1. Introduction

In Kurzon (2007) I set up a tentative typology of silence in social interaction. Four types of silence have been postulated: conversational, textual, situational and thematic. The first – conversational – is the usual type of silence analyzed in the literature. It is the silence of the addressee who does not respond to questions or statements addressed to him/her; it is the silence of a person who is among friends and acquaintances who are having a conversation, but s/he does not participate. The second type, textual silence, is the silence of a reader perhaps at home, or perhaps in the library, and the silence of a worshipper saying a silent prayer. Thirdly, situational silence is similar to textual silence except that there is no text and it often occurs where many people are present, i.e., at war-remembrance ceremonies.

What these three types of silence have in common is that they may be timed. In the case of a pupil in school who remains silent when the teacher asks a question, the time may be measured from the moment the question is asked to the time either when s/he does answer the question or when the teacher addresses the question to another pupil, hoping that an answer is forthcoming. A worshipper reaches a point in a religious service at which s/he has to recite a silent prayer. The time s/he takes to recite the prayer is the length of the silence. An example of situational silence is the one-minute silence at remembrance ceremonies. Unlike textual silence where the silence derives from a person reading a text, in situational silence no specific text is recited in silence, although suggestions may be made to say a particular prayer or other text (Gregory, 1994: 12).
Thematic silence, on the other hand, is different from the other three, in that no silence in effect takes place. Thematic silence refers to the omission of a text, of a reference, of mention of a particular topic in the discourse of a speaker. We often find this type of silence occurring in speeches of politicians and other public figures, who talk, give speeches, but do not mention a topic that may embarrass her or him, or may best be unsaid for political reasons. The person is not silent, but is silent about a particular topic.

In this paper, I will clarify the status of thematic silence, especially in light of the correspondence I had with Jacob Mey while preparing my article for the *Journal of Pragmatics*. Jacob was a help in all ways, making suggestions in my presentation, and even advising me to omit a short section. However, in this Festschrift in his honour, I will restore that deleted section, as additional support for my claim that thematic silence is not silence, and may be considered only as a metaphorical silence.

**2. Silence as Metaphor**

Time, then, may be taken as the factor that distinguishes actual silence (or ‘notable silence’: Bilmes, 1994) – or non-talk – as a phenomenon in social interaction, from metaphorical silence, which does not constitute silence in its meaning of non-talk. Silence may be timed in that a short pause in speech may last around half a second (usually called a pause in conversational analysis), to a silence of several seconds in which the speaker is collecting his or her thoughts before speaking, and to a much longer silence of hours, if not days, for example, the refusal of a suspect to cooperate with the police in their investigation (‘right of silence’: Kurzon, 1995).

Lakoff, in his analysis of metaphors as a cognitive phenomenon in language (1993), presents the metaphor as a conceptual mapping from a source domain to a target domain, which may be presented thus:

TARGET DOMAIN is SOURCE DOMAIN

So, taking his example, Lakoff argues that love is often conceived as a journey, which gives us metaphorical expressions such as ‘love is a journey’. Moreover, the expression ‘We’re stuck’ can be used for travel – stuck at a point in a journey (e.g., because of adverse weather conditions), and metaphorically we may say of a relationship that it is stuck. Adopting this cognitive approach, we may talk of silence as a CONTAINER when it describes a state, for example

(1) They ate dinner in silence.

a SUBSTANCE when it relates to an activity, for example