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Cross-Cultural Implications Of Silence Between Adult Somali English Students And A United States Teacher

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by
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Abstract

This study explores the multiple meanings and uses of silence with respect to the Somali culture and the cross-cultural implications of silence between a United States teacher and the Somali English language learner (ELL). The findings can enhance teachers' cultural understanding of silence as a form of communication used by English learners native to Somalia in a beginning — intermediate ELL classroom. Three overarching trends were found through inductive analysis of data collected through a modified Communication Observation Language Tool and open-ended interviews. These trends include: silence as a means for organizing and upholding social norms; silence as a space for understanding and learning; and, silence as an indication of acculturation. The major findings of this study imply that the use and meaning of silence is indeed culturally determined. This distinction not only guides student communication but teacher understanding or in some cases, misunderstanding of the student. In reviewing the culturally distinct implications of silence, I worked to express the importance for an educator to understand the culturally determined meaning and use of silence in order to successfully work with English language learners from the Somali culture.

Keywords: culturally responsive pedagogy, cross-cultural communication, ELL/ESL, non-verbal communication

Dedication

To my advisor, committee and colleagues, thank you for your time, collaboration and dedication to the field;

To my family who has provided me with abundant support and encouragement;
To my husband who has helped me to reach my dreams; and,
To my children, may they always consider the perspectives of others and know how much I love them.

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Cross-Cultural Implications of Silence Between Adult Somali English Students and a United States Teacher

Chapter One: Introduction

Throughout my 15 years in education, I have been impressed with the power of nonverbal communication. During my most recent role as a teacher mentor, I was introduced and trained in patterns of nonverbal communication for effective classroom management. The training I received cited literature showing that 93% of all communication across cultures is non-verbal (Grinder, 1993), and outlined 21 nonverbal patterns of communication for effective classroom management. Of those nonverbal patterns, I was particularly interested in the use of silence as a means of communication. As I implemented and coached my peers on these nuanced non-verbal classroom management tools, I remained skeptical that silence, which was considered an excellent and positive way to gain attention, meant the same thing to all students, of whom represent many languages and cultures from around the world. As a white, middle-aged American woman, was I interpreting the students' silence appropriately? Silence is a meaningful element of communication that is linked to and defined by cultural conventions.

My curiosity about this difference in the use of silence greatly increased while teaching an intermediate ELL course to adults. I had assumed that the more formal education a student had, the less I needed to explicitly express my desire for them to participate in discussion. However, over time I found that the amount of formal education a student had was not as much of an indicator of class participation as what appeared to be their culturally defined rules of silence. For example, within the same classroom Somali female students who would readily participate one day dramatically changed behavior, becoming demure and quiet the next. When I checked in with these students, their comprehension hadn't changed; they knew the answers,

which they would have offered the day before. The only change was the attendance of older, male Somali students. When these older male Somali students attended, the female Somali students were silent. When they did not attend, the female Somali students readily answered questions and led class discussions. This pattern remained over time.

Background and Role of the Researcher

I have taught in an urban, upper Midwestern adult education program for the last nine years. The largest student populations served are Latino and East African students. The majority of the students who attend the program from East Africa are native to Somalia, a predominantly Muslim culture recently targeted in U.S. political propaganda advocating anti-Muslim sentiment. Because there are so many Somali students, a group already ostracized by society in many ways, I was particularly interested in understanding their cultural and linguistic framework, to better teach them English and ensure a culturally responsive classroom environment. As Geneva Gay explains, "culturally responsive teaching is using the cultural knowledge, prior experience, frames of reference, and performance style of ethnically diverse students to make classroom encounters more relevant for them" (2010, p. 31). As an ELL teacher, I have come to believe that knowledge and implementation of culturally responsive teaching is of equal importance as my understanding of the English language.

During student conferences, I began discussing the observed variations of participation levels with my students from Somalia. I asked my female Somali students if they were conscious of their change in participation. Their responses helped me to understand there were strong, and clear social norms within Somali culture, specifically with regard to gender and age. They explained that it is not appropriate for a Somali woman to speak before a Somali man, particularly an older Somali man. My understanding was further reinforced over time through

my relationships with colleagues and students from Somalia of the deep interconnection between the Islamic tradition and Somali cultural norms. I continued to see differences in student participation, with male Somali students far more apt to speak up, while women remained quiet when older men were present.

As I continued to focus on this use of silence, I became aware that this pattern was followed by those who displayed higher levels of religious devotions — as demonstrated through physical modesty and adherence to a strict prayer schedule. For example, Somali women who displayed modesty through a loose fitting dress and a *hijab*, a scarf that draped over the head and attached under the chin, followed the rules of silence in class and a general prayer time, but would not as strictly as those Somali women who wore a loose fitting dress and a *niqab*, a face veil. I also observed that the Somali men, who wore modest western wear and followed a general prayer schedule, seemed to demonstrate less frustration toward Somali women and younger Somali class members who broke social norms of silence, compared to the Somali men who followed a strict prayer schedule, and wore a *thobe*, an ankle-length tailored shirt, and *kufi*, a small skull cap.

Guiding Question and Purpose of the Research

As my awareness increased, it became quite clear to me that interpretations of silence bears culturally bound meaning and rules. With over half of the students in my class originating from Somalia, I became motivated to understand this cultural difference. This paper attempts to understand Somali uses of silence in the adult ELL classroom, in order to help U.S. teachers interact equitably and prepare to teach in a culturally responsive way.

In an effort to meet this goal, I came upon the work of Jaworski (1993; 1997) with regard to recognizing culturally bound norms and values regarding the use and meaning of silence:

one's culture is the underlying motivation to any use of silence. However, Jaworski also explains that the situation, what a particular context requires, and the individually defined traits of a person all affect the frequency and implication of silence, all of which mean studying the nature of silence poses great challenges when dealing with cross-cultural communication.

For my study, I explore how the meaning of silence is largely dependent on a given cultural context. I work to explore the multiple meanings and uses of silence with respect to the Somali culture. With respect to promoting culturally responsive teaching, one cannot start to solve a problem until it is identified and understood. Gay (2010) further explains: "If teachers do not know how their own cultural blinders obstruct education opportunities for students, they cannot locate feasible places, directions, or strategies to change them." With this in mind, I can explore the cross-cultural implications of silence between a United States teacher and the Somali English language learner, and work to answer: when do Somali students use silence in the ELL classroom?; what reasons do Somali students describe for using silence in the ELL classroom?; how do Somali students' explanations of using silence in the ELL classroom compare to a United States teacher's understanding of why they used silence?

Summary

In this study, I focused on defining what the use and meaning of silence is by Somali English students in a beginning - intermediate ELL classroom. In addition to exploring when and for what reasons these students describe for using silence, this study includes a comparison of Somali students' explanations of using silence in the ELL classroom to a United States teacher's understanding of why they used silence. This cross-cultural analysis can provide insight to help a United States teacher interact equitably and prepare to teach in a culturally responsive way.

Chapter Overviews

In Chapter Two, I review literature relevant to various uses and meanings of silence with respect to specific cultures and the importance of understanding the cultural rules and norms of silence for student's native culture. Within Chapter Three, I discuss the methodology, the participants, and the analysis. In Chapter Four, I discuss the results and lastly, in Chapter Five, I summarize and reflect on the research and discuss conclusions and further recommendations for study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

This study focuses on the use and meaning of silence within specific interaction periods in order to answer the following questions: when do Somali students use silence in the ELL classroom?; what reasons do Somali students describe for using silence in the ELL classroom?; how do Somali students' explanations of using silence in the ELL classroom compare to a United States teacher's understanding of why they used silence? The research is done with a select number of students of Somali backgrounds, all of whom speak Somali as their first language. The findings from this study can help increase teachers' cultural understanding of these cross-cultural, silent interactions, helping them interact and prepare in a culturally responsive way of instruction to increase student learning.

In this chapter, I discuss the various implications of silence and silence as a culturally-specific form of communication. Silence has almost as many functions as speech acts. It can manifest itself in various ways; the interpretation of its meaning holds potential risk of miscommunication in intercultural encounters.

Silence is a meaningful element of communication that is linked to and defined by cultural conventions. As Saville-Troike explains: "All aspects of culture are potentially relevant to the domain of silence, but those that have the most direct bearing on this topic are social and institutional structures, values and attitudes held about language and speaking, or not speaking, and ways in which communicative knowledge and skills are transmitted from one generation to the next" (p. 379, 2006). In light of the relevance of the subjective cultural framework for defining silence, for the purpose of this study, an instance of silence is considered a pause in discourse, which is greater than or equal to two seconds.

The Use of Silence

According to linguists, silence in communication is viewed not simply as an absence of noise but as a part of communication as important as speech (Nakane, 2007). Silence not only has the capacity to create structure, as in cueing for turn-taking or spacing in the production of words and sentences, but it can also take on a multitude of meanings, serving as communication in and of itself; it is important to distinguish between silence when no communication occurs and silence that is full of meaning or part of communication (Tannen & Saville-Troike, 1985).

The meaning of silence. Silence, according to many linguists, is the most indirect and ambiguous form of communication (Drew & Heritage, 1992). The ambiguity largely rests in the interpretation of what is implied. These implications, ideas indirectly communicated, rest in the positive or negative nature of silence, which is in turn rooted in one's culture (Bergman, Hall & Ross, 2007). Linguists define the positive and negative nature of silence in different ways. According to Allen (1978), the positive nature refers to the chance for personal growth, where the negative nature can be considered a failure of spoken language. Nakane (2005) explains the positive nature of silence as a sign of solidarity and rapport and negative silence as a means to create distance. The positive and negative understanding of silence is central to this study, as understanding the culturally-bound use and meaning of silence is critical to ensure a culturally responsive teaching practice.

Culture and silence. Within any culture there are norms and values regarding the use and meaning of silence (Jaworski, 1997). According to Nakane (as cited in Paulston, Kiesling, & Rangel, 2012) anthropologists were one of the earliest groups of researchers who turned their attention to culture-specific uses of silence. Ethnographic research found a wide range of uses and meanings of silence in various cultures; children were socialized and taught to use silence

according to their respective culture at a very early age. Nakane points out: “This may be why the use of silence may be more unconscious than speech and cause problems in intercultural communication” (as cited in Paulston, et al., 2012, p. 163). The nature of silence poses great challenges when dealing with cross-cultural communication.

According to Scollon (1995), culture can be defined by a discourse system, therefore one could assume that any two people from differing cultures or backgrounds may have differing expectations of successful communication. An example of this is when one culture's silence has positive implications; the next may understand silence to have very negative implications. Given this understanding, it is easy to see why miscommunication and misinterpretation commonly occur during cross-cultural *silent* communication.

A great degree of research has been conducted on cross-cultural communication. The leaders in this research have looked at how specific cultures perceive and administer silence. While working with the Japanese culture, Lebra found that the value of silence in Japan is based on the cultural understanding that there are two parts of the self – the inner-self and the outer-self (1987). The inner-self is associated with truthfulness and silence, while the outer-self is associated with deceit as well as the face, mouth and words. Silence is therefore considered more honest and revered as it is seen as a positive and active state of being. This is in opposition to speech which is considered a delay from activity. According to Sifianou (1992), Asian cultures in general feel speech should be used only when necessary. The value of silence as an indication of being connected to a higher self or to Allah is also seen in cultures based in the Islamic traditions.

When exploring the relevance of silence as it relates to Islamic religious devotion, Salim explains that: “Keeping silent establishes piety, brings about the blessings of Allah, increases

wisdom, brings peace and happiness and is the gateway to beneficial knowledge. One should also know that Allah is most easily reached through silence" (2007, p.1). These religiously based descriptions of silence extend to demonstrating respect with regard to age and gender as well. Hamid (2003) explains that in order to honor an elder, the eldest man of a group should always be allowed to speak first. Additionally, Afkhami and Friedl (1997) discuss that within Islamic tradition being silent is a Muslim woman's sign of consent and agreement. This is of particular importance to this study, as Somali cultural values reflect the teaching and applications of Islam (Farid, 2004).

Collet's (2007) study, which explores the relationship of Somali national identity and being a Muslim, found that Islam and Somali culture are virtually inseparable; religion provides a template for behaviors that are important to Somali culture and identity (2007). This is seen in Ghafarian's work as well, when he quotes Imam Ali ibn Abi Talib:

> He who speaks more commits more errors. He who commits more errors becomes shameless. He who is shameless will have less fear of Allah. He whose fear of Allah is less, his heart dies. He whose heart dies enters the fire. He who knows that his speech is also a part of his action speaks less except where he has some purpose (2009, p.1).

Ghafarian goes on to outline rules of silence described by Imam Khomeini, they include:

1. Ten minutes before beginning your prayer, sit on the prayer mat and just be silent whilst fixing your eyes on one spot.
2. Before you say anything, plan exactly what you're going to say.
3. Be quiet during "discussions" devoid of knowledge and facts. Also, if you see a discussion heading towards an argument, be silent.
4. If you don't know, say you don't know.

5. If you're getting angry, be silent. If someone else is getting angry at you, be silent. Remember, if we decide to adopt the way of silence, we will find ourselves tearing one more veil that separates us from our Creator. And surely He knows best. Silence indicates many virtues such as strong intellect and wisdom, the devout Muslim makes silence a part of their personality (Ghafarian, 2009, p. 1)

In contrast, Western cultures tend to see silence as a means to accentuate separateness and disconnectedness of people, places and things (Tatar, 2005). The Western understanding of silence, has been regarded as the norm in much of the research that has been conducted on cross-cultural silence (Jaworski, 1993). This emic perspective is also commonly administered in Western classrooms. As Zemylas states, "The current educational system in the West is rooted in a fear of silence, which is one reason the understanding of silence in negative terms prevails" (2004, p. 208). This negative understanding of silence is critical to this study, as it identifies the institutionalized cultural framework of the use and meaning of silence in the West.

Silence in the United States Classroom

Students' use of silence varies depending on their cultural understanding of silence as well as their expectations and beliefs about education and learning (Nakane, 2005). For example, as Jaworski and Sachdev point out in their study, some ethnic minority students who are silent feel that listening, thinking and reflecting are better means of learning (1998). Conversely, United States teachers, with their Western understanding of silence, view quietness, or the silent student, as having negative characteristics that deter academic achievement (Jaworski & Sachdev, 1998). Within the context of the Western classroom, as Shultz states, "Silence generally has a narrow and specific range of interpretations: teachers use silence for positive ends to control their classroom, and alternatively, a student's silence tends to have negative

connotations, indicating disengagement" (2009, p. 13). In the U.S. classrooms, there are implicit and stated rules for talk and silence that are taught to young children when they enter school (Schultz, 2009).

While silence holds multiple meanings for individuals within and across ethnic and cultural groups, in contrast a limited number of meanings are assigned to silence in U.S. classrooms. United States educators generally assume that silence, outside of compliance when asked for, indicates that a student either does not know the answer or has made a conscious decision to resist learning and not to participate in discussion. Shultz (2009) further identifies resistance to learning or participating in the classroom as the most common explanation for silence. This assumed resistance is often interpreted as an assertion of power.

Within the context of a United States ELL classroom, Saville-Troikle highlights the role of acculturation in understanding the rules of silence and explains that, learning appropriate rules for silence is also a part of the acculturation process for adults attempting to develop communicative competence in a second language and culture. Saville-Troikle further notes that ELLs demonstrating a high level of proficiency in all four modalities often retain their native silent pattern when using silence in the second language (1985).

Understanding the discrepancies between cultural norms, values and established patterns in regard to silence is vital to instruction and conduct of a classroom of English language learners. An accurate understanding of silence is necessary for culturally responsive teaching (Jaworski, 1993).

Need for Research

While recent studies have focused on the cross-cultural implications of silence in East Asia (Nakane, 2005), Japan (Lebra, 1987), Australia (Nakane, 2003), New Zealand (Macalister,

2010), Greece (Sifianou, 1992), Latvia (Hamot, et al, 2007), Finland (Donal, et al., 2006) and Nigeria (Oyinkan, 2010), little research has been done with respect to the use of silence within the Somali culture.

As immigrants speaking from East African language families, such as Somali, Oromo, or Arabic, increase in the U.S., it is important for English language educators to understand these students' respective cultural understandings of the implications of silence to ensure a culturally responsive teaching practice. Additionally, it is critical that the explanations of the use and meaning of silence is done by these individuals to ensure an emic perspective.

The purpose of this study is to help ELL classroom teachers ensure culturally responsive practices by describing the use and meaning of silence as it is defined by students of Somali background within the bounds of an adult intermediate ELL classroom. In order to better understand this, I explore the cross-cultural implications of silence between a United States teacher and the Somali English language learner, and work to answer: when do Somali students use silence in the ELL classroom?; what reasons do Somali students describe for using silence in the ELL classroom?; how do Somali students' explanations of using silence in the ELL classroom compare to a United States teacher's understanding of why they used silence?

Summary

The remaining sections of this paper are organized in the following way. Chapter Three discusses the methodologies used. Chapter Four presents the results of the data collection. Finally, Chapter Five examines the data and informational findings from the case study.

Chapter Three: Methodology

Through a qualitative research study, I examined the classroom implications of silence between adult ELL students from Somalia and a United States teacher — in order to answer the following questions: when do Somali students use silence in the ELL classroom?; what reasons do Somali students describe for using silence in the ELL classroom?; how do Somali students' explanations of using silence in the ELL classroom compare to a United States teacher's understanding of why they used silence?

In order to ensure an accurate and thorough study, data was collected through the use of a structured observation recording scheme in a classroom of English learners and post observation interviews. The findings from this study can help to increase cross-cultural understanding of these nonverbal interactions. This understanding can help these teachers prepare in a culturally responsive way, which can increase student learning.

This chapter describes the research paradigm and methodologies employed in this study. The chapter begins with a description of the methods used to address the guiding questions of the research, as well as a deeper look at the qualitative research paradigm. Secondly, it explores the data collection process, highlighting the details of the study, including the participants and the setting. A further look into the data collection techniques follows, highlighting the description and rationale for each technique. Next, is an outline of the procedure that was followed during the data collection. The description of the analysis of the data collected follows, which is in turn followed by a description of the ethics employed in the study.

Qualitative Research Design

As noted by Merriam (2009), qualitative research design is characterized by rich descriptive data, conducted in a natural setting and, therefore is context sensitive, or specific to

the situation. This study took place in a beginning/ intermediate ELL classroom. Within this context, the use and frequency of silence within specific interaction periods was examined.

As Merriam (2009) makes clear, qualitative research is particularly interested in how people interpret their experiences. This qualitative research design includes the perspectives and insight of all participants, students and teacher alike, and compares learner perspectives to teacher perspectives on the use and meaning of silence.

Qualitative researchers use a variety of data, from an array of collection techniques with the aim to increase understanding of the study's focus and to improve the quality of practice in a particular discipline (Merriam, 2009). This study falls into the general structure of a case study. It took place in a bounded situation of a beginning-intermediate ELL classroom with a small number of participants. In-depth information was obtained and analyzed to gain greater insight in cross-cultural, nonverbal interactions between the Somali students and a United States teacher.

Data Collection

Participants. The study was done with four students of Somali cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The identification of the participants began with a teacher recommendation. The recommendation was based on the following criteria: the student was an adult, with some history of formal education, had low-intermediate to intermediate English proficiency, and had spent less than one year in the United States. Once the teacher recommendations were made, I initiated contact with the participants.

All of the students who participated in this study identified as Somali, had some history of formal education, and had low-intermediate English proficiency according to the Comprehensive Adult Student Assessment System, an assessment administered regularly to all students in the program. Two women participated, age 35 and 29, and two men, ages 26 and 38.

At the time of the study, they had all been in the U.S. for less than one year. For the purpose of this study, pseudonyms were given to each participant. The 35 year old women is referred to as Asha; the 29 year old woman is referred to as Fadumo; the 26 year old man is referred to as Abshir; and, the 38 year old man is referred to as Musse. The United States teacher who participated was a woman in her early 30s. When asked by a student how she identified herself, she said she was Black American, born and raised in the Midwest.

Student and teacher participants were asked to voluntarily join in the research. They were assured that throughout the research their identity would be protected and that any recordings made would be destroyed at the culmination of the study. While eight students agreed to participate in the study, due to lack of attendance or later withdrawal, only four students participated. Of those participants, three limited their participation to the observation and interview, without the use of audio or video recording. One student agreed to a video recording, observation and interview (without audio recording) but after the fact expressed concern over the video recording. It was consequently destroyed immediately following the interview.

Location. The participants all attended an adult education center in a large metropolitan city, in the upper Midwest. At the time of this study, this center served approximately 7,000 adult students, under a mission to provide outstanding programming to support life, academic and skills for the workforce. The learners who participated in the programming were representative of the surrounding community. The adult students served in the consortium were: 57% African, 9% African-American, 25% Hispanic, 4% Asian and Pacific Islanders, 4% White, and 1% American Indians/Native American.

Classroom Context. This study took place in a low - intermediate ELL classroom, located in an urban adult education program, from 6:00 - 7:30 pm. The classroom was located on

the fifth floor of a newly constructed building. This same building housed the administrative offices of the largest urban school district in the state. The classroom included six tables that sat up to six students at each table. The teacher was stationed at the front of the classroom. There was a teacher's desk with a computer and document camera which was used each night I observed. A teaching station was located at the front of the room along with a projector screen and whiteboard, which faced the students. The room and furniture in it was clean, new and well organized.

Data collection technique #1: observation recording scheme. In order to explore when Somali students use silence in the ELL classroom, interaction between a United States teacher and a small group of students were observed. During the classroom interaction, I used a modified Communication Orientation to Language Teaching (COLT) coding scheme (Appendix A) and recorded the instances of silence demonstrated by the participants. As Jaworski (1993) states, the average wait time or pause in speech, in a classroom setting, falls between one and three seconds. Additionally, Jefferson's (1989) empirical study on the length of silent pauses in naturally occurring conversation found that native speakers of English seem to tolerate up to one second of a silent pause. In light of these research findings, a compromise between these times is used to determine an instance of silence. Therefore, for the purpose of this study an instance of silence is considered greater than or equal to two seconds. A video recording of the observation for the first student participant was used to confirm the duration of silence. The pauses in discourse by the other student participants were assessed during the observation by the researcher.

The COLT is commonly used in qualitative research as a form to record information at the time the behavior actually occurs, as well as afterwards. According to Mackey and Gass

(2005), standard COLT schemes allow for analyzing observed behavior twice, each time in a different section. One section is for real-time coding, when the behavior occurs, and the other for post-observational analysis of a recording.

The original COLT scheme includes more than 40 categories for participant organization, activities, topic and content, in the first section, and allows for post analysis of teacher-student and student-student interaction. I developed a modified COLT scheme, for the purpose of this study. This modified COLT scheme is in line with the original format, in that it includes the participant's name, age, and gender. Observation schemes can promote valid findings only when they are appropriate and applicable to the research question (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the modified COLT included categories for capturing instances of silence. It also included a section to record the number of instances of silence displayed in the class. During the post-observation viewing of the recorded observation, administered for consenting participants, the noted instances of silence were checked again, to ensure that all instances of silence were documented. In order to ensure that all instances of silence were recorded, participants were placed in close proximity to each other.

Data collection technique #2: student open-ended interview. In order to access the learners' insight into what was observed and answer the question, What reasons do Somali students describe for using silence in the ELL classroom?, interviews were conducted with the participants after the observations. This qualitative data collection technique tends to ensure rich and detailed participant response (Mackey & Gass, 2005). In order to help the interviewees accurately provide detailed interpretations of the observed instances of silence, or a pause in discourse which is greater than or equal to two seconds, a video or noted instance was used as a stimulus during the interview. With each instance of silence, the participant was asked to

explain why they chose to be quiet. The use of stimulated recall positively contributes to classroom research as it allows researchers to view classroom instruction and interactions from the learner's perspective (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Additionally, it ensures validity and accuracy of data.

Data collection technique #3: teacher open-ended interview. In order to answer the question, How do Somali students' explanations of using silence in the ELL classroom compare to a United States teacher's understanding of why they used silence?, the teacher was also interviewed in the same manner and asked to define their interpretation of the recorded instances of silence. One of the major advantages of interviews is the fact that they allow researchers to investigate phenomena that are not observable such as a learner's self-reported perceptions or attitudes (Mackey & Gass, 2005). While the COLT can support the identification of an instance of silence, the meaning behind it can only be understood through participant interpretation. This open-ended format allows responders to express themselves in their own way (Mackey & Gass, 2005). While the use of close-ended questions may be beneficial in future analysis of silence, open-ended questions seem appropriate in the initial stages of studying this important, cross-cultural communication.

Procedure

Participants

This study took place over the course of three weeks. Group interactions, which were observed in class, along with follow-up interviews, took place two times over three weeks. The group interactions were approximately 20 minutes. Student participants worked in large group and pair work activities, in close proximity, on a discussion topic in line with the current, in class unit of study. During the pair work, each student was paired with a student not participating in

the study. This occurred organically, as the pairs were determined by the teacher. Fadumo was paired with a Latino male, of similar age. Abshir was paired with a Somali woman who was slightly older. Muuse was paired with a Somali male his same age. The pair work lasted 20 minutes. The instances of silence were separated into three time frames; beginning, middle and end. Each time frame captures approximately six and a half minutes of the 20 minutes observation. For the purposes of this study, an instance of silence was considered greater than or equal to two seconds.

At the time of the observation, the curricular unit of study was on personal health. The class followed the Ventures 3 curriculum, designed by Cambridge University Press (Bitterlin et al., 2013). During the first observation, the teacher conducted a whole group discussion after an in-class reading of the health benefits of herbs (see Appendix C). During the second observation, pair work was done simulating a doctor-patient role play (see Appendix D). One student asked a series of questions, soliciting answers from their partner. Once that was completed, the roles reversed.

During the in-class discussion activity, the observer recorded the instances of silence, using the modified recording scheme. For the purpose of this study, an instance of silence was considered a pause in discourse, which was greater than or equal to two seconds. The duration of the instance of silence was calculated using a running stopwatch. Once an instance of silence was displayed, the observer used the stopwatch to confirm its duration was greater than or equal to two seconds. The video recording of the consenting participant was also used to confirm that each instance of silence was included.

Post-Observation

Following the in-class observation, the video of the consenting participant was reviewed

by the observer to ensure that each instance of silence was recorded. Interviews were conducted immediately following in-class observation. The identified instances of silence, specific to the participant being interviewed, were noted and used for simulated recall for each student interview. During the interview, the researcher recorded participant responses.

The same open-ended interview protocol was followed when gathering information from the teacher. Due to the fact that the instances of silence reviewed, were produced by the student participants, a selection of no more than ten instances of silence total, two to three instances from each participant, were selected for the teacher to respond to. Again, for the purpose of this study, an instance of silence was considered a pause in discourse, which is two seconds.

Data Analysis

Following the research, I examined the data collected with regard to the cross-cultural implications of silence between the adult ELL students from Somalia and the United States teacher. This data analysis process, referred to as inductive data analysis, involved multiple examinations and interpretations of data in the light of the research objective (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Through the examinations, research findings emerged from the frequent and dominant themes within the raw data (Mackey & Gass, 2005 p. 357). The identification of key terms such as *know*, *think*, *learn*, and *comprehend* helped to identify the first theme; silence as a space for learning and processing. The student participants used several phrases that related to this concept of understanding and learning, for example, Fadumo states: “I want to learn”, “I listen to learn” and “want to understand.” As I continued to review the data from the student interviews, I was aware that for three of the students, the use of silence was initially explained as having to relate to learning and understanding. This can be seen by Asha: “I want to know if I understand” and Abshir: “No talk, no understand”.

Upon reexamination, key terms such as *man, woman* and *rules* helped to identify the second theme; silence as a means for organizing and upholding social norms. Further examination of the data revealed terms connected to *time, age* and *acculturation* which helped to identify the third theme; silence variations as an indication of acculturation. This information was compared to the age and gender of the participant to examine any relationship between the numbers of instances of silence observed with the demographics of the participants. The following is a description of how the data was analyzed, in order to answer the following questions: when do Somali students use silence in the ELL classroom?; what reasons do Somali students describe for using silence in the ELL classroom?; how do Somali students' explanations of using silence in the ELL classroom compare to a United States teacher's understanding of why they used silence?

Observation Recording Scheme

The observation recording scheme was the most useful tool in collecting data that explained when Somali students used silence in the ELL classroom. These data were collected on two different occasions, both in class and through post-observation viewing (for the consenting participant). The frequency of silence by each participant was recorded on the modified COLT observation recording scheme. The division of the observed discussion was divided equally into three groups to define the beginning, middle and end. Each section of time lasted approximately six and a half minutes. This data specifically addressed the first sub question: When do Somali students use silence in the ELL classroom?

Open-Ended Interviews

Students. The responses from the interviews directly related to the second sub question: What reasons do Somali students describe for using silence? Overarching patterns were

identified through analysis of the student responses. These responses were organized into commonly occurring categories. The first category was identified through frequent comments that related to understanding and learning, all of which included key terms: *know*, *think* and *learn*. The second major theme that surfaced through inductive analysis included comments that referred to gender and rules. These comments included key terms: *man, woman* and *rules*. This category was first identified by student referral to the roles of a female or male. The significance of a category acknowledging the roles and rules of gender also surfaced in comments made about the rules of communicating across genders. While some aspects of these themes were noted in the data gathered from the teacher's interviews, the difference of perspective provided additional patterns discovered through further analysis.

Teacher. The data collected through the observation scheme and interviews, helped to provide a rich, descriptive and layered perspective to understand the cross-cultural implications of silence between a United States teacher and Somali English learners. Through an analysis of the results and identification of key terms from the interviews with the student and the teacher, the final question, How does the Somali student's explanation of the use of silence compare to the United States teacher's understanding of why they use silence?, was directly addressed.

The responses from the teacher affirmed the category of silence as a means for understanding and learning. However, a noted difference is the teacher participants' interpretation of silence indicating the student not understanding versus the student participants' explanation of silence to ensure comprehension. Through continued inductive analysis, an additional category explaining the use and meaning of silence became apparent through the use of key terms such as *time, age* and *acculturation*. This category is related to the theme that gender and social rules play a role in the use of silence, but presented silence as an indicator of

age and acculturation.

Verification of Data

In order to increase internal validity, the gathering of data through the modified recording scheme and interview, as explained above, helped me to gain participant's insight into the topic of study. This data collection process reduces observer and interviewer bias, and enhances the validity and reliability of the information (Mackey & Gass, 2005) While this was a small study, conducted alone, the teacher participant's observation of the data, provided an additional perspective to verify and confirm the data.

Ethics

In order to ensure the rights and privacy of the participants, and protect the needs, values and desires of these individuals, the study employed the following protective safeguards: 1) a Human Subject Research form was completed and approved through Hamline University; 2) a Research Request was submitted, reviewed and approved by the school district; 3) written permission was granted by the school's program coordinator; 4) research objectives were shared with the participants; 5) all participant information was delivered in both English and, with the help of two native Somali speaking colleagues, written and spoken in Somali; 5) written permission was obtained from the participants; 6) participant anonymity was preserved throughout the course of research; 7) participants were informed they could remove themselves from the study at any time, without repercussions; 8) and, all research materials were locked in a secure location throughout the duration of the study.

Summary

In this chapter, I explained the research methodologies employed in order to address the guiding questions of the research; which include: when do Somali students use silence in the

ELL classroom?; what reasons do Somali students describe for using silence in the ELL classroom?; how do Somali students' explanations of using silence in the ELL classroom compare to a United States teacher's understanding of why they used silence? After discussing the qualitative research paradigm, I highlighted the data collection procedure and data analysis process, with respect to each technique. Finally, I outlined the ethical considerations employed in this study.

In the following chapter, Chapter Four, I present the data and informational findings from the case study. Finally, in Chapter Five I discuss the major findings from the study, the limitations, the implications for teachers and administrators, and suggestions for future research.

Chapter Four: Results

Through the implementation of in-class observation collection using a modified Communication Observation Language Tool and open-ended, post-observation interviews, I sought to find the answer to the following questions: when do Somali students use silence in the ELL classroom?; what reasons do Somali students describe for using silence in the ELL classroom?; how do Somali students' explanations of using silence in the ELL classroom compare to a United States teacher's understanding of why they used silence? This chapter reports data collected from both student and teacher participants as they relate to the data collection techniques and the guiding research questions. The overarching themes identified through data analysis are discussed as they relate to the data collected, as well as the literature reviewed in Chapter Two. The themes are: silence as a means for organizing and upholding social norms; silence as a space for understanding and learning; and, silence as an indication of acculturation. The transcription of the responses of both student and teacher participants are preserved to retain original language use.

When do Somali students use silence in the adult ELL classroom?

Observation Recording Scheme

The resulting data suggested a significant difference in the frequency of silence by females over males, with females displaying silence over seven percent more often than males. It also indicated a more constant display of silence throughout the observed discussion by the female student participant compared to the male student participants, who displayed silence only at the beginning and once in the middle of the observed discussion.

Table 1 outlines the instances of silence displayed at the beginning, middle and end of the observation by each participant. It is important to note the variation of discussion format

between Asha and Fadumo, Abshir and Muuse. Asha was observed during a whole group discussion, while Fadumo, Abshir and Muuse were observed during pair work. It is also important to note that the total instances of silence broken down by gender results in twenty two for females and three for males. In it, it can be seen that Asha displayed silence fourteen times; five times at the beginning and middle of the large group discussion and four times at the end of the discussion. Fadumo displayed silence for a total of eight times. She used silence twice at the start of the pair work, when she was first assigned her Spanish speaking, male partner. She was also silent four times in the middle of the pair work, eventually relying on her phone to write and translate information to her partner, and twice at the end of the discussion, when she felt the work had been sufficiently completed. Abshir displayed a total of three instances of silence. He first used silence once at the start of the discussion while reviewing the written handout and twice in the middle, when he again turned his attention away from his female, Somali partner to his handout. Muuse did not display any instances of silence. He was partnered with a Somali man of similar age.

Table 1: When Silence was Observed

Student	Age	Gender	Instances of Silence- beginning of discussion	Instances of Silence- middle of discussion	Instances of Silence- end of discussion	Discussion Format	Instances of Silence by Gender
Asha:	35	F	IIIII	IIIII	IIII	Whole Group	14
Fadumo:	32	F	I*I	IIII	II	Pair Work	8
Abshir:	26	M	I	II		Pair Work	3
Muuse:	38	M				Pair Work	0

*While the majority of the instances of silence entailed quietness for approximately two seconds, this instance of silence was held for 33 seconds.

What reasons are given for Somali students' use of silence in the ELL classroom?

Open-Ended Interviews

In order to access the learners' insight into what was observed and answer the question, What reasons do Somali students describe for using silence in the ELL classroom?, interviews were conducted with the participants after the recorded observations. The interviews began with the following prompt: *With each occasion of silence please explain why you chose to be "quiet".* Open-ended questions were posed following the initial prompt.

Through the data collected from the student participants through post-observation interviews, two overarching themes were identified; silence as a space for understanding and learning, and silence as a means for organizing and upholding social norms. These categories are meant to be suggestive, not definitive, to give educators and researchers new ways to understand student silence and how silence works in the classroom.

Silence as a space for understanding and learning

The first explanation offered by both female participants, identified a space for learning and processing as the reason for the displayed silence; as Asha states: "I want to somebody to say, to hear and listen to other first to other answers and compare. I guess and write down answer on paper. You see, for people I don't want to answer. I am new here." Fadumo explains "I am quiet. I listen to teacher… I want to learn." Conversely, both male participants highlight the use of silence for understanding as opposed to learning. Additionally, they both identify the goal of speaking English as soon as understanding is secured; as Muuse states: "No talk, no understand. Peoples talk talk Somali when no understand English. I know answer English, I talk. I know answer, I talk. "And Abshir states: "When I no understand, I ask Rukiya, Somali (points to woman across the table to him) — only to understand. He reflected that "In Somalia, everyone

talk a lot. But listen to the teacher." This, along with a later reflection by Asha supports the theme that silence is used to help uphold norms as they relate to gender, as she explains that "... mens are bossy in Somalia. They answer first — always, even if they no understand." The social roles that males and females have in Somalia were further explained by Asha, as she stated with regard to difference in male and female energy level: "Womens — we at home taking care of house and cooking and children. Man is fresh. They want to learn fast. They ask more. They want it all — all the language because they need to work for the family. Womans are tired."

Silence as a means for organizing and upholding social norms

The general trend I found when silence was used, given the information obtained through the observation and notes recorded on the modified Communication Observation Language Tool, highlights the significance of gender and the use of silence. While it is important to note that Asha's observation took place during a whole group format, it is also important to note that her patterns of when she displayed silence are similar to Fadumo, the other female student participant, whose observation occurred during a discussion done in pairs.

Both male participants displayed significantly fewer instances of silence. While Abshir displayed a few instances at the start and end of the pair work, Muuse did not display an instance of silence of at least two seconds through the duration of the observation. The obvious lack of silence displayed by Muuse is not only evident in the records of the observation, but was noted and addressed several times by the classroom teacher during class, as she asked for his silence to display attention on two different occasions.

As Farid (2004) discusses, Somali cultural values reflect the teaching and applications of Islam. This gender defined use of silence is in line with Afkhami and Friedl's statement that within Islamic tradition, being silent is a Muslim woman's sign of consent and agreement (1997).

Just as gender was an identified trend using the modified Communication Observation Language Tool, gender continued to be a factor in the results of the open-ended interviews. While this can be seen in comments by Abshir: "In Somalia is half boy and half girl. Classroom no mix", it was especially noted by the female student participants. Fadumo was paired with a Spanish-speaking male. When this was brought up by the interviewer, she explained that it was not ideal to work with a man, stating "Work with man — no good… It is better lady and lady." Asha explained further that in Somalia, "If a man asks a woman a question, she answers — but maybe no talk a lot. If a woman asked a man a question — maybe no good. He won't answer."

Collet explains that religion provides a template for behaviors that are important to Somali culture and identity (2007). The social norms for behavior, which were later referred to by Asha as "the rules" of practicing Muslims, were described as having different levels of adherence, further explaining that the greater the adherence, the greater their religious devotion. For example, Asha explained that whether or not a man answers a female depended on how "strict" they were, or how strict they follow the behavioral rules of a practicing Muslim. The degree of observance could be so great that these individuals may not be able to function in the context of the United States classroom, as she stated: "strict people no be strict if they want to learn in America classroom."

How do Somali students' explanations of using silence in the ELL classroom compare to a United States teacher's understanding of why they used silence?

Open-Ended Interviews

In order to answer this question, the classroom teacher was asked to interpret the instances of silence discussed by the students. A review of the instances of silence was viewed by the teacher during the interview and used to elicit the teacher's insight. Fadumo, Abshir and Muuse's instances of silence were discussed during the teacher interview using the noted

instances from the Modified Communication Observation Language Tool.

The data collected from the teacher participant offered more insight into the theme of silence as a means for organizing and upholding social norms and silence as space for processing and learning, and revealed an additional theme; silence as an indicator of acculturation. Again, these categories are meant to be suggestive, not definitive to give educators and researchers new ways to understand student silence and how silence works in the classroom.

Silence as a means for organizing and upholding social norms

Just as the student participants identified a relationship between gender and silence, so too did the teacher participant. The teacher participant, however, equally focused on the age of the student. For example, she explained that "In general, I think older women say what they want to say when they want to stay it. Middle aged women are quiet — regardless of their English level. Younger women, 18-25, are more vocal." When asked about the instances or lack of instances of silence by the male participants, the teacher stated that "Men don't want me to explain anything. When I do, they talk over me — that is true of all ages. They don't want to look wrong or be wrong. They are willing to offer answers, not ask questions." This may support Hamid's (2003) finding that in order to honor an elder; the eldest man of a group should always be allowed to speak first.

Silence as a space for understanding and learning

Like the male participants, the teacher participant also explained the presence of silence to indicate a lack of understanding. This is expressed in the interview, when she states: "Fadumo most likely was confused and couldn't communicate this to her partner, and so she just stayed quiet" and "When Asha didn't answer my questions, I assumed that she didn't understand and didn't know how to formulate the question in English." Though Asha expressed her silence as a

space for processing, not necessarily an indication of a lack of understanding, as she states: "I know what it is, but I want to know exact what I am thinking is good before I speak." The teacher participant's interpretation is in line with Schultz' (2009) findings that United States educators generally assume that silence, outside of compliance when asked for, indicates that a student either does not know the answer or has made a conscious decision to resist learning and not to participate in the discussion.

Silence variations as indicators of acculturation

The teacher participant went on to note that the difference in female silence had more to do with the time they had spent in the U.S. As she explained that "The trends of silence is more age defined and how long they have been in the U.S." She further explained that "younger women are very vocal and will speak whether or not a man is speaking; the same can be said of the older women who are considered the elders. However, the middle aged women who may have not been in the states as long are seldom eager to speak; especially when a man is speaking. This is in line with the findings of Saville-Troike's study on the role of acculturation and learning appropriate rules for silence in a second language, stating that understanding the appropriate rules for silence is in fact part of the acculturation process (1985).

The similarities and differences between the student and teacher participants demonstrate how one's cultural lens shapes our explanation and interpretation of cross-cultural communication. While both the teacher and student participants discussed the role of social norms, specifically with regard to gender, the display of these norms were explained by the student participants as an indication of religious devotion and by the teacher participant as an indication of acculturation. Further, while both the teacher and student participants discussed silence as a space for learning and processing, the teacher participant expressed her assumption

that if a student understood, they would talk. This perhaps demonstrates a presence of her own cultural lens and expectation of students to adhere to the norms of the western classroom; further exemplifying the relevance of culturally responsive teaching practices. As Gay states: "Culturally responsive teaching is about teaching, and the teaching of concern is that which centers classroom instruction in a multiethnic cultural frame of reference" (2010, p.xxii). However, shifting one's frame of reference first requires an understanding of one's own culture. As Gay (2010) points out, cultural self-awareness and consciousness-raising for teachers is a critical element of culturally responsive teaching.

Summary

In this chapter I presented the results of my data collection in seeking to answer the following questions: when do Somali students use silence in the ELL classroom?; what reasons do Somali students describe for using silence in the ELL classroom?; how do Somali students' explanations of using silence in the ELL classroom compare to a United States teacher's understanding of why they used silence? The data, as outlined in Table 1 displayed the student participant's use of silence, resulting in a display of female student participants using silence seven times more than male participants. The data obtained from the open-ended interviews followed. The student participant responses from their respective interviews were presented first. Through inductive analysis, two themes were identified: silence as a means to uphold and organize social norms, and silence as a space for understanding and learning. Finally, the data highlighting the teacher participant's interpretation of the student's use and meaning of silence, confirmed the aforementioned themes and offered an additional: silence as an indication of acculturation. In Chapter Five I discuss my major findings, their implications, and suggestions for further research.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

In this study I attempted to answer the following questions: when do Somali students use silence in the ELL classroom?; what reasons do Somali students describe for using silence in the ELL classroom?; how does the Somali students' explanations of using silence in the ELL classroom compare to the United States teacher's understanding of why they used silence? In this chapter I discuss the major findings from the study, the limitations, the implications for educators, and suggestions for future research.

Major Findings

The goal of this study was to explore the multiple meanings and uses of silence with respect to the Somali culture and better understand the cross-cultural implications of silence between a United States teacher and the Somali English language learner, in order to increase teachers' cultural understanding of the use and meaning of silence, specifically with respect to English learners native to Somalia in a beginning - intermediate ELL classroom. Increasing this understanding can help United States educators of Somali English students interact and instruct in a culturally responsive way, and in turn increase student learning. Three overarching trends were found through inductive analysis of data collected through a modified Communication Observation Language Tool and open-ended interviews. These trends include: silence as a means for organizing and upholding social norms; silence as a space for understanding and learning; and, silence as an indication of acculturation.

When do Somali students use silence in the adult ELL classroom?

In order to understand when Somali students use silence in an adult ELL classroom, the data from a modified Communication Observation Language Tool was analyzed. The data indicated a trend of greater use of silence by the female student participants. The female student

participants used silence over seven times more often than the male student participants. The female student participants also displayed silence throughout the observed discussion, in contrast to the male participants who displayed silence near that start of the discussion.

What reasons are given for Somali students' use of silence in the ELL classroom?

In order to understand the reason Somali students describe for using silence in the ELL classroom, open-ended interview were conducted with both the student and teacher participants, following an observed discussion. Through inductive analysis of the resulting data, two overarching themes were identified by the student participants, silence as a means for organizing and upholding social norms and silence as a space for understanding and learning. The data from the teacher participant confirmed the relevance of the first two trends and offered another: silence as an indication of acculturation.

Students

The student participants' primary descriptions for using silence explained silence as a means for understanding and learning. The concept of understanding, when asked about silence was part of all of the student participants' responses. The female student participants also offered a second theme for how Somali students explain the use of silence, which has to do with silence as a means for organizing and upholding social norms. With reference to "rules" and "strictness," the female student participants explained a set of norms for gender roles, which include silence. For example, as Fadumo stated: "Work with man — no good… It is better lady and lady." Asha explained further that in Somalia, "If a man asks a woman a question, she answers — but maybe no talk a lot. If a woman asked a man a question — maybe no good. He won't answer." The student participants explained that adherence to these rules related to the level of Islamic religious devotion an individual had.

Teacher

The teacher participant also discussed the relevance of gender in the use of silence. When explaining the degree of silence displayed, the teacher participant offered a negative statistical relationship between the instances of silence displayed to the time spent in the U.S., resulting in the third trend: silence as an indication of acculturation. The teacher participant also noted a correlation of age of the individual to the display of silence, explaining that "The trend of silence is more age defined and how long they have been in the U.S." She further explained that "younger women are very vocal and will speak whether or not a man is speaking; the same can be said of the older women who are considered the elders. However, the middle aged women who may have not been in the states as long are seldom eager to speak, especially when a man is speaking."

The use of silence as it related to the learning process was also explained by the teacher. With respect to silence as an indication of understanding and learning, the teacher presented a negative statistical relationship between silence and understanding, explaining that "When Asha didn't answer my questions, I assumed that she didn't understand and didn't know how to formulate the question in English."

How do the Somali students' explanations of using silence in the ELL classroom compare to a United States teacher's understanding of why they used silence?

In order to understand how the Somali students' explanation of using silence in the ELL classroom compared to a United States teacher's understanding of why they used it, data gathered through open-ended interviews conducted with both the teacher and student participants were analyzed. The similarities and differences, with respect to the identified themes were noted. For example, the awareness of silence as a tool to organize and uphold social norms was

discussed by both student and teacher participants. This was true with respect to gender and age. The measure of this use was explained quite differently, however. The students described a positive statistical relationship to the number of instances of silence to the level of adherence to Somali social norms; explaining that a student could follow these rules to a degree that would not permit them to participate in the United States classroom. Conversely, the teacher's explained a positive statistical relationship to a student's level of verbal participation in the classroom to their level of acculturation. This discussion of silence as an indicator of acculturation continued throughout the teacher's interview responses. An acknowledgment of time spent in the U.S. was also made by student participants, however, this was made to explain their need for quiet processing, not a lack of understanding the teacher's desired verbal participation.

The use of silence as a space for understanding and learning was further discussed by both the teacher and student participants. There was, however, a noted difference between the female student participants and the male and teacher participants' description of this process. The female students used the terms "thinking" and the male and teacher participants used the word "understand." I feel that this is an important distinction as thinking does not necessarily mean there is a lack of comprehension or understanding. Thinking could have potentially indicated that the student was analyzing or synthesizing the information, but indeed understood the concept at hand. As Nakane (2005) notes, students' use of silence varies depending on their cultural understanding of silence as well as their expectations and beliefs about education and learning. As a teacher myself, trained in the U.S., I can relate to the teacher participant's connection to a lack of comprehension and silence. As Jaworski and Sachdev explain the western understanding of silence views quietness, or the silent student, as having negative characteristics that deter academic achievement (1998).

Limitations

The first limitation that must be acknowledged is the reality of my own cultural lens. As an educator who has spent many years studying and analyzing different cultures, it must be acknowledged that any insight I have is both stunted and accentuated given my own cultural framework. When discussing the phenomena and complexity of culture, as the researcher, I would be remiss not to highlight this critical limitation.

The formality of the participant consent letter served as an initial limitation. While I had the information translated in Somali, through the help of a Somali speaking colleague, at least 10 potential participants displayed immediate resistance after glancing at the letter which was two pages long, including a space for their required signature. After several refusals, and what seemed to be warnings made about me and the project to other Somali students in the commons area of the school, I asked a Somali-speaking teacher to help interpret the information and calm any fears. While the Somali-speaking teacher did help to explain the project, resulting in three signatures, he explained, after discussing with the students in Somali, that they would be willing to share their thoughts but not be recorded.

The refusal to allow audio and/or video recording certainly posed a limitation to data collection. This fact not only limited the feedback given through interviews, with the absence of a stimulated recall, but also an assurance that all instances of silence were recorded during the observation. This was particularly true with regard to the teacher participants, as she may not have been aware of all the instances of silence by each student, and without the recordings, consequently had to assume an understanding.

Additionally, student participants' refusal to engage in a written, open-ended questionnaire, which was originally a triangulation data point I planned to collect, also limited

the data obtained to verbally solicited information written down by the researcher. The fear of leaving a record of their participation in the project seemed to increase with each visit. This perceived underlying fear and mistrust by Muslim Americans of non-Muslim Americans was not just present in the Adult Education program, but the country at large. Given the level of their unfamiliarity with me, many Somali students displayed immediate distrust and fear of participating in the project.

The current political climate of the U.S. is one in which hate rhetoric and sentiment aimed at immigrants and refugees who practice Islam is abundant. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center's annual census of hate groups, anti-Muslim groups have increased from 34 in 2015 to 101 in 2016, resulting in a 197% increase (Potok, 2017). The newly appointed President of the U.S. issued two travel bans aimed at Muslim countries, calling for a "total and complete shutdown of all Muslims entering the country" (Potok, 2017). This, coupled with the fact that I am a white, middle aged, native English speaking woman, certainly limited not only who participated in the study, but the level of participation of those who did, as well.

Fear, as well as the reality of irregular attendance in Adult Education programs at large, limited the access to participants. While I secured four signatures prior to the first observation, when I returned to conduct the observation, only one consenting participant was present. I received consent and access from three other beginning/intermediate ELL teachers and their classroom; however, given the low numbers of Somali speaking students, I was not able to move the study forward with them. Once I was given access to the classroom I worked in, I was limited to the opportunities for interaction provided by the teacher. This variation in opportunities for interaction and student activities certainly limited the resulting data.

Implications

As Jaworski (1993, 1997) states, one's culture provides the underlying motivation to any use of silence. The major findings of this study imply that the use and meaning of silence is indeed culturally determined. This distinction not only guides student communication but teacher understanding — or in some cases, misunderstanding of the student.

This was clearly evident in the student interviews. While the teacher interview demonstrated an awareness of the culturally determined uses and meanings, the lens of her own cultural understandings of the use and meaning of silence implicated her interpretation of the students' use of silence. As Gay (2010) states, if teachers do not know how their own cultural blinders obstruct education opportunities for students, they cannot locate feasible places, directions, or strategies to change them. Understanding the culturally defined meaning of silence is vital to how an educator instructs and conducts a classroom of English language learners. One cannot start to solve a problem until it is identified and understood.

In reviewing the culturally distinct implications of silence, I worked to express the importance for an educator to understand the culturally determined meaning and use of silence in order to successfully work with English language learners from the Somali culture. Western educators of English language learners must be aware of various cultural understandings and uses of silence in order to effectively communicate, connect with, and assess their students. Removing one's cultural bias to understanding silence, I feel, is a responsibility of English as second language teachers and of educators at large.

I feel it is important for teachers to be able to connect with, adequately assess and invoke learning for all students in a classroom. This should be true not just in spite of cultural differences but in appreciation and acknowledgment of the differences. In light of what Farid

(2004) states that Somali cultural values reflect the teaching and applications of Islam it seems critical that United States educators spend time to better understand the Islamic faith, so as to more thoroughly understand the nuances of silence as they relate to organizing and upholding social norms.

Understanding the discrepancies between cultural norms, values and established patterns in regard to silence is vital to instruction and how a culturally responsive educator conducts a classroom of English language learners. As Jaworski (1993) points out, an accurate understanding of silence is necessary for clear communication.

Suggestions for Further Research

There are many aspects of this study that require greater focus in order to truly understand a Somali student's use of silence and the cross-cultural interpretation of that silence by a United States teacher. In order to understand the culturally bound meaning and use of silence, a greater number of participants would be needed, across more classrooms. Including more demographic information for each of the participants, and their classmates, would help the researcher better understand the context of the classroom.

I would also recommend ensuring a video and audio recording from each observation and interview, and include space on the modified Communication Observation Language Tool for physical nuances associated with each instance of silence. This would help the researcher categorize the uses and identify stronger trends for meaning.

Following the structured interviews, I would also recommend asking students and teacher participants to complete a simple, open-ended questionnaire to explain the instances of silence in which they participated. Because beginner - intermediate level ELLs typically express themselves better in one modality over the other, student participants who may have a higher

writing proficiency, would be better able to express their insight in an open-ended questionnaire. If this questionnaire is done without interpretation by the interviewer, bias would be reduced, and validity increased. As stated by Mackey & Gass, open-ended, written productions by participants help to provide a culturally grounded perspective of the topic of investigation (2005).

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Culturally responsive teaching is increasingly important in the field of education, not only for English language teachers, but for all educators and administrators. The findings from this study can not only help teachers of all content, it can also add to the fields of education, linguistics and cultural anthropology as it expands our cross-cultural understanding of the use and meaning of silence between the beginning - intermediate Somali English student and the United States teacher. I hope to be able to share the findings learned from this study with my colleagues at the district and state level, in order to support efforts toward recognizing the importance of a culturally responsive teaching practice. With each advance we make in better understanding cross-cultural communication, we move closer to securing a more equitable education experience for all students.

Final Reflection on Silence

While this study focused on the use of silence by Somali ELLs in the context of the United States classroom, I feel it would be remiss to not highlight the use of silence, stemming from a presence of fear as a refusal to participate. I came to understand that these students, who are a part of a culture I am interested in and feel a connection to, see themselves as a group under attack, a group that needs to protect one another from all outside speculation. Consequently, I met their refusals with silence as well. While I perhaps would have secured greater data and more significant findings related to my research questions, if I had pressed the desire for full

participation, I offered understanding through silence.

I left the final observation, aware that I had yet to secure all of the data which I had envisioned for so many months, reflecting on the fact that I too had sought reprieve through silence from the divisive political climate. I became mindful that this desire for silence and ability to turn off the news radio or cancel my push notifications from the major news sources was indeed a luxury. These students who may have agreed to participate, or would have only months prior, were now consumed with protecting themselves with a guard of silence.

I end this project in greater awe of the use of silence than I started it. I end this project aware that understanding cross-cultural use and meaning of silence is necessary to ensure a culturally responsive classroom, but I also end it aware that perhaps the greatest depth of human emotion is in fact only communicated through silence.

Appendix A:

Modified Communication Orientation to Language Teaching (COLT) coding scheme:

Modified Communication Observation Language Tool				
Date:			***Lesson Topic***	
Time:			***Obs no:***	
Student:	***Age***	***Gender***	***Instances of Silence (tally)***	***Discussion Format***
A:				
B:				
C:				
D:				

Appendix B: Interview Questions

Interview Question:

As we look at this video, please pay attention to when you are quiet.

With each occasion of silence please explain why you chose to be "quiet"

Appendix C: In Class Handouts from Observation #1

LESSON D Reading

1 Read and answer the questions. Then listen.

TRACK 14

THREE **BENEFICIAL** HERBS

Many herbal plants are easy to grow. You can use them in cooking and to prevent illness. You can grow thyme, lavender, and mint in a garden or in your home.

Thyme is a small herbal plant. You can use it in cooking and as a medicine. The leaves are gray-green, and the flowers are usually purple, white, or pink. Many people use thyme to cook chicken and fish. You can also dry the leaves and make tea with them. Thyme tea with honey is very good for a cough or a sore throat.

Lavender is a popular garden plant with silver-green leaves and tiny purple flowers. The flowers have a beautiful smell. You can use the dried flowers to keep clothes and sheets fresh. You can use lavender when cooking meat, and you can make tea from the dried flowers for headaches. Using lavender may even keep blood pressure low. Some people use lavender oil in their bath to help them relax.

Mint is a beneficial plant that grows quickly. You can use the leaves in salads and with meat or fish. You can use the fresh or dried leaves to make tea. It helps with indigestion and upset stomachs. Add sugar to iced mint tea for a delicious summer drink.

Use thyme, lavender, and mint to stay healthy and prevent illness.

1. Which of the herbs in the article is good for treating indigestion?

_____

2. Which of the herbs in the article is good for treating headaches?

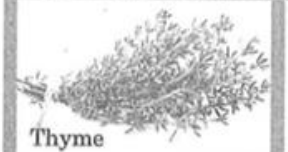
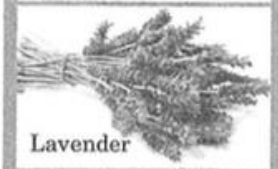
_____

3. Which of the herbs in the article is good for treating stomachaches?

4. What illnesses in the article can thyme tea help treat?

Check your answers. See page 137.

2 Complete the chart. Use the information in Exercise 1.

Name of plant	Use it to make . . .	Use it to cook . . .	Use it to treat . . .
 Thyme	*tea*		
 Lavender			
 Mint			

Appendix D: In Class Handouts from Observation #2

LESSON F Another view

1 Life-skills reading

Medical History Form

1. Chief complaint: Describe the problem and approximately when it began.

Problem	Date problem began

2. Have you ever had any of the following?

☐ allergies	☐ back pain	☐ frequent headaches	☐ high blood pressure
☐ arthritis	☐ chest pains	☐ heart attack	☐ high cholesterol
☐ asthma	☐ diabetes	☐ heart disease	☐ tuberculosis

3. Are you pregnant? Yes No

4. Are you currently taking medications? Yes No

5. If yes, list all medications, including vitamins and herbal supplements.

_____

6. List any major illness, injury, or surgery that you have had in the past year.

_____

The above information is correct to the best of my knowledge.

7. Signature: _____ 8. Date: _____

A **Read** the questions. Look at the form. Fill in the answer.

1. Where do you write the reason for this doctor visit?
   - Ⓐ number 1
   - Ⓒ number 4
   - Ⓑ number 3
   - Ⓓ number 5
2. Where do you write the names of the medicines you take?
   - Ⓐ number 2
   - Ⓒ number 5
   - Ⓑ number 4
   - Ⓓ number 7
3. Where do you write that you had back surgery last year?
   - Ⓐ number 1
   - Ⓒ number 5
   - Ⓑ number 2
   - Ⓓ number 6
4. Where do you write when the problem began?
   - Ⓐ number 1
   - Ⓒ number 5
   - Ⓑ number 3
   - Ⓓ number 6

B **Work** with a partner. First, complete the form about yourself or someone you know. Then ask questions about your partner's form. Are the medical histories similar?

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