of Silence*, Ndidi Chiazor-Enenmor's *If They Tell the Story*, and Oyinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister, the Serial Killer*. Silence in domestic violence has often been dismissed as an act of acquiescence or docility. However, through the lens of pragmatism and iceberg theories, this paper posits silence as a sophisticated and eloquent speech act that performs specific functions within domestic and social dynamics. This study categorises the silences in these texts into three functional types: protective, performative, and resistant. The analysis reveals that across different cultural contexts, silence serves as a sophisticated tool for navigating trauma, enforcing complicity, and reclaiming agency in environments where verbal expression is either dangerous or insufficient. The paper recommends the application of silence as unspoken speech in human communication that is therapeutic/strategic in traumatic situations of domestic violence.

Keywords: pragmatics, silence, iceberg theory, Gricean maxims, domestic violence

Introduction

It is the norm to encourage people going through domestic violence to speak up, that is, to use their voices to put an end to the violence. In the book, *Five Kinds of Silence*, the psychiatrists and the police officers all encouraged Billy's family to speak up and not to keep quiet because silence is believed to shield the abusers from the consequences of their actions. In contrast, Unoaku encourages her daughter Azuka to avoid speaking to protect the family's image in *If They Tell the Story*.

According to various studies on silence, it has become necessary to say that silence is not synonymous with docility, but can be an elaborate means of communication, performing different speech acts in the context of domestic violence. This paper looks at a few ways silence can be classified as a sophisticated means of communication in three contexts of the novels.

Domestic violence is a broad topic that involves the abuse of intimate partners and children. The scope of this study is the abuse that takes place between intimate partners and the nuclear family.

Drijber et al. 2012 cited in Gitonga (2021), explain domestic violence as a pattern of abusive behaviours by one or both partners in an intimate relationship. The American Psychological Association (APA, 2001) defines domestic violence as ongoing patterns of behaviour, attitudes, and beliefs in which a partner in an intimate relationship attempts to maintain power and control over the other through psychological, physical, and/or sexual coercion.

From the definitions above, it is obvious that domestic violence is not usually gender-based, although the ratio of domestic violence involving women is usually higher than that of men.

Silence is referred to as the absence of sound. Wikipedia defines it thus: "Silence is the absence of ambient audible sound, the emission of sounds of such low intensity that they do not draw attention to themselves." This definition views silence as something that is done without attracting any attention.

There have been many scholarly articles on the concept of silence across different fields. In the field of linguistics, many scholars are of the opinion that the absence of silence is not synonymous with the absence of communication because where language fails to communicate, silence takes over. Ludwig Wittgenstein -an Austrian-British philosopher widely considered one of the most influential thinkers of the 20th century. He revolutionized analytic philosophy, logic, and the philosophy of language through two distinct, major phases: the Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus and Philosophical Investigations. (Google, 2026). Wittgenstein's (1922) view on silence is famously summarised by different scholarly writings as "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must be silent" *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, (1922). He posits that language is limited to describing facts. He believes that deep meaningful realities—such as ethics, aesthetics, and the mystical—exist beyond the limits of language and must be shown through actions or silence, and not in spoken language. In the interpretations of Wittgenstein's work, silence is not considered empty, rather it provides a space where understanding takes shape.

George Steiner (1967) in his book *Language and Silence,* which explores the atrocities of World War II and the Holocaust, argued that silence or a move towards non-verbal communication is the only honest response to profound human inhumanity and not spoken

language which has been corrupted by political lies. From his argument, Steiner believed that there is no reasonable way to explain the level of atrocities of World War II and the Holocaust due to different political interests that will try to diminish the effects of human inhumanity at these periods; rather, through a careful and silent study of the nuances and effect of these wars will understanding take shape.

Steiner's stance resonates with this paper's position on the eloquence of silence in these selected works. Sometimes, words are inadequate to explain the emotional and mental trauma of victims of domestic violence.

Julia Kristeva regards silence as not a mere passivity but rather a disruptive "silent production" that challenges the traditional symbolic order that often represents subjugated bodily experiences or trauma. She explains that silence in traumatic situations communicates more than words, bearing meaning that conventional language cannot handle. According to Kristeva, in traumatic situations, attention should be paid to that which is unsaid rather than what has been said because everyday language cannot decipher the exact meaning of the unsaid. This explanation comes in handy in studying the interactions between Billy's family and the authorities in book *Five Kinds of Silence.*

Susan Sontag in her essay "The Aesthetics of Silence" (1967), explored the use of silence in modern art. She viewed it as a deliberate, paradoxical, and a powerful form of "speech" or communication. She argued that modern art moves toward silence to escape the servile bondage of providing conventional meaning. She wrote in her essay, "… Silence is the artist's ultimate other-worldly gesture: by silence, he frees himself from servile bondage to the world, which appears as patron, client, consumer, antagonist, arbiter, and distorter of his work" (1967).

Sontag's opinion is that modern art should not be bound by the artists providing a conventional meaning of their works. When artists maintain silence over their works, they allow their works to communicate their own meaning to the patrons. Sometimes, these meanings can be contradictory, but that is the beauty and power of silence as a powerful form of communication.

The iceberg theory, also known as the theory of omission associated with Ernest Hemingway, is a style of writing that leaves the deeper meaning of a story beneath the surface while allowing only a small part of the meaning to be shown through dialogue and action. Thomas Cox (2024) sums it thus in his article on the topic. "The iceberg theory involves the intentional omission of details and explicit explanations in writing, leaving the reader to infer the meaning and significance of the story." According to Coursel's article, "In *The Art of the Short Story*, Hemingway summed up the theory in a way only him could, writing: 'A few things I have found to be true. If you leave out important things or events that you know about, the story is strengthened. If you leave or skip something because you do not know it, the story will be useless.'" Ernest Hemingway cited in Nicholas Coursel (2020).

Nicholas Coursel (2020) goes further to write:

> The core ethos of the iceberg theory is simple: know everything about your characters and story, but write very little. As writers, it is our job to play God when we write, yet in Hemingway's eyes, we must resist holding our reader's hands. Give them just what they need to understand, drop hints as breadcrumbs throughout the piece, but don't go over the

> top and spoon-feed them with the plot. Always trust their intelligence; anything less is an insult.

There are three parts to the iceberg theory:

1. The Tip (The Prose): The actual words on the page. They should be simple, direct, and factual.
2. The Submerged Part (The Context): The emotions, history, and motives that are never explicitly stated.
3. The Impact: The weight the reader feels because they have to infer the truth between the lines.

This paper looks at how what the authors failed to write strengthened the meaning or communicated in these selected texts to the readers.

H. P. Grice, a British philosopher, introduced the concept of conversational implicature in 1975 and gave basic guidelines for a conversation to work. This is an unwritten rule that is meant to be observed in conversation called the Cooperative Principle. This rule follows four maxims:

The Maxim of Quantity (Be Informative)

The Rule: Give enough information—not too much, not too little.

The Maxim of Quality (Be Truthful)

The Rule: Don't say things you know are false or that you can't prove.

The Maxim of Relation (Be Relevant)

The Rule: Say things that actually matter to the current topic.

The Maxim of Manner (Be Clear)

The Rule: Avoid being vague or disorganized. Be direct.

H. P. Grice stated this in his book *Logic and Conversation* that was published in 1975. Below is an excerpt from the book.

> But at each stage, SOME possible conversational moves would be excluded as conversationally unsuitable. We might then formulate a rough general principle which participants will be expected (ceteris paribus) to observe, namely: Make your conversational contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged. One might label this the COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE. On the assumption that some such general principle as this is acceptable, one may perhaps distinguish four categories under one or another of which will fall certain more specific maxims and submaxims, the following of which will, in general, yield results in accordance with the Cooperative Principle. Echoing Kant, I call these categories Quantity, Quillity, Relation, and Manner. The category of

> QUANTITY relates to the quantity of information to be provided, and under it fall the following maxims: 1. Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purposes of the exchange). 2. Do not make your contribution more informative than is required. (1975)

When someone breaks these rules on purpose, it is called "flouting" a maxim. In applying the pragmatics of silence, the paper looks at specific instances where these selected texts flout the conversational cooperative principle maxims.

Exploring the Pragmatics of Silence in the Three Selected Literature

In linguistics pragmatics, silence is more than absence of speech. It is a complete and strategic means of communication that relies on context, culture, and power dynamics to perform different roles. It looks at different ways to understand what is being communicated even when no speech is involved. The paper will analyse the pragmatics of silence in the three selected works vis-a-vis the theoretical frameworks to look at how the authors communicate meanings beyond speech or flout the Grice's maxims.

> The pragmatics of silence treats silence as a meaningful communicative act, not just an absence of speech. It functions as a strategic tool for social interaction, power negotiation, and emotional expression, including indicating agreement, disagreement, or managing politeness. Context and culture are essential for interpreting its intent, with functions ranging from creating interpersonal space to acting as a powerful tool in conflict. (Alfuraiji1& Alhelal, 2025).

Flouting Gricean Maxims through Silence

Flouting occurs when a writer intentionally fails to obey a maxim (Quality, Quantity, Relation, or Manner) to prompt the reader to look for a hidden meaning. The paper will give specific instances in these texts where the authors intentionally flout Gricean's cooperative principle maxims.

1. Flouting the Maxim of Quantity (The "Withholding" Silence)

The Maxim of Quantity requires a speaker to be as informative as is necessary.

- **In *My Sister, the Serial Killer*:** When Ayoola tells Korede she has killed Femi, she provides almost no details. By flouting the maxim of quantity through brief, vague responses or shrugs, she leaves her sister Korede without any choice than to clean up her mess and protect her due to their shared childhood trauma. Her silence communicates: *"I am the victim here; the details do not matter as much as my safety."*

> On their one-month anniversary, she stabbed him in the bathroom of his apartment. She didn't mean to, of course. He was angry, screaming at her, his onion-stained breath hot against her face. (But why was she carrying the knife?)
>
> The knife was for her protection. You never knew with men, they wanted what they wanted when they wanted it. She didn't mean to kill him; she wanted to warn him off, but he wasn't scared of her weapon. He was over six feet tall and she must have looked like a doll to him, with her small frame, long eyelashes and rosy, full lips. (Braithwaite, p. 12).

In pragmatics of silence, Ayoola and Korede's silence becomes a case of "if we don't name it, it doesn't exist". Hence, she intentionally doesn't answer Korede's question about why she killed Femi nor provides her with the necessary information that will help her to deduce the reason for the killings. Her silence lets her from being accountable for her actions and examining her true motives for the killings. Korede's silent support ensures that Ayoola is not punished and endangers the lives of men in her life. This silence communicates to the reader as *"I will protect my sister and will not let her suffer again given our shared childhood trauma."*

In *Five Kinds of Silence*: During the police interrogations, the daughters provide "less than enough" information. This flouting signals to the detectives (and the reader) that their mental state is still under the "contract of silence" established by Billy. Their silence is more informative than speech—it screams of a history of suppressed speech and subjugation.

Mary: Never knew when a fit would take him.

Policeman: He was having fits so you shot him? Is that what you're saying?

Billy: *enters the room in a white shirt*.

Mary: He wasn't – he wasn't an easy man.

Susan: He was a difficult man.

Policeman: And that's your reason, is it?

Silence.

Is it?

Janet We don't want to talk about it. If you don't mind. (Stepheson, p. 118-119)

In *If They Tell the Story*: Azuka's meeting with the Matron at the orphanage puzzled the matron because Azuka failed to provide the exact reason she wants to leave her daughter at the orphanage except saying that she is embarking on a journey. By flouting the maxim of quantity, the matron understood that Azuka is dealing with mental health issues that go beyond what is communicated.

"Why do you want to leave your child here?" she asked again, smiling.

Azuka hesitated. "I am going on a journey."

"Journey to where?"

"To somewhere far away."

… She trod softly. "Why don't you want to take her along with you on this journey?"

"I just told you it's a journey to somewhere far away." (Enenmor, p. 286)

2.

Flouting the Maxim of Quality (The Ironical Silence)

The Maxim of Quality requires a speaker to tell the truth and not say things for which they lack evidence.

In *If They Tell the Story,* when Ojinta stormed into Azuka's traditional wedding preparations to ask "Are there no elderly men in your kindred?" (p. 109), everyone kept quiet. By not speaking, they neither deny nor acknowledge the truth that could have made them pause; they examine the extent of their greed. This silence is a pragmatic compromise; it acknowledges a reality without having to validate it with a potentially inaccurate verbal description.

In *My Sister, the Serial Killer,* The Abebe sisters' innocent silence as their mother confronted their interrogating officers is a flouting of quality. They do not *say* they are innocent, but their silence allows their mum to believe that they are. This is a deceptive silence, the sisters allow a lie to exist in the gap where the truth should be.

> "Why should we go through all this? My girls have done nothing wrong!" My mother rises from her seat as she delivers her heartfelt, misguided defense. The older policeman frowns and stands up, scraping his chair across the marble floor, and then nudges his partner to follow suit. Perhaps I will let this play out. Wouldn't the innocent be indignant?
>
> "Ma, we will just have a quick look"
>
> "We have been accommodating enough. Please leave."
>
> "Ma, if we have to, we will return with the necessary paperwork."
>
> I want to speak, but the words won't leave my mouth. I'm paralyzed—all I can think of is the blood that was in the boot. "I said leave," my mother stresses. She marches to the door, and they are forced to follow suit. They give Ayoola curt nods and leave the house. Mum slams the door behind them. "Can you believe those imbeciles?" Ayoola and I don't answer. We are both reviewing our options. (pp. 84-85)

3.

Flouting the Maxim of Relation (The Avoidance Silence)

The Maxim of Relation requires a speaker to be relevant to the topic at hand.

In *Five Kinds of Silence,* when Lawyer 2 asks Mary why she put up with Billy for so long. She flouts the maxim of relation by choosing silence and providing a response that has nothing to do with the question, though the response may be relevant to the case later. Her silence communicates her need to avoid a discussion on the topic that has made her a prisoner to Billy's rules, knowing that her first attempt at leaving Billy caused him to threaten her personal safety.

> **Lawyer 2:** Why did you put up with it so long, Mary?
>
> **Mary:** And this is his medication list.

She hands him a piece of paper.

Lawyer 2: Dad: 4 phenytoin, 1 sun, 1 royal jelly, 1 vitamin. Mum: 1 sun, 1

royal jelly, 1 vitamin, 1 blood pressure, 1 anti-sickness.

Mary: So there wouldn't be any mistakes.

Lawyer 2: I'll put it in the file. We can use it in court (Stephenson, p. 135)

- In *If They Tell the Story***,** when faced with cultural expectations or intrusive questions, a character might respond by simply walking away or with silence. This irrelevant silence is an act of sovereignty. It says: *"Your question is not relevant to my internal reality."*

In the novel, Azuka meets the village gossip Akuabata on her return to the village when she first decided to quit her marriage. When Akuabata asks Azuka why she has not returned to the village after her wedding, she chooses silence because the truth was not relevant to her present reality then. "We have not set eyes on you since he took you away from us. We thought his wealth will cement us, not separate us." Azuka was quiet. She felt uncomfortable." (p. 249). In pragmatics of silence, Azuka's silence communicates a reality that is too raw and hurtful for a casual conversation.

The Iceberg Theory and the Selected Texts
Applying the iceberg theory to the selected texts and highlighting the pragmatics of ***Five Kinds of Silence*** **(The Weight of the Unseen)**

- **The Tip:** Billy's family gives short and clipped responses that did help the police officers and psychiatrist very much. His daughter Janet is probably the only person in history who considers the cell a beautiful place.

  Janet: I could live here. (p.120)

- **The Submerged Part:** Is decades of domestic terror in form of horrific physical, sexual abuse, and the psychological conditioning as well as Billy's ghost that lock them in the past and prevent them from speaking.

This submerged part is probably why the judge decided to acquit Billy's family of his murder.

silence in each is necessary at this stage of the work.

Janet: Is this a cell?

Policeman: Yes.

Janet: It's beautiful.

Policeman You should try and get some sleep now, Janet.

She sits on the single bed.

Susan/Janet: When the judge told us we weren't going to prison, we wanted to say thank you but nothing came out. She said, you've suffered enough. That was very kind of her, we thought. (p. 151)

- **The Relation:** The iceberg theory explains why the play is so heavy. Even when the characters are not

> talking about the abuse, the stack of those missing memories and years of abuse are what make the silence quite eloquent and terrifying.

Silence here becomes an invisible prison that locks up Billy's women forever in his oppressive shadows even after his death.

If They Tell the Story **(The Communal Iceberg)**

- **The Tip:** The conversation between Azuka and her husband Nduka and the neighbours referring to her as *nne nkita* (dog mum) due to her present childlessness.

> …"The appointment won't be for me alone but for both of us." He looked at her with amusement, then hissed and went to the sitting room … "When will you be free this week?" "Free to do what?" "To see a doctor." "I never told you I wanted to see a doctor, did I?" "Why are you so insensitive?" "I am not insensitive: I am just re-affirming that I don't need any stupid test to prove that I am virile." (pp. 138-139)

- **The Submerged Part:** The shared cultural misconception that holds women accountable for childlessness without any proper investigation. It also shows the patriarchal belief that every man is virile and has no part in any delay in procreation.
- **The Relation:** Ndidi Chiazor-Enenmor uses the iceberg to highlight some of the challenges that women go through in a traditional African society.
- **The Tip:** Azuka's kinsmen bridal list padding after finding out that her husband is rich and Unoaku's insistence that Azuka remains in her marriage despite the domestic abuse.

> "I was told that our in-law is a rich man. I did not know that it was to this extent." "But I said so," Ikpo stated. "I said that what we asked for was too small and you people thought that I was out of my mind." "It is not too late to make amends. Let us quickly add more items to the list." … "Don't you know how these things are done? We will tell them to augment with cash for anything they cannot provide." (pp. 107-108)
>
> "Mama, Nduka has done terrible things to me … look at my scars. Look at the gap in my gum. I could have died, mama. I could have died." "But you did not die." "You have to go back to Lagos. All I know is that I cannot allow my fellow women to laugh at me as someone whose daughter's marriage has failed. What eyes will I use to look at them at *nzuko umuokpu*?" (pp. 255-256)

- **The Submerged Part:** The author uses the kinsmen's greed to create awareness of cultural and societal practices that commodify women and allow husbands to see their wives as personal property purchased and the ownership mentality. Unoaku's conversation with her daughter Azuka examines how parents sacrifice their daughters' well-being on the altar of "what will people say" and directly/indirectly give to the spousal abuse of their daughters.
- **The Relation:** Ndidi Chiazor uses the iceberg to project how parents and kinsmen's actions set up their daughters for a lifetime of abuse in their marriages. The kinsmen's greed

didn't allow them to do a thorough investigation of Nduka's family and lineage before handing over Azuka to him.

Silence here becomes a societal bondage that turns a blind eye to female subjugation and unhealthy expectations in marriages.

***My Sister, the Serial Killer* - The Tactical Iceberg**

- **The Tip:** Korede buys bleach, scrubs floors, and is always ready to clean up the mess with no question asked. Protecting Ayoola and destroying Dr. Tade's career by refusing to tell the truth.
- **The Submerged Part:** The dead bodies piling up, the deep-seated childhood trauma caused by their father that makes Korede to keep protecting Ayoola and not holding her accountable even if it means destroying the career of an innocent man and the dark contract between the sisters that allows Ayoola to continue on her killing spree while Korede cleans up the mess.
- **The Relation:** Ayoola is a living iceberg. Her beautiful and soft surface draws men to her like ants to sugar, but the submerged part is a deep-seated childhood trauma and hatred for men whom she considers shallow and only drawn to a pretty face.

Braithwaite uses the iceberg theory for irony where beneath the beautiful and frail appearance lies a dark and bloodthirsty personality. She also uses it to highlight some negative effects of traumatic childhood that stems from domestic abuse. Beneath the surface, Korede's silence shows the need to shield her family from further trauma as the author projects her as the stronger and more practical member of the family.

Silence flows horizontally from their childhood trauma to Ayoola and to Korede. The sisters use silence as a collaboratively, where Ayoola tactically uses silence to manage her image and gets Korede's protection.

Pragmatics of Silence and Speech Acts Theory

Here, the paper looks at the different ways silence is used as an act of communication in the selected texts.

- **Silence as an Act of Complicity (in *My Sister, the Serial Killer*):** When Ayoola kills and Korede cleans, they often do not speak. This silence is a speech act of agreement. Korede's silence on the murders makes her an accessory and a collaborator to Ayoola's crimes.
- **Silence as an Act of Resistance (in *Five Kinds of Silence*):** When the daughters refuse to answer Billy, their silence is a speech act of rebellion**.** This becomes a means of protest where speech would lead to more trauma.

- **Silence as an Act of Protection (in *If They Tell the Story*):** For Azuka, silence becomes a way to protect herself and cope with the unhealthy expectations of the society and her mum Unoaku on her marriage.

The Presupposition

This is what the characters already know without having to say it. Meaning sometimes relies on shared knowledge.

- **Shared Trauma (in *My Sister, the Serial Killer*):** The Abebe sisters share many silences in the book that they do not need to explain. The

presupposition is that they have all lived through the same childhood trauma. Korede's silence is eloquent because it acknowledges a rationale behind Ayoola's crimes and the need to protect the family from further traumatic situations.

- **The Sisters' Secret (in *My Sister, the Serial Killer*):** When the sisters look at each other over a dead body, the presupposition is: "We know what happened, and we know our roles." The silence works because the background knowledge of each other's role at Ayoola's crime scene has been defined through past collaborations.

The Implicature

This is the hidden message that the reader infers from the silence.

- **The 'I'm Innocent' Implicature:** Ayoola's soft and beautiful appearance makes people infer that she is a gentle soul and easily gets attracted to her. She isn't saying she is gentle; she is using silence to create a false implicature.

  Do you believe she may have hurt him?"

  "No. My sister is the sweetest person you'll ever meet. Have you met her?"

  They shift uncomfortably. They have met her. They have looked into her eyes and fantasised about her. They are all the same. (Braithewaite, p. 175)

- The 'I'm Broken' Implicature: In *Five Kinds of Silence*, Janet and Susan's long pauses during the interview sessions with the lawyers create a strong implicature that they are victims of extreme abuse, even before they say a single word about the violence.

Susan: Pardon me?

Lawyer 1: What were the events which led up to it?

Susan: He just said. He just said. You know.

Pause.

Lawyer 1: And what did you say?

Susan: I just – I wasn't – I didn't know what it was. I knew it was bad.

Pause

Lawyer 1: Did it happen regularly?

Susan: Every Friday. Other times in between.

Pause. (Stephenson, pp. 139-141)

A Comparative Analysis of the Three Texts

Enforced Silence as Power: *Five Kinds of Silence*

In Stephenson's work, silence is an institutionalised pragmatic rule. Billy's house operates on a maxim of silence. The girls' inability to speak to the police is a pragmatic carryover from years of being conditioned that speech equals punishment. Here, silence is a performative act of submission. The eloquence lies in the heavy air that communicates Billy's presence even when he is not in the room. The women also use silence not as a form of resistance from Billy's further abuse but also to avoid societal judgement.

> Pause.
>
> We were trapped. Stop looking at me like that. You don't understand. There was nothing we could do. He could have done it to you. Even someone like you. It's easy. You don't fight. You don't know how to. You keep going. You survive.
>
> Pause.
>
> You think we're freaks, don't you? (p. 141)

Cultural and Traumatic Silence: *If They Tell the Story*

Chiazor-Enenmor uses silence as a cultural semiotic in the Nigerian context of the novel, where silence often functions as a sign of respect for culture, elders, family values, etc. or endurance for situations that will place the family negatively. Unlike the fear-based silence in Stephenson, Azuka uses silence to navigate childlessness, domestic violence, and societal expectations that require women to keep the family unit together. For Azuka, it becomes a protective silence, a way to protect herself and cope with the unhealthy expectations of the society and her mum Unoaku on her marriage.

Tactical and Complicit Silence: *My Sister, the Serial Killer*

Braithwaite offers cynical pragmatics in this novel. Korede and Ayoola use silence as a cooperative contract. When Ayoola kills, the silence between them is a speech act of complicity. By not naming the murder, they deny its reality. Furthermore, Ayoola also uses silence as a face-saving act; by saying little, she remains the perfect object of desire, allowing men to project their own meanings onto her quietude. Korede's silence is tactically enough to ensure that her family is protected from further trauma.

Conclusion: The Unified Theory of Eloquent Silence

The comparative study of Shelagh Stephenson's *Five Kinds of Silence*, Ndidi Chiazor-Enenmor's *If They Tell the Story*, and Oyinkan Braithwaite's *My Sister, the Serial Killer* demonstrates that silence is a multidimensional literary and linguistic construct. By synthesizing Ernest Hemingway's Iceberg Theory with the Pragmatics of Silence, the study arrives at a new understanding of how meaning is manufactured in contemporary narratives.

The Submerged Logic of the Flout

According to Hemingway's Iceberg Theory, the power of a story lies in the seven-eighths of the narrative that remain submerged beneath the texts. This study argues that the pragmatics of silence, specifically the flouting of Gricean maxims, is the mechanism by which readers access that submerged mass. When Janet and Susan flout the maxim of quantity by withholding details of their abuse, the weight the reader feels is the submerged iceberg of decades of trauma. When Ayoola flouts the maxim of quality through a deceptive, innocent facade, the reader feels the chilling mass of the submerged bodies she has hidden. In both cases, the omission is not an absence, but a pointer to a reality that is too vast to be contained by words.

The Eloquence of the Omitted

Ultimately, this research reveals a unified theory of silence in fiction: the more significant the submerged, the more eloquent and strategically necessary the silence becomes. Silence becomes the ultimate speech act. It is the bridge between the indescribable nature of human experience and the audible requirements of the story. Whether it is used as a prison as in *Five Kinds*

of Silence, a coping mechanism as in *If They Tell the Story*, or a weapon as in *My Sister, the Serial Killer*, silence proves that the most profound communications often occur in the gaps between the lines.

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