

Israeli Demonstration Posters: Spatial Semiotics of Silence

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Summary. Israel's coalition effort (2023) to introduce a “(judicial) reform” was perceived by many Israelis as endangering Israel's standing as a democratic state. The salience of silence as a theme and a form in the posters exhibited in the demonstrations supporting and opposing the coalition's move triggered the examination of the semiotic roles played by silence in those posters and whether this use of silence differed by reform support/opposition. Two-hundred and twenty posters partaking in the demonstrations' linguistic landscape were examined. Implementing an algorithm based on Ephratt's (2022) model for identifying different types of silences revealed that fifty six of the posters alluded to one of the six categories of silence (stillness, symptomatic silences, silencing, pauses, the unsaid or verbal silence). These posters served as the data for a qualitative-thematic methodology, iteratively abstracting semiotic roles. Silences and silencing reoccurred as a theme concerning political discourse, particularly the matter of voice. The need for parsimonious use of crucial signantia on posters transformed into a semiotic strategy in which leaving out expected signantia served iconically to communicate absence, conatively activate the observers or express consent, metalinguistically convey the shortage of words, legally circumvent possible charges and create a hiatus that provides soothing qualities, enhancing in-group and out-group tolerance. The differing use of silence in the posters, depending on reform support/opposition, is explained in terms of *horror vacui* and motivation. Finally, the individual posters, as material texts, did

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not appear nor function in isolation: they took an active part in producing the demonstrations' spatial semiotics.

Keywords: judicial crisis; demonstration posters; political discourse; verbal silence; linguistic landscape; *horror vacui*.

1.0. Introduction

The paper considers demonstration posters as a form of political discourse specified as “language that performs the social function of defining collective identities, legitimate hegemony and motivating values which find expression in political associations and goals” (Hayward 2010: 3). The decisive attribute of political discourse is its political associations and goals¹. Political discourse takes place on a variety of platforms. Alongside its extensive use of virtual platforms, political discourse is a substantial constituent of the linguistic landscape that has been described as “the geospatially situated domain of material texts and textual practices in public space” (Malinowski, Dubreil 2019: 1). Demonstrations carried out by real people in real locations play a key part in political discourse (see, for example, Hatuka 2023; Seargeant et al. 2023; Spolsky 2009: 65–89). Posters composed and handwritten by individuals or distributed by organisations occupy the linguistic landscape of demonstrations, which partakes in the semiosis of a demonstration's space. Being a cheap, handy medium, the placard is an independent textual unit that gives voice to individuals, extending the demonstrations' discourse beyond official speeches and art performances (see, for example, Ben-Said, Kasanga 2016). Seargeant et al. argue that “[L]inguistic landscape research is, at its core, a distinctly visual branch of sociolinguistics. It's about the display of language – and particularly written language – in the public sphere. About what this can tell us about the organisation of society” (2023: 3). It is important to emphasise that the visual

¹ For an overview of the concept and its definitions, see, e.g., Randour et al. 2020; Wilson 2015.

channel, i.e. the appearance of material texts, must be analysed and interpreted by integrating linguistic semiotics and spatial semiotics (see Greimas 1986). The latter examines the gathering of posters and demonstrators in a particular location: the actors' and actants' interaction with the geophysical setting of demonstration and its static and dynamic locus. The linguistic phase of the written text, including the use of fonts and language-specific graphics, in no way replaces the language's auditory channel it is attached to. In fact, there is no such thing as written language. Contrary to signed languages, for example, spoken languages' primary channel is vocal (auditory signantia)². Their transcription into script belonging in the visual medium does not constitute a language in itself; it is a channel mediating the auditory channel. The visual appearance of a poster's texts (language) is intended by the person composing that poster, interpreted by the spectators on site as a two-fold signantia – spoken and visual, – and must be treated and analysed accordingly (see the poster described in Seargeant et al.'s monograph 2023: 1; see also Greimas 1986: 33).

The noticeable involvement of silence as a theme (signatum) and as verbal signantia in the posters partaking in the linguistic landscape of Israel's 2023 demonstrations triggered an examination of the roles of silence as used in the posters of supporters and opponents. The word "silence" is used in English to denote many different concepts, situations and processes: some have nothing to do with communication and language; among those which form part of interactions, some impair communication, some support interaction and others even serve, alongside speech, as a means of expression. Whatever the term may be, the competent interlocutors

² The paper follows a triadic semiotic model that perceives signs as a relation between the sign-vehicle that we name here "signans"; that for which it stands "signatum"; and the idea to which it gives rise, its "interpretant" (see, e.g., Dressler 1995: 22). The decision to use these eclectic terms was motivated by the wish to use simple rather than composed terms (e.g., "sign vehicle") and such that are free of terminological ambiguity (such as Pearce's "representamen", denoting both the entire sign and its vehicle component).

spot the various silences, identify their type in the specific discursive context and interpret them accordingly.

The algorithm displayed in Fig. 1 (based on the principles elaborated in Ephratt 2022), will serve to spot silences in the posters' text and distinguish between the different types of silence (see 2.0).

This algorithm designates six chief types of silence:

- the stillness of nature and of still objects, which is external to interaction;
- symptomatic silences and silencing which, while taking place within interaction, are not the product of the speaker's choice (see 3.1);
- paralinguistic pauses which the speaker initiates as intervals supporting or backgrounding interaction but are not in themselves part of the code (see 3.2.6);
- the unsaid referring to content which despite being relevant (and so expected) is left out by the speaker to conceal information (see 3.2.5);
- finally, verbal kinds of silence – acoustic or graphical verbal signs whose expected signans is deliberately left out by the addresser (not pronounced or not inscribed, accordingly) as a means of expression (to inform or activate and not to conceal, see 3.2).

Even though verbal silence may not emerge as lapses in time or graphic blanks, its expected (but not materialised) signantia are spotted retroactively “defined only by that which it is not” (see Greimas 1986: 27).

The posters involving silence as a theme (signatum) or as verbal signantia are tagged according to the demonstrators' orientation (supporters or opponents of the reform) and analysed and explained using a qualitative thematic approach to discern the roles played by the types of silence attested in the posters. Within these types, special attention is drawn to verbal silences, the signantia frequently exerted to iconically denote absence as a theme (see Ephratt 2022).

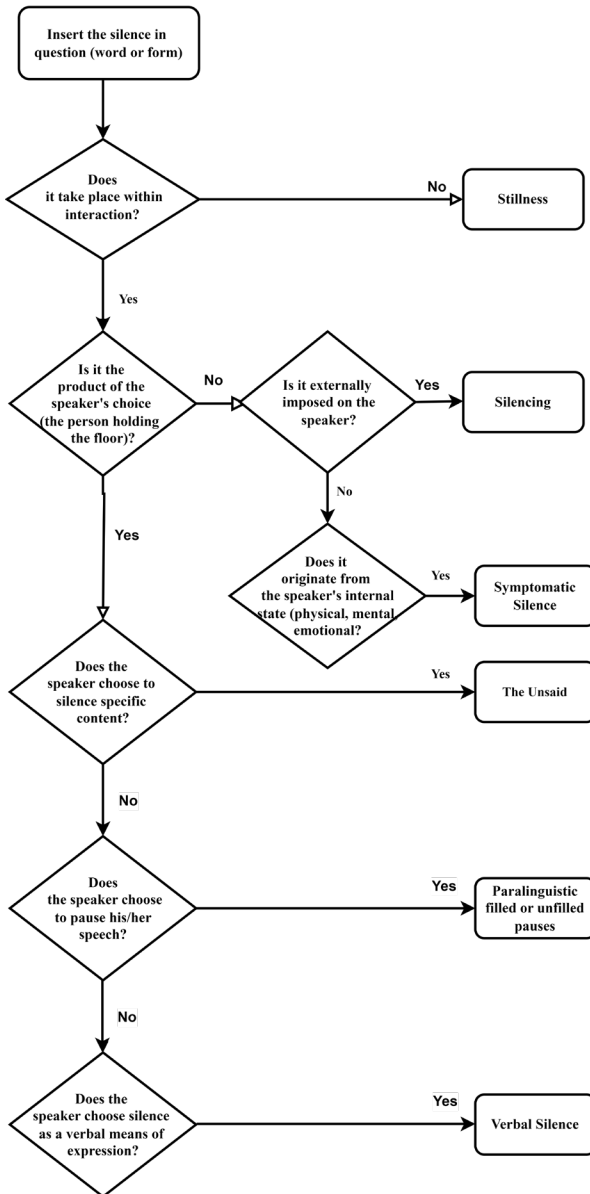


Fig. 1. An algorithm for decoding silence and silence types

The paper briefly outlines Israel's political crisis and the corpus and methodology of the study before it moves on to investigate and illustrate the roles of silence, particularly, verbal silence as used in the posters. Finally, the finding that the use of silence differed in the posters of the two groups is explained in terms of *horror vacui* and motivation.

1.1. A Short Synopsis: Israel's 2023 Judicial Crisis

The state of Israel was founded 76 years ago. Following the termination of the British Mandate and in line with the United Nations' General Assembly "Partition Plan of Mandatory Palestine" (Resolution 181 (II)), Israel's People's Administration ("Temporary Assembly") approved the new state's Declaration of Independence. The Declaration of Independence constitutes the founding document of the State of Israel, expressing the nation's vision. Despite the explicit dictate in the Declaration of Independence³, the drafting of a constitution was repeatedly postponed due to several reasons: the rapid transformation of the Provisional State Council into a (permanent) Parliament; the immanent tension (ever since the drafting of Israel's Declaration of Independence) between Israel's stance as a democratic state and its identity as a Jewish state; and the coalition system of governance. Only in 1994 did the parliament amend the law of Human Dignity and Liberty as a basic law in the spirit of the principles included in Israel's Declaration of Independence, stating that

THE STATE OF ISRAEL [...] will be based on freedom, justice and peace as envisaged by the prophets of Israel; it will ensure complete equality of social and political rights to all its inhabitants irrespective of religion, race or sex; it will guarantee freedom of religion, conscience, language, education and culture.⁴

³ Paragraph 12 of the Declaration: <https://embassies.gov.il/MFA/AboutIsrael/history/Pages/Declaration%20of%20Establishment%20of%20State%20of%20Israel.aspx>.

⁴ Paragraph 13 of the Declaration, See URL link in previous note.

To safeguard democracy and prevent the centralisation of governmental power, power was split between three independent branches⁵: (1) The Parliament – the sole governmental authority with the power of legislation; (2) The Government as the executive branch, composed of the prime minister and the ministers, serving by virtue of the parliament’s confidence. (3) The third is the judicial branch, which interprets and applies the law in the name of the state.

Israel’s political system is a coalition system. In accordance with the distribution of parliament seats per party as determined by the general election’s results, the parliamentary parties form a coalition which constitutes the government. The outcome of the November 2022 general elections was a right-wing coalition that had a clear majority in the parliament. Typically, the size of the coalition and its uniformness determine the degree of independence of the legislative and executive branches; hence, with six coalition parties, holding 64 of the parliament’s 120 seats, the judicial authority (the Supreme Court) was the only mechanism left to ensure the balance of power between the legislative authority and the executive authority. This proviso became even more baffling due to Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s deep involvement in a trial after being indicted on charges of bribery, fraud, and breach of trust.

Soon after the new government had been sworn-in, its justice minister introduced his flagship plan to overhaul the state’s judiciary⁶. From the start, the new government and coalition have been engaged in only one operation: passing that which they term “the judicial reform”. This instantly drew widespread public criticism. Citizens across the political spectrum perceived this as a “judicial coup” weakening the judicial authority (the only branch safeguard-

⁵ <https://m.knesset.gov.il/EN/About/Pages/BranchesOfGovernment.aspx>.

⁶ See, for example, <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel/politics/1676402332-judicial-reform-101-what-you-need-to-know-about-the-balagan-in-israel>.

ing the separation of powers), and so endangering Israel's existence as a democratic state. Starting January (2023) the opponents have held weekly demonstrations in varied designated spaces in cities and villages, on bridges and road intersections. In addition, they have held occasional demonstrations and disruption events triggered by specific events (see, for example, Shultziner 2023). The reform's supporters, on the other hand, initiated demonstrations only as a counterweight to the opponents' demonstrations or as a way to encourage the reform's leaders to advance the process whenever a freeze was being considered. On special occasions, both the supporters and the opponents located their demonstrations in significant spaces, such as the "National Quarter" in Jerusalem or next to the private residences of key political figures promoting or opposing the reform. All demonstrations stopped at once on 7th October 2023, the day Hamas maliciously attacked Israel (see note 29).

2.0. Corpus and Methodology

The research examines what roles silence plays in the posters exhibited during the demonstrations and whether they differ by orientation: supporting or opposing the reform?

The Corpus. Posters are independent texts. Since the placards are limited in size, their fonts must be large enough to be read instantly from a distance. As documented in the literature (see, for example, Philipps 2012: 8–12; Ben-Said, Kasanga 2016: 73), most demonstration posters consisted solely of verbal texts. Only images that constituted an integral part of the posters' semiotics were analysed (with their text). To ensure that the research is based on the voices of the demonstrators, the corpus is limited to the posters that were physically observed, hand-held or mounted in the public space. They were collected from the photos taken by individuals and from those published in the media. Posters confined to virtual sites were not included in the study. The initial data for the study comprised

220 posters displayed in the public space during demonstrations by both the supporters and the opponents of the judicial reform.

Methodology. The study explores the roles played by silence in the posters; it does not question silence and its types. To single out the posters that make use of any form or mention of silence, an algorithm based on Ephratt's (2022) theory of silence was constructed (see Fig. 1). The application of this algorithm revealed that 44 (of the 136) opponents' posters and 12 (of the 84) supporters' posters alluded to silencing as a theme or used verbal silence as semiotic strategy. These 56 posters comprise the data for this study⁷.

To answer the research question, a thematic qualitative analysis of the posters' texts will be conducted. The method for exploring thematic patterns within the posters' raw texts (and their graphics, where relevant) will pursue the following stages:

- open coding and designating repetitions in the excerpt, resulting in breaking the data into small clusters (code words);
- condensing the clusters into meaningful categories;
- abstracting themes derived from linking the categories to theoretical constructs (political discourse roles);
- and finally, looking for patterns that explicate the roles that verbal silence plays in the protests' posters (Hutchinson 1988: 133–135).

Unlike quantitative methods (i.e., employing prestructured surveys and questionnaires to test predetermined variables), the technique of elevating themes is an iterative interpretive process. Attuned to similarities and differences, this iterative-interpretive process goes back and forth from the posters' raw text to categorisations and theories until satiation is achieved, i.e., when adding more material does not require adding, modifying or replacing the themes or the patterns.

⁷ Posters in which the only form of silence is intertextual spaces (see Ephratt 2022: 207–217 and Ornan-Ephratt 2024) were not included in the data for this study.

3.0. The Theme of Silence and the Roles of Silences in the Posters

The semiotic principle of diagrammaticality states that “additional of intensional meaning on the level of the signatum is diagrammatically reflected by morphotactic addition of an affix on the level of signans” (Dressler 1986: 528). This is illustrated by comparing the utterance:

[1a] soldiers equal pilots

with

[1b] Golani brigade soldiers equal [a single] military pilot.

This trivial example (see [13]) points to two matters:

- A. More signantia results in more information (signatum, and hence interpretant);
- B. [1b] carrying more information than [1a], restricts the possible interpretants, thus results in reducing the semiotic possibilities (such as the soldiers’ affiliation and their number).

But counter to diagrammaticality as just defined, when denoting absence, loss and voids (spaces), isomorphisms between signantia and signatum turn out to be counterfactual. The iconicity of the void is exemplified citing a poster displayed by a protester in a demonstration against the judicial reform⁸:

[2a] There’s no such thing as half a democ J

compared with

[2b] There’s no such thing as half a democracy

⁸ All posters, except [11], [12] and [16] are originally in Hebrew. However, transliterations are provided when lexical or grammatical Hebrew particularities are relevant.

Although the signans “democracy” is phonetically cropped in [2a] (“democ”, both in the Hebrew source and in its English translation) and so results in an incomplete utterance, its interpretant is conveyed with greater semiotic impact than its verbally “complete” counterpart ([2b]). Whereas [2b] suggests a (metalinguistic) oxymoron using a grammatically complete sentence, it is the iconic incompleteness of [2a] that phonetically and graphically depicts the impossibility of half a democracy and so bears out the claim. Comparing the two examples reveals the nature of the semiotic options offered by iconic (verbal) silence: [2b] -- complete and finite structure leaves no room for alternative options, whereas the mutilated signans in [2a] makes room for infinite possibilities (interpretants). In [2b], “democracy” denotes the complete and saturated signatum; however, the incomplete signans in [2a] implies other possibilities, for example, [there’s no such thing as] “...a partially democratic system”, “...a partially democratic prime minister”, “...a partially democratic media”. In addition, as explained shortly (3.2.2.2), the addressees reading the poster must not only notice the fracture but assume the encoders’ position, completing the signans – not to settle the diagrammatic principle but instead to resolve its signatum and successfully arrive at the interpretant (see Greimas, Ricoeur 1989: 556 on the transformation of actors). While diagrammaticity (as in [1b]) is the default semiotic scheme, the use of verbal silence as a means of expression (as in [2a]) defies diagrammaticity. Thus, by requiring an exceptional interpretative effort, verbal silence gains indexical iconicity. Searching paths other than the default is the delta in which creativity resides (see 4.0). The semiotic, enigmatic nature of verbal silence is manifested in the significant presence of content expressed by the absence (or as in [2b] mutilation) of the expected signans (or signantia).

Silence stood out as a theme (signatum) and as a means (missing expected signans). This manifested over a widespread spectrum: from silencing at one extreme; through silence as consent; and verbal silence as a source of semiotic power that can be used for

conveying information, sharing ideas, and/or enacting resistance and as a paralinguistic silence that allows slow-time.

3.1. Silencing as a Theme

From the outset, societies and administrations have recognised the importance and value of expression in general, and speech in particular, as a resource of power. The resource of freedom of speech, or speech and its denial, was and still is a tool of control, alongside exclusion in general, the freedom of movement, the right of assembly, the right to vote and the right to representation. Thus, the act of silencing is politically, socially and emotionally charged. In the same vein, breaking silence is a functional tool in the service of oppressed groups struggling to reaffirm their rights (including the right to self-expression). Due to the success of liberation movements and a worldwide trend to grant rights and equality, the struggle has shifted in modern times from the right to freedom of expression in general, i.e. from opposing silencing to the right to talk about specific contents (see, e.g., Jaworski 1993: 115–139; Zerubavel 2006 and Oele 2022⁹). Given that power is not exercised solely through silencing but also extends to control over resources of speech and silence, it is sometimes silence (rather than speech) that constitutes power. Typical examples of this are the “silent treatment” (experienced as passive-aggressive silence) and sectarian or personal (intersubjective) boycotts.

As illustrated, when silence or silencing are the theme of political discourse, and no verbal silence is involved, diagrammaticality holds: the signatum “silence” (or “silencing”) is matched by the articulation (pronunciation or writing in its graphic manifestation) of its corresponding signans. Silence as a theme is attested in the

⁹ Space limitations do not allow detailing Oele’s 2022 interesting essay on the dialectics of silence (following Serrer and Weil) in the context of crisis or discussing the current essay’s views on silence and their convergence and divergence with the above philosophers.

posters displayed by both the supporters of the reform and its opponents. These occurrences clustered along two subthemes: silencing and voice.

3.1.1. Silencing, Submission and Resistance

Contrary to verbal silence, silencing is not the product of free will and not a chosen means of expression but instead it is externally imposed on people by a genuine or fake authority, as a means for controlling individual or collective speech (in general, or in specific contexts). Silencing can be explicit, imposed through censorship, or indirect, by restricting access to public media or sabotaging communication channels. In addition, implicit silencing refers to cases that on the surface appear as an individual or a group internalising externally imposed silencing. However, a closer look reveals that in these cases, the submissive internalisation of the silencing is a reaction to physical or mental violence, or stems from political, financial, cultural or emotional dependencies.

A poster expressing the idea that submission to silencing indicates passivity and impotence, reads as follows:

[3] “Silence is despicable” (Zeev Jabotinsky)¹⁰.

This poster, displayed by the opponents, is a quote from the hymn of the revisionist movement “Betar”, composed in 1932 by its leader, the revisionist and Zionist visionary Zeev Jabotinsky¹¹. In so doing, the left-wing protesters appropriate the saying and thus the authority of Jabotinsky, who is considered the founding father of the Israeli right-wing parties comprising the current coalition and endorsing the reform. In intertextualising and appropriating this citation, the opponents of the reform communicate to the government and its followers that (1) they, the opponents, are en-

¹⁰ https://beersheva.mynet.co.il/local_news/article/bymdnxx3 (text in Hebrew).

¹¹ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ze'ev_Jabotinsky.

dorsing the statement of the government's ideological leader; that (2) accordingly, submitting to the government's silencing would mean failing to fulfil their civic duty; that is why (3) the government must take notice of their objections; and most importantly, that (4) this severe crisis is an outcome of the government's attempts to covertly restructure the political system.

A poem's title

[4a] "I Can't Keep Silent in Light of How My Country Has Changed Her Face"

and its opening line:

[4b] "I Have No Other Country"

are quotes from a poem written by the late Israeli poet Ehud Manor. These lines were sung or cited in right-wing and left-wing protests in Israel even during Manor's lifetime. Reacting to the pro-Trump riots and the attack on Capitol Hill (January 2021), Nancy Pelosi, then the Speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives, chose to open her speech on the floor of the Congress by citing these lines to express her shock and her commitment to preserve the nation's democratic values¹².

By using these lines in their posters, the reform opponents communicate their determination to defy the government's attempt to silence the opposition, especially when the state's democratic structure is at risk. In addition, due to the intertextual referencing, the use of these lines equates Israel's current crisis with the threatening nature of the Capitol Hill events.

[5] The Handmaid's Tale¹³.

¹² <https://www.timesofisrael.com/how-an-israeli-poem-sustained-and-inspired-nancy-pelosi-through-the-trump-years/>.

¹³ See e.g., <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LXn4PuNGu2A>; <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/culture/article-734989> and see the next note.

In the “parade of handmaids” performed throughout Israel, the reform opponents emulated the distinctive costumes used in the serialised television production based on Margaret Atwood’s novel, thus creating a prominent semiotic visual and intertextual display. Referring in this manner to [5] the story of the “Divine Republic of Gilead”, a dystopian, totalitarian, neo-Puritanical regime based on Jewish religious law, creatively suggests the slippery slope one faces when democratic governmental mechanisms are “re-formed”. This is particularly pertinent to Israel’s crisis, given that this is the first time in the state’s history that half of the governing coalition is comprised of members of Jewish Orthodox parties. In Atwood’s novel, a radical theocratic regime robs women of their status as human beings and deprives them of their rights (to their body, their needs and will) to appropriate their wombs in the service of the new regime. In the novel, the many forms used to silence these women include depriving them of their name and self-identity (using instead the possessive form of the husband’s name), promoting submissiveness, thus, eliminating any form of resistance.

The Handmaid’s parade has been assumed as a form of a silent protest in many demonstrations worldwide¹⁴; however, in this crisis, the convergence of the universal context of “re-formed” regimes, along with the biblical-Jewish context, pertinent to both Israel and the “Gilead Regime” of the novel, serves to transform the message of the parade [5] from an enactment of a fictional dystopia to a wake-up call, a warning about the new reality that awaits if the judicial reform planned by the current Israeli government is accomplished. Examples [3] and [4] depict resistance to silencing, whereas [5] portrays the final outcome of silencing.

¹⁴ Beaumont Peter and Holpuch Amanda, “How *The Handmaid’s Tale* dressed protests across the world”, *The Guardian* (August 3, 2018), <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/aug/03/how-the-handmaids-tale-dressed-protests-across-the-world>.

3.1.2. "Kol": Voice and Vote

Not accidentally, in Hebrew (as in other languages), the lexeme denoting vote ("kol") is the product of a semantic shift from the lexeme denoting "voice". While the opponents of the reform express their concern regarding future silencing and the duty to resist the silencing emerging under the coming judicial measures (see 3.1.1.), the posters of the supporters of the reform dedicated to voice-votes blame the previous regimes (prior to the reform, including the Supreme Court) for overlooking their voice-votes. These posters raise two subthemes.

[6] You are not the "Lords of the land"!
And we are not second class, and do not mean to
relinquish our voice/vote in the election!!!¹⁵

Poster [6] evokes the essence of voice-vote as identity: the speaking self, voice (and vote – political say) as part of the individual's ego. Poster [7] illustrates the value of voices/votes (see also [13]):

[7] Military id number 5998937
A soldier in a special unit
My voice/vote = pilots' voice/vote.

The government pressing the reform, as well as its supporters, have claimed repeatedly that gaining a clear majority (64 out of 120 seats) in parliament gives it the right to pursue this reform. Although the context and the contents of the demonstrations are political, using the Hebrew polysemous word "kol" in the singular form serves to emphasise and retain both of its interpretants: vote and voice.

¹⁵ See e.g., <https://imti.org.il/53508/> (text in Hebrew).

3.2. The Roles of Verbal Silence

Verbal silence covers the deliberately absent expected linguistic grammatical or lexical signantia, chosen by the speaker (holding the floor, within interaction) as a verbal means of expression. A speaker may leave out, i.e. may not articulate (pronounce phonetically, or write as mediated in script) a signans due to other reasons. To give two examples, muteness or aphasic speech illustrate symptomatic absences due to unintentional causes (see “symptomatic silences” in Fig. 1 in 1.0.). Intentional absences – such as grammatical ellipsis – do not fall within the category of verbal silence because grammar rules ban repeating the particular recoverable constituent and therefore their signans is not expected in that specific sentence. The speaker, who chooses to employ verbal silence as a signans, intentionally undertakes to inform their addressee of the coming absence of the expected verbal signans. To this end, the speaker uses speech forerunners pointing to the coming silence (see also Ephratt 2022: 30–50, Saville-Troike 1985: 4). The forerunners serve as background marking the coming verbal silence as a figure. This makes the sign’s signans two-fold: the expected (unarticulated) signans (moving to the fore) as well as its absence (see, e.g., “democ 1” and “democracy in [2a] and [2b], 3.0). The two partake in a dynamic generation of signification, in a way broadening Chomsky’s transformational idea of surface structure (verbal silence’s unarticulated signans and its forerunners) and deep structure (see Greimas, Ricoeur 1989: 555, and concerning spatial semiotics, Greimas 1986: 44). Being verbal means of expression, they may range from the phonetic level to the entire discourse. Verbal silences belong in the linguistic inventory; they are part of its given-information (see Goffman, 1959: 2) and play active semiotic and rhetorical roles in discourse and verbal communication.

Serving communication within interaction, verbal silence is available and used in all areas of life: in the many contexts and contacts of spontaneous interpersonal discourse, as well as in collective and political discourses, in a wide variety of genres of

written texts (see Ephratt 2022) and as shown here also in political posters. In all these settings, verbal silence occurs not because the addresser has nothing to say or wishes to conceal something from the audience, but rather, as the addresser's deliberate choice to express what they wish to share using verbal silence. Often such a choice is motivated by iconicity or is the outcome of a shortage of words. As explained (in 1.0.), written texts do not constitute a language of their own, designating phones writing is primarily a mediating device (see Greimas 1986: 33). External to the verbal (speech) silence, other semiotic channels employ the deliberate absence of signantia as a means of expression. Visual silences (signantia)—i.e. blank or empty signantia in the graphic (spatial) realm—constitute, alongside verbal silence, a principal semiotic means (in the context of political discourse; see, e.g., Rengel 2023). As illustrated, some posters combine both the verbal and the graphic manifestations of silent signantia (see, e.g., [2a] in 3.0., 3.2.1; [11] 3.2.1) and some bring together verbal silence with silent locations (see [8a] below).

3.2.1. Iconic Silence: Void for Void

Essentially, iconicity is any “similarity between a *signans* and a *signatum* in the mind of the interpreter (who produces an interpretant)” (Dressler 1995: 22g). Focusing on silence in light of iconicity seems intriguing, primarily because of the unique two-fold facet of silence, which like that of icons, is both a quality and a signans. As a quality, silence is external to language, belonging in the real world, such as the stillness of nature. As a verbal signans, it is a symbolic form that is a part of the conventionalised verbal code. Paraphrasing Peirce (CP 2.308), nothing is verbal silence unless it is interpreted as such. When silence serves as a verbal signans denoting void, it appears as both enigmatic and one that elicits a highly intuitive iconic mode of representation (see the poster described in Seargeant et al. 2023: 1).

To illustrate this phenomenon, we return to [2a]. The mutilated signans (lexeme: “democracy”) iconically manifests the meaning: damaging democracy (signatum) results not in a partial democracy but annuls democracy all together. The opponents of the reform who drafted this poster added a right-angle bar to graphically mark the space. But this addition is, as any other written form of verbal silence (see 1.0.), primarily phonetic: leaving out phones composing the signans. The verbal silence conveyed in this poster elicits a threefold message:

- it is a referential argument stating a fact, which, as such, is not negotiable;
- a semiotic strategy employing iconicity: a phonetic/spatial void represents (as a diagram or a metaphor) a conceptual void;
- a conative call-up and warning: in the same way the addressees can resolve the mutilated signans, it is still possible – in the real world – to stop the destruction of democracy (signatum) and thus to rescue or restore democracy.

Iconicity is likewise epitomised by leaving unarticulated a syntactic constituent that is anticipated in the specific syntactic construction. As this constituent is neither superfluous nor syntactically recoverable, it does not count as an ellipsis but rather emphasises the void. Displayed physically on the graves of fallen soldiers in military graveyards during the week of Israel’s Memorial Day as part of the anti-reform protests, the wordings in posters [8] and [9] were often displayed alongside a photo commemorating the fallen soldier.

[8a] For naught¹⁶.

In [8a], the adverb comes without its main clause, leaving the subject and the action unarticulated. The full syntactic articulation might appear as:

¹⁶ See, e.g., <https://haipo.co.il/wp-content/uploads/2023/07/Haipo-news-for-nothing-220723-scaled.jpg>.

[8b] NOUN PHRASE: The sacrifice of X [soldier/son/father]; VERB PHRASE: was; PREPOSITIONAL PHRASE: for naught.

The absence of any grammatical constituent (signans), which denotes the absence of its object (signatum), iconically depicts gratuitousness: a loss lacking purpose or justification.

The next poster is as follows:

[9a] In their death [martyrdom] they bequeathed [commanded]



Fig. 2: [9a-Hebrew transliteration] *b-motam siwwu*¹⁷

This poster, similarly, relies on a void created by leaving the (syntactic) complement of the verbal phrase uninstantiated. This stands in light of its intertextual origin:

[9b] In their death they bequeathed us life

the verse in a poem written by the Hebrew poet Bialik (1898).

¹⁷ I thank the photographer Tomer Neuberger for granting permission to use this photo here. See also <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/rjxok9bxn> (text in Hebrew).

Some reform protesters displayed posters offering a different complement phrase, such as,

[9c] In their death they bequeathed us democracy¹⁸.

Comparing [9a], [9b] and [9c] illustrates not only the iconic force and semiotic significance of the verbal silence created in [9a], but also makes apparent the multiple semiotic options gained using verbal silence. This multiplicity allows for competing, and in time, conflicting complements, leading to a richness of interpretants (see also 3.2.2.2; on silence as an opening see Oele 2022: 191, and note 9 above).

In addition, displayed physically on the graves, (see Fig. 2) posters [8] and [9] constitute an epitome of the complementing relations, incorporated in the verbal silence's posters, between the verbal and the visual, between spatial semiotics and linguistic semiotic (Geimas 1986). Taking "silent as a grave" literally brings together the key role of silence in the spatial semiotics of graveyards and the poster's verbal silence that gives voice to the fallen soldier resting under that stone.

The next example of iconic verbal silence has to do with negation. While stating an affirmative argument indicates existence, phrasing an argument negatively negates any presence and makes its absence salient. This rhetorical practice reoccurred in many posters of both supporters and opponents. One such example is a poster held by a supporter of the reform, presenting the phrase

[10] Esther, you're not a queen¹⁹

alongside an altered photo showing Esther Hayut, the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court of Israel, wearing a crown. This phrase

¹⁸ See, e.g., <https://restart-israel.co.il/with-their-death-they-commanded-us-democracy>.

¹⁹ See, e.g., <https://www.kipa.co.il/%D7%91%D7%A8%D7%A0%D7%96%D7%94/1153046-0/> (text in Hebrew).

alludes to the Biblical Queen Esther; yet, by using the negative form, it suggests that, unlike Queen Esther, this Esther “is not above the law”. Theoretically, this allows for endless possibilities instantiating a positive counterpart. Unlike the multiplicity of options suggested by the incomplete phrases (such as [9a]), the use of a (saturated) negative statement in [10], rules out any pragmatic or semantic option, and so implies complements such as “...you’re not a queen but merely a public servant.”

The last poster illustrating the iconic use of verbal silence to denote conceptual void employs special graphics to designate this iconic silence:

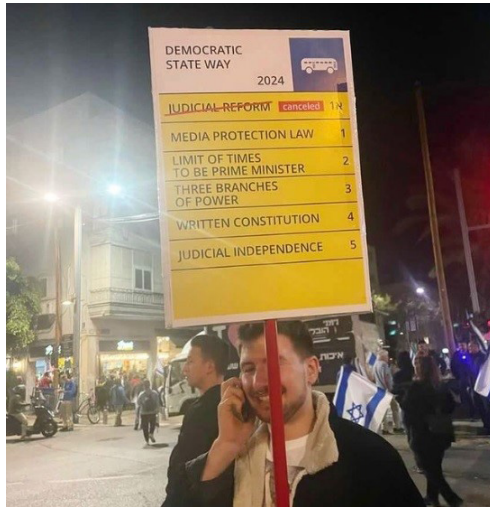


Fig. 3: [11] Democratic State way²⁰

Authentic speech, being immediate and linear, materialises in time and so lapses once it is articulated. By contrast, a script materialising in space remains after it has been inscribed, and

²⁰ I thank the photographer, who wishes to remain here anonymous, for granting me permission to use this photo here. <http://www.instagram.com/p/CqgP8P-NePC/?igshid=MzRI0DBiNWFIZA==>.

consequently the writer – or whoever has access to this text – can alter parts of it; from that point on, the readers see the text in its final form (see Griemas 1986: 33 on the diachronic [historical] stratification of the object). Leaving the text but striking it through as a sign of cancellation constitutes a graphic device of verbal silence, as it places this iconic absence in the fore (see also Giora et al. 2009). As illustrated in [11] (Fig. 3), the reform opponents' poster utilises the graphic pattern of a bus stop sign. The sign lists the bus's route, the "Democratic State way" and instead of destinations, it lists the undertakings of a democratic government. The top undertaking listed, "judicial reform" has been struck through, to indicate iconically that such an undertaking is not part of the desired democratic route. This poster exemplified the semiotic strength gained by the double phase of script as mediating speech and, as here, a semiotic (visual) signans overcoming the linearity of speech.

3.2.2. *Conative Verbal Silence*

Despite all verbal functions being initiated by the addresser's verbal behaviour, the conative function centres on the addressee; it "finds its purest grammatical expression in the vocative and imperative" (Jakobson 1960: 355). This function highlights the transformational force of silence (see Oele 2022). We describe here two of the roles of verbal silence centred on the addressee that are illustrated in the posters.

3.2.2.1. *Silence as consent.* A special case of conative silence is "*qui tacet consentire videtur*" – "he who keeps silent is assumed to consent". Consent belongs in the conative function because it performs a pact: through the admission of consent, the addresser allows the addressee to act or refrain from doing so. Due to the pragmatic parsimony of verbal silence, this is the default verbal signans for performing consent. One such example is found in this reform opponents' poster, which alludes to the perception of "silence as consent", by urging the addressee (in English):

[12] Don't let democracy die in silence!²¹.

3.2.2.2. *Activating the addressee.* Verbal silence is used regularly to activate the addressee. A special form of verbal silence steering the addressee to act takes place when the addresser uses metalinguistic verbal silence to signal the addressee that at this point in the discourse exchange, the addressee is urged to act as encoder rather than decoder. This results in turning that addressee – and in demonstrations all attendees – into active participants, joining the addresser in encoding the message (see Greimas, Ricoeur 1989: 556). Two major metalinguistic-conative strategies presented in the posters are (1) posing questions and (2) using the three dot (ellipsis) mark.

Facing the 2023 political crisis, senior Israel Defence Forces pilots and air force staff announced that due to the judicial reform plan, they would halt their voluntary reserve service, a contribution they made willingly in a democratic state. These announcements had a tremendous impact. A poster held by a supporter of the reform posed a sincere quantitative question, comparing the value attributed to infantry army soldiers versus that attributed to air force pilots:

[13] How many Golani [brigade soldier]s equal/worth [one] pilot?
[13 Hebrew transliteration] *kama golanšiqim šawe tayyas?*²²

Notice that while “soldiers” (*golanšiqim*) is in the plural, “pilot” (*tayyas*) is in the singular (see [1] above). Question [13] is addressed

²¹ See, e.g., <https://www.digi24.ro/galerie-foto/1/stiri/externe/protestarii-au-incercat-sa-l-impiedice-pe-netanyahu-sa-plece-din-tara-premierul-israelian-s-a-dus-la-aeroport-cu-elicopterul-2277385#7>; <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/binyamin-netanyahu-defies-mass-protests-with-vow-to-fulfil-mandate-qhnl3wrd>.

The metalinguistic semiotic choice of language, particularly a foreign or minority language, is in itself a conative verbal silence. Space limit considerations do not allow further elaboration (in fact, this is the focus of many linguistic landscape studies, see, e.g., Spolsky 2009: 65-89.).

²² See https://www.mako.co.il/news-politics/2023_q1/Article-7804dba98913781027.htm (text in Hebrew).

to both reform supporters (including the members of the government who are pressing for the reform) and its opponents (including the pilots withholding their services). [13] poses a (sincere) question by presenting a direct performative speech act that prompts the addressee to provide information. This is by no means a rhetorical question (which essentially is not a question but an argument phrased indirectly and so not involving any form of answer; see Schmidt-Radefeldt 1977: 377, also 3.2.6.).

[14] Us--no ... our taxes--yes? ... ²³

This example fuses together (1) the iconic silence announced using the three-dot signans (“us --no ...”), (2) a sincere question to be answered by the addressees and (3) emotions (e.g., outrage) and indirect speech acts (e.g., blame or rebellion) elicited among the reform opponents. This three-fold iconic verbal silence affirms the answer that “There can be no taxation without representation (consideration)”.

3.2.3. The Use of Verbal Silence to Circumvent Possible Charges

In unique legal and moral circumstances, different forms of verbal silence are adopted to express, and so share (in silence), contents that are taboo, not politically correct or even texts and ideas that are being banned. Following the Israeli authorities’ decision to ban messages associating Israel’s current crisis with the Nazi regime, referring to the Holocaust in posters using verbal silence served to bypass possible legal charges. The following example from a reform opponent’s poster seems a plain illustration of the use of syntactic verbal silence to intimidate:

²³ See <https://www.ynet.co.il/news/article/bynpfk5si> (text in Hebrew).

[15] We've just started²⁴

Not pronouncing (phonetically) the complement verbal phrase, (e.g., “rebellion”) blocks the possibility to charge the person behind the poster with sedition (see, similarly, Seargeant et al. 2023: 1. On the crucial differences between promises and threats see Castelfranchi, Guerini 2007; Ephratt 2022: 181–182).

3.2.4. *Metalinguistic Verbal Silence—The Shortage of Words*

The shortage of words results from the addresser's impression that code (language) fails to capture and successfully convey the message (see also the quote from Serre in Oele 2022: 192). It is particularly acute in circumstances such as a demonstration, in which an entire message must be packed into a poster. The poster's size is determined by the fact that each poster is usually held by a single person and the poster's surface must allow enough space for letters and images to be seen from a distance. The shortage of words as a theme is expressed, often using words rather than verbal silence. One such example is:

[16] My outrage cannot fit on this sign²⁵

This message, which occupies the entire surface of the poster, emphasises not the poster's limited size but that the shortage of the code (language) prevents the protester from detailing the magnitude of emotional outrage experienced.

3.2.5. *The Unsaid*

“The unsaid” is a category of silence in which there is content – the addresser has something to say about a particular issue – and that specific speech exchange is made in the expectation that the

²⁴ See <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/byn9z0ynh> (text in Hebrew).

²⁵ See <https://www.alfa.lt/aktualijos/pasaulis/izraelio-teismas-pradejona-grineti-pirmaja-byla-del-b-netanyahu-teismu-reformu/302293/>.

addresser will relate and elaborate on this issue. This anticipated but deliberately left out content constitutes “the unsaid” (see Fig. 1). Zerubavel (2006) describes the unsaid as “the elephant in the room”. Poster [17a] presented during a reform supporters’ demonstration illustrates the rhetorical use of the unsaid:

[17a] ‘We hereby declare *the establishment of a Jewish State!*
The Ariel Movement, protects the Jewishness of the state!’²⁶

The first line (four times larger than the second line) is a truncated quote from Israel’s Declaration of Independence. The full quote reads:

[17b] ‘We hereby declare the establishment of a *Jewish State in the Land of Israel, {to be known as} the State of Israel.*’

A substantial factor furnishing the antagonism between the groups supporting the reform and opposing it revolves around the dispute on whether Israel is or should be a Jewish religious state based on Judaic law ([17a]) or a secular and democratic state run on the basis of equality among all its citizens²⁷. Punctually ending the quote on the poster using both inverted commas and an exclamation mark signifies the deliberate choice to disregard its latter part. It is the familiarity with the entire quote that makes the unsaid conspicuous, that is interpreted by the addressees as informative.

3.2.6. *The Soothing Function of Silence*

Paralinguistic pauses and slow-time (see Bruneau 1973) are temporary spacing initiated by the speaker to facilitate decoding,

²⁶ See <https://twitter.com/23tkuma/status/1651586546720440321> (text in Hebrew).

²⁷ As a matter of fact, facing this crisis, thinkers have propagated plans for dividing Israel into two separate states: The State of Israel and the State of Judea. See, for example, Kapushchevsky 2023.

processing and needs. In addition, the processing of the figure is facilitated by paralinguistic infinitesimal pauses or juncture groundings, which punctuate the message (compare, for example, the location and effect of the juncture in “a name” vs. “an aim”). Paralinguistic pauses constitute a distinct trait of silence, most valuable in the context of a crisis, as they can be used to perceive, grasp, process and respond. This is the attentive function of silence, which Oele (2022) associates with the faculty of listening (see note 9 above). In the midst of the extreme steps and the resulting chaotic activities and emotions associated with the current crisis, such pauses can have an exceptionally soothing effect, enhancing in-group and out-group empathy and tolerance.

But the soothing function can also be attained using language’s phatic function (see Jakobson 1960: 355; Ephratt 2022: 283–292). Such is the use of verbal silence to produce humour in the service of its soothing function. The production of humour, using verbal silence, serves two ends related to the demonstrators’ objectives. The first refers to the making of the poster (see motivation in 4.0), and the second looks at the functioning of the particular poster within the demonstration’s landscape. For the poster to serve its persuasive purpose, i.e. to influence the addressees in some way, it must stand out among the many others on the scene. This holds particularly true in the context of demonstrations carried out by hundreds of thousands of reform opponents spanning over 38 weekends at more than 30 locations.

Humour has a psychological soothing effect. “A merry heart doeth good like a medicine” (Proverbs 17: 22) is by no means a myth: its neurochemical soothing effect has been proven (e.g., laughter is associated with an increase in endorphin levels). The use of humour to draw attention in the first place has a unique, longstanding and valuable effect, particularly given the attested increase in psychological tension and depression among Israel’s citizens due to the current ongoing crisis (see, for example Hama-Raz et al. 2024). Humour involving verbal silence may take on two forms on posters. Poster [13], discussed above, elicits humour

not by its funny content but by its form: imitating the verbal pattern of a humorous riddle produces a humorous effect. The second form is the customary case consisting of funny posters, e.g.,

[18a] But, Daddy, you promised a dictatorship for the Sabbath!

[portraying the image of the 33-year-old son of Netanyahu — Israel’s PM — weeping].²⁸

“But” is a conjunctive function-word signalling contrast: “[T]he unexpectedness of what is said in the second conjoin in view of the content of the first conjoin [... or] a repudiation on positive terms of what has been said or implied by negation in the first conjoin” (Quirk et al. 1985: 920–928; 935). While the conjunctive “but” is stated in [18a] indicating the dyadic nature of the phrase (C_1 but C_2), the initial conjoin (C_1) is deliberately left unarticulated:

[18b] C_1 but Daddy, you promised a dictatorship for the Sabbath!

Such a hollow dyad is a regular occurrence in speech. [18a] is particularly familiar, as it imitates a child’s complaint manner (and the associated intonation):

[18c] But, Daddy, you promised a special treat for the Sabbath!

The phrasing in [18a] is funny because mimicking this common phrasing sets the expectation for a typical child-parent scenario; however, once the word “dictatorship” comes up, the conjunction seems out of place, requiring an alternative reading (see Ephratt 1990). To make sense of [18a], one needs to know that on the eve of the Sabbath of April 1, when this poster was displayed (by the opponents of the reform), Netanyahu decided to freeze the reform in response to severe national-security alerts (presumably,

²⁸ See <https://www.maariv.co.il/news/politics/Blog-1017529> (text in Hebrew).

attempts to take advantage of Israel's internal crisis)²⁹. Thus, the message conveyed by the reform opponents in [18a] humorously epitomises not only Netanyahu's certainty that the reform (and so the State of Israel) is his personal possession (on the personification of Netanyahu see Lavi et al. 2022), such that he can afford it as a personal treat for his child but that his son too experiences state matters as his own and therefore expresses his disappointment and rage upon being deprived of this treat.

Having completed the micro-level analysis illustrating the chief roles of silence in the posters exhibited in Israel's 2023 pro- and anti-judicial reform demonstrations, we now address the second research question: a macro view of the linkage between the political standpoint of the two groups and their use of silence.

4.0. The Political Standpoint of the Supporters and the Opponents and Their Use of Silence

The difference between the use of silence in the posters supporting the reform and its use in the posters opposing the reform is evident both in respect to quantity and in respect to quality: 12 (14.2% of the 84) supporters' posters alluded to silencing as a theme or used silence as form versus 44 (32.3% of the 136) opponents' posters. This apparent disproportion is explained here in terms of *horror vacui* and how it affects motivation (passion) and creativity. *Horror vacui* was first used as an anthropomorphic metaphor personifying the physical world's fear of emptiness (see, e.g., Thorp 1990). As the use of the term moved away from its initial physics context, its literal psychological meaning came into play (a prominent case was Blaise Pascal, who was intensely obsessed with the idea of a void). Aristotle and his contemporaries claimed that there is no void in nature ("the plenum" theory); however, the "plenum theory" tolerates two conflicting scenarios: it maintains that vacuum does not exist, and that vacuum does not persist (because it is filled instantly).

²⁹ Unfortunately, as became apparent on 7th October 2023 in the face of Hamas' savage attack on Israel, these alerts turned out to be true alarms.

Horror, not unlike fear, is known to elicit conflicting responses: fight, flight, or freeze. The fight response embraces the void as a challenge that motivates reflection and action, while flight and freeze result in ignoring and so avoiding any management of the void.

We now apply these observations to our topic: the relationship between the political standpoints of groups for and against the reform and their use of silence. A quantitative comparison of the posters' texts shows that while the word count in the posters of the reform's opponents ranged between 1 and 13 words ($\bar{x}=4.98$) (excluding [19]), the word count in the posters of the reform supporters ranged between 1 and 31 words ($\bar{x}=5.68$). This difference is significant, bearing in mind the posters' spatial limitations (see 3.2.4). Yet, as illustrated above, when part of the signantia is expressed using verbal silence, the addressees share with the addresser the onus of communication, as they must first identify the presence of verbal silence and then interpret its message (3.2.2.2). Accepting this burden, as it stands out examining the opponents' posters, is tantamount to fighting (as opposed to fleeing or freezing), in reaction to feelings of void, particularly when verbal silence is iconic, making the void (absence, emptiness, loss, etc.) present. By contrast, the reform supporters' posters scarcely invoke verbal silence; typically, their posters were highly verbose, some squeezing into a single poster a lengthy saga. The significance of this practice goes beyond the technical aspect: in line with the "plenum theory", it is an immediate outcome and clear expression of the inability to tolerate a void.

Poster [19], created by the reform opponents, further emphasises these differences between the two camps. The poster's format mimics the graphic layout and colours used in the Home-Front Command's televised alerts, which serve to warn the public in real-time of the presumed destination of missiles launched towards Israel, to enable the residents in these locations to seek immediate shelter. However, as seen comparing Fig. 4b (an authentic alert) and Fig. 4a (the poster) instead of the expected use of the lines to

display the names of the communities threatened by the oncoming missiles (nine communities in Fig. 4b), succeeding the heading “Home-Front Command Alerts [with its distinctive badge], the poster next says – “Right-wing government” followed by “Full-on”. Poster’s [19] remaining twelve lines repeat the word “full” (Hebrew “male”), iconically, introducing empty speech:



Fig. 4a:
[19] POSTER HOME-FRONT COMMAND ALERTS³⁰



Fig. 4b:
AUTHENTIC HOME-FRONT COMMAND ALERTS, 28th October 2023³¹

Examined from the reform opponents’ stance, the poster iconically uses verbal silence (acknowledging void and fighting it) to epitomise not only the voids associated with the government and the reform, but particularly to portray the latter’s political stance fearing void. The fear of a void is communicated in [19] using empty speech. Lacan coined the term “*parole vide*” (as opposed to “*parole pleine*”) to capture speech that reflects the immanent alienation and split between the subject and their desire (1956:

³⁰ I thank the photographer Avihu Shaltiel for granting permission to use this photo here.

³¹ See note 29 above.

50). Unlike the cases of the unsaid (see 3.2.5), a special feature of empty speech is the lack of correspondence between the signantia uttered by the addresser and the (silenced) interpretant. In this manner, empty speech, like Aristotle's "plenum theory", represents a flight strategy, camouflaging the void instead of facing the nothingness and fighting accordingly. Poster [19] is particularly impressive because it cleverly captures the relationship between the political standpoints of the groups and their handling of the void: from the perspective of the reform opponents, the empty speech inserted into the lines of the poster iconically highlights and thus acknowledges the void. Alas, the repetition over and over of the word "full", devoid here of meaning shows the right-wing government as fearing the void and, consequently, filling it with empty speech (the "plenum stance"). This in turn serves to accentuate the emptiness (void) of the government's promises, those made by the parties during the campaign and then again once the coalition gained over 50% of the seats in parliament. For this government, empty speech is not merely a rhetorical strategy but also part of its stance. As it flees the void, the government also fails to fulfil its primary responsibility, i.e. to see and address its citizens' urgent needs.

Accordingly, the dull use of silence in the posters supporting the reform and its extensive creative use in the posters opposing the reform is the outcome of the confirmed effect of the plenum versus the void political standpoints on motivation (passion) and creativity. Personality theories, such as psychoanalysis, explain motivation and creativity as triggered by void (e.g., Freud 1908: 156). Kasof et al. (2007: 109) designate valuing conformity, tradition, custom-convention and obedience as antagonistic to creativity. This portrayal accords the association between the "plenum stance", conformity and passivity opposing creativity and so resulting, among other plenum symptoms, in highly verbose posters and, on the other hand, the association between acknowledging void and motivation (fight) employing creativity (such as verbal silence).

5.0. Conclusions

The semiotic qualitative analysis surfaced the enigmatic traits of silence: portraying silencing alongside silence as an internal, soothing effect, and silence introducing voids that activate the addressee. While silence can conceal, due to its iconicity, verbal silence is a semiotic strategy whereby, when absence is the focus of the message left out, (silent signantia may be the only discursive option. Silencing reoccurred as a theme concerning political discourse, particularly the matter of voice and vote. The need to use signantia parsimoniously in posters transformed into a semiotic strategy in which leaving out an expected signans served iconically to communicate absence, conatively activate the observers or express consent, convey the metalinguistic shortage of words, legally circumvent possible charges, create a hiatus that provides soothing qualities, enhancing in-group and out-group empathy and tolerance.

The use of silence differed in the posters of the supporters and the opponents. This is explained in terms of *horror vacui* and motivation.

In this examination of silence, particularly verbal silence as primarily a linguistic semiotic phenomenon, each poster was analysed separately. Following the application of the qualitative thematic method to identify the semiotic roles of the silences resulted in abstraction and generalisation, elevated beyond the individual posters. Moreover, because they are literally material texts, the verbal posters examined here belong in both the audio and the visual channel, and thus additional levels apply. The individual posters and the posters on the scene, as media, do not appear nor function in isolation. These posters (as texts and as images) share the demonstrations' spaces with physical objects (such as semiotically significant or insignificant buildings, bridges, topography and traffic; see Greimas 1986) and auditory sources (such as speeches, performances, chats and artifacts) permanently

placed in the scene, or put there for the demonstration, as well as the turnover of people occupying the demonstration's grounds. Together they all play an active, dynamic role in the construction of the demonstration's linguistic landscape and the production of the political discourse carried out in the particular demonstration and particular space, in its transmission in the media, and so they all take part and contribute to the political discourse in the macro-national arena.

This semiotic whole is obtained by a dynamic interaction between its varying discrete signantia, such as the individual poster. The semiotic continuum, comprising the political discourse, encompasses significant spaces. As illustrated in the analysis, a poster's [9a] verbal silence as semiotic-symbolic space may interact strongly with the space in which it is situated, thus semiotically merging the linguistic with the spatial. Intervals (spatial, temporal or symbolic) play a crucial psycho-semiotic role in configuring figure-ground relations: eliminating spaces altogether hampers the ability to differentiate (set borders), which is a prerequisite enabling interaction and integration (see 3.2.6). Though latent, while intervals between entities (see on *horror vacui* §4.0) manifest their discreteness, such spaces may also bridge physical distances (such as the distance between the posters, the demonstrations' central podium, a significant building) or points of view (literal and figurative, such as spatial angle; ideological differences, semiotic levels such as linguistic or spatial), and they may also produce rhythm and continuity, generating a linguistic landscape as a semiotic universe. This is why, as illustrated (3.2), introducing material (vocal lapses, or optical blanks) spaces or tokens thereof, such as the signantia of verbal silence, makes room (antonym of "no space"), sets space as latitude: an opening as potentiality.

Hopefully the research method and findings shall lead the way for linguistic landscape studies that further investigate the roles of silence in posters, in other media and other societies engaging in political discourses.

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