

# *Listening to the Universe*

## *Escuchando al universo*

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### ABSTRACT

The present article focuses on listening conceptualized as an active process of perception, with no fixed boundaries, directly connected to thought, and highlighting the ethical underpinnings of communication. Overall, listening is discussed as the primary and authentic characteristic of being with a double movement – towards the Other and towards oneself. A close link between obedience and listening is emphasized, which is demonstrated by employing the Russian equivalent of the verb ‘to obey’ and the peculiarities of its cases. The dynamic nature of listening is also discussed in terms of metaphor (transfer based on similarity) and metonymy (transfer based on contiguity). It is argued that listening reveals the liminal and sacred nature of communication.

### KEY WORDS

LISTENING, OBEDIENCE, ALTERITY, GRAMMAR, METAPHOR,  
METONYMY, COMMUNICATION.

### RESUMEN

El presente artículo se centra en la escucha conceptualizada como un proceso activo de percepción, sin límites fijos, directamente conectado con el pensamiento, y destacando los fundamentos éticos de la comunicación. En general, se discute la escucha como la característica primaria y auténtica del ser con un doble movimiento: hacia el Otro y hacia uno mismo. Se enfatiza un vínculo estrecho entre la obediencia y la escucha, lo que se demuestra empleando el equivalente ruso del verbo “obedecer” y las peculiaridades de sus casos. La naturaleza dinámica de la escucha también se analiza en términos de metáfora (transferencia basada en la similitud) y la metonimia (transferencia basada en la contigüidad). Se argumenta que escuchar revela la naturaleza liminal y sagrada de la comunicación.

### PALABRAS CLAVE

ESCUCHA, OBEDIENCIA, ALTERIDAD, GRAMÁTICA, METÁFORA,  
METONIMIA, COMUNICACIÓN.

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## I. MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

IT IS COMMON TO CONCEPTUALIZE visual perception as the main way of our relationship to the world. Especially since the Modern Age, our communication has relied mostly on the visual medium, which is understandable because

“the visual communicative act depends on the stability of the social framework” and “a common cultural background or a framework of shared knowledge”<sup>1</sup>.

However, as noted by Richard Rorty, although the West has been obsessed with the visual, “there should be other concepts of our relationship with things”<sup>2</sup>. In this regard, listening can be seen not only as a contrast to visual perception, but also interpreted as a return to the origins of being. These ideas have found their most consistent expression in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger, for whom listening is not one’s secondary ability, but one’s very essence<sup>3</sup>.

While of the four traditionally identified forms of communication – speaking, reading, writing, and listening – the latter has received less academic attention than the other three, it is still an exaggeration to say that “listening has been neglected”<sup>4</sup>. It was already seen by Aristotle as a sensual medium of pure movement and considered critical for ideal democracy as a matter of immediacy when everybody can hear everybody else’s voice. Today, listening is receiving a more comprehensive conceptualization<sup>5</sup>. It is in a philosophical light that listening can be understood more fully. Let us briefly discuss some of its main characteristics.

First, although listening is an active process – “we hear, not the ear”<sup>6</sup> – it is still more natural and immediate and so less active than the other forms

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1 M. Hartwig, “Style”. In M. K. Hartwig (Ed.) on *A Companion to Ancient Egyptian Art*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015, p. 51.

2 R. Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature*, Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979, p. 120.

3 M. Heidegger, *Being and Time: A translation of Sein und Zeit* (D. J Schmidt, Ed., J. Stambaugh, Trans.). New York: SUNY Press, 1966.

4 K. Ratcliffe, “Rhetorical Listening: A Trope for Interpretive Invention and a ‘Code of Cross-Cultural Conduct’”. *College Composition and Communication*, 1999, issue 51, no. 2, p. 196.

5 D. Worthington and G. Bodie (Eds.). *The Handbook of Listening*. Hoboken, NJ.: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2020.

6 Heidegger 1996, p. 47.

of communication: all one needs to do to listen is just to be still. When we listen, we do not have to move – we just are. There is not much one can actively do with/against listening, short of closing one's ears. Also, it is the earliest form of communication. In-utero, the developing embryo and fetus cannot read, write, or speak, but can perceive sound vibrations; the hearing thresholds in fetal development have been experimentally identified<sup>7</sup>. The fetus itself is an auditory organ and even looks like an ear on a sonogram. This way, one's first contact with the world is established, and there is nothing one can do to exercise control over it. By the same token, the early humans were connected to the place by listening to their environment where they found meanings and enacted them. In a way, the place had power over people, which they did not try to challenge or predict; rather, they found it nurturing and mysterious, letting it be.

Second, listening has no fixed boundaries and directionality: it

“favors sound from any direction. We hear equally well from right or left, front or back, above or below. ... There is nothing in auditory space corresponding to the vanishing point in visual perspective”<sup>8</sup>.

Through the visual medium, objects appear against a spatial horizon; while the eye pinpoints objects in physical space against a certain background, the ear is open to the entire world and it does not matter from what (back)ground the sound comes. In other words, the perspectival world is primarily visual, whereas acoustic space is aperspectival. When we speak about ‘putting time into perspective’, ‘perspective’ is used in the figurative sense of a ‘mental outlook over time’, not in the meaning related to the realm of optics. Thus, when it comes to the acoustic world, “its resonant and interpenetrating processes are simultaneously related with centers everywhere and boundaries nowhere”<sup>9</sup>. It can also be mentioned that sound is the most important medium of communication for tribal

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7 P. Fletcher and C. O'Toole. *Language Development and Language Impairment: A Problem-Based Introduction*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2016.

8 E. Carpenter, and M. McLuhan (Eds.). *Explorations in Communication: An anthology*. Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1960, pp. 67–68.

9 M. McLuhan, “Visual and Acoustic Space”. In *Audio Culture: Readings in Modern Music*. C. Cox & D. Warner (Eds.). *New York and London: Continuum*, 2004, p. 71.

cultures that exist in ‘acoustic space’, which McLuhan calls “the ‘mind’s ear’ or acoustic imagination”<sup>10</sup>.

Third, listening is directly connected to thought because our experiences of the world make their way through our perceiving body to the mind as phenomena, hence the importance of phenomenology of listening<sup>11</sup>. The relationship between listening and thought is manifested in language; for instance, unlike the other forms of communication, one can say ‘I hear you’ meaning ‘I understand you’, but not – in that sense – ‘\*I speak you’, ‘\*I read you’, or ‘\*I write you’. Fourth, listening highlights the ethical underpinnings of communication. Listening is conceptualized as “an encounter with radical alterity”<sup>12</sup>, cf. the ideas of Emmanuel Levinas, for whom to communicate is to recognize the Other, to give and be accountable to the Other.

And fifth, it is through listening that the sacred nature of communication is revealed. Sacredness is usually identified with special spaces or places, such as burial sites, shrines, and temples. However, such spaces or places are consecrated through communicative practices in the form of rituals that are carried out time and time again. In this respect, “the voice is ultimately linked with the dimension of the sacred and ritual in intricately structured social situations where using the voice makes it possible to perform a certain act”<sup>13</sup>. The sacred can also be viewed as a momentary connection created not through speaking but listening – in the form of silence. The experience is sacred because it appears natural, and “in any given cultural community, the sacred is whatever it treated as unquestionable, “beyond interdiction”<sup>14</sup>. In this sense, silence is indeed golden.

## II. ‘NATURA NON NISI PARENDO VINCITUR’

As noted earlier, listening is one of the main concepts in the philosophy of Martin Heidegger who viewed it as

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10 Ibid.

11 L. Lipari, “Phenomenological Approaches”. In *The Handbook of Listening*. D. Worthington and G. Bodie (Eds). Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2020.

12 L. Lipari, “Listening, Thinking, Being”. *Communication Theory*, 2010, issue 20, p. 350.

13 D. Mladen, *A Voice and Nothing More*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2006, p. 107.

14 E. Rothenbuhler, *Ritual Communication: From Everyday Conversation to Mediated Ceremony*. Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE., (1998). p. 24.

“the primary and authentic way in which Dasein is open for its own most potentiality-for-Being-as in hearing the voice of the friend whom every Dasein carries with it”<sup>15</sup>.

Heidegger identifies listening with the primary and authentic nature of being because “we can listen in a hearkening way”<sup>16</sup>. This characteristic of listening is captured well by the Russian equivalent of ‘hearken’ – ‘vnimat’, which means ‘pay attention, follow’ (‘vnimanie’ means ‘attention’). Not only is listening a mode of being through which Dasein understands, but also “our hearkening ... is somehow an obedience [Gehorsam]”<sup>17</sup>. If we compare speaking and listening as two forms of communication, then the former is clearly social in nature, while the latter is more solitary: one can simply be, motionless, obediently hearkening to the radical alterity of the world. In listening lies a possibility of a relation to the Other, and so it contains a double movement – towards the Other and towards oneself. A close link between obedience and listening is found in many cultural traditions and reflected in such languages, as Greek, Latin, and Hebrew. What is crucial to recognize here is that it can be conceptualized only in terms of listening to the Other and the Self, at the same time; it is insofar as the subject (the Self) and the object (the Other) are united into one whole that communication is constituted and regulated. The link between obedience and listening, therefore, reveals the most natural underpinnings of communication. In this regard, one can recall Francis Bacon’s famous aphorism – ‘Natura non nisi parendo vincitur’ (Novum Organum, I, 3, 129), translated either as ‘Nature to be commanded must be obeyed’ or ‘Nature is conquered only by obedience’, i.e., by being listened to.

Thus, it is only by listening to the Other that we become ourselves; this is clearly seen in the Russian equivalent of the verb ‘to obey’ – ‘slushat’sya’, which is reflexive and literally means ‘to listen to oneself’. It is generally believed that all reflexive verbs are intransitive. Indeed, ‘-sya’ (‘self’) signifies an action that closes on the subject, as it were, and does not pass on to an object. This, at first glance, applies to the verb ‘slushat’sya’ – ‘to obey’ (‘to listen to oneself’). For instance, in the ‘Historical Grammar of the Russian

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15 Heidegger 1996, p. 206.

16 M. Heidegger, *Heraclitus – The Inception of Occidental Thinking and Logic. Heraclitus’ Doctrine of the Logos*. London and New York.: Bloomsbury Academic, 2018, p. 189.

17 *The Heidegger Reader*, 2009, p. 245.

Language’ by Fedor I. Buslaev we read: “An active verb with a pronoun ‘*sa*’ loses the value of the reflexive voice when it does not already show a direct transition of action to this pronoun. So, for example, in the verb ‘to decide’ on something, this transition is still noticeable: ‘to decide oneself on something’; but the verb ‘to obey someone’ can no longer be divided into ‘to listen to yourself someone’<sup>18</sup>. In a number of works on modern Russian, however, the view on the nature of the verb ‘to obey’ is different. For instance, when it comes to generative verbs, it is noted that “some reflexive verbs are very close to them both in semantics and in governing, e.g.: ‘to seek, to harass, to adhere, to touch, to obey, etc.’”<sup>19</sup>. In some cases, the verb ‘to obey (to listen to yourself)’ is considered active, transitive, and imperfective.

It is noteworthy that of the verbs denoting the four main forms of communication, only ‘listening’ in a reflexive form can be transitive. Thus, unlike ‘to obey (to listen to yourself)’, the meanings of the verbs ‘to say’, ‘to write’ and ‘to read’ do not presuppose a purposeful subjective action, cf., ‘*Ya chitayus’* – \*I am reading self.’ Even if we take such imperfective verbs as ‘to talk’, we will see that they are intransitive, since they only relate to objects, indicated by the preposition ‘to’, cf. ‘to talk to someone’.

The dual nature of the verb ‘to obey (to listen to yourself)’ is also manifested in the peculiarities of its governing. In his book on Russian syntax, Alexander Peshkovsky admitted:

“We find it difficult to place in some kind of category the genitive of the verbs ‘to touch, to hold, to stick’ .... ‘to obey and to listen’ (in the same sense) whom (*to obey the mother*)”<sup>20</sup>.

It is also noted that “some constructions allow for double case forms...”<sup>21</sup>, such as the verb “to obey (to listen to oneself)”, which can be used not only in the genitive, but also in the accusative case, cf. ‘*slushat’sya mamy*’ and ‘*slushat’sya mamu*’ – ‘to obey (to listen to yourself) the mother’, the latter being more preferable.

Thus, the verb ‘to obey (to listen to yourself)’, has a special status: it can be used both as intransitive and transitive and, in the second case,

18 F. I. Buslaev, *Istoricheskaya Grammatika Russkogo Yazyka*, 1875, pp. 114-115.

19 N. Yanko-Trinititskaya, *Vozvratnye Glagoly v Sovremennom Russkom*, 1962, p. 138.

20 A. Peshkovsky, *Russkii Sintaksis v Nauchnom Osvechenii*, 2001, p. 299.

21 D. Rozental’, *Russkii Yazyk*, 1997, § 200.

govern nouns both in the genitive and the accusative case. For such verbs Andrey Zaliznyak proposed a special case – ‘zdatel’nyj’ (‘the waiting’), which sometimes coincides with the accusative, and other times with the genitive. Naturally, such verbs include ‘to wait’ and its derivatives, but also such verbs as ‘to fear’ and ‘to obey (to listen to yourself)’ “gravitate toward this type of governing”<sup>22</sup>. Indeed, ‘to obey (to listen to yourself)’ agrees well with animated nouns in the accusative case, e.g., ‘slushat’sya mamu’ – ‘to obey (to listen to yourself)’ the mother’ and does not agree as well with the inanimate nouns, e.g., ‘slushat’sya prirodu’ – ‘\*to obey (‘to listen to yourself’) the nature’. The verb ‘to obey (to listen to yourself)’ in the genitive case, on the contrary, does not agree well with animate nouns, cf. ‘slushat’sya mamy’ - ‘to obey (to listen to yourself)’ the mother’ and agrees well with inanimate nouns but only in the negative sense, cf. ‘ne slushat’sya sovetu’ – ‘to obey (to listen to yourself)’ advice’.

In regard to the accusative case, the action of listening (obeying) can be conceptualized as follows: with animated nouns, the success of the action that passes on to the object is, as it were, attributed to the subject; if the action is not successful, the object is to blame. With inanimate nouns in the accusative case, ‘to obey (to listen to yourself)’ does not agree. In regard to the genitive case, the action of listening (obeying), on the contrary, does not agree with animate nouns, but easily agrees with inanimate objects in a negative meaning: in other words, not listening to (not obeying) inanimate objects is easy! In regard to the accusative case, the action of listening (obeying), while still that of the subject, has a kind of ‘waiting’ character and, as a result, contains a certain passivity. In regard to the genitive case, it is precisely a peculiar passivity (negation) of the action that has an active character of not listening (not obeying). Thus, the subject appears to be in a win-win situation: when convenient, the subject takes credit for the success of the action, and when inconvenient, the subject simply does not listen to the ‘disagreeable’ objects. In other words, the subject always chooses out of the two cases the one that is preferable, which with animate nouns is “usually accusative, with inanimate usually genitive”<sup>23</sup>. In general, it seems that in the ‘waiting’ case the message is successful if the action turns out to be as expected, and then we can talk about a natural contact

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22 A. Zaliznyak, *Grammatichekii Slovar’ Russkogo Yazyka*, 2013, p. 49.

23 Ibid.

between the subject and the object: not surprisingly, this happens between us and the people we listen to ourselves (obey). In other cases, there is a lack of contact, i.e., a lack of agreement with inanimate nouns, cf. 'slushat'sya prirodu' – '\*to obey (to listen to yourself) nature', or there is, so to speak, a 'negative' contact, i.e., an action of not listening (not obeying), e.g. 'ne slushat'sya soveta' – 'not obeying (not listening to yourself) advice', 'ne slushat'sya Zemli' – 'not obeying (not listening to yourself) the Earth'.

If we consider the verb 'to obey (to listen to yourself)' in the 'waiting' case, we cannot fail to notice that the gap between the subject and the object cannot be completely overcome: an action of the subject always has some kind of passivity taking on a 'negative' activity. Perhaps the verb 'to obey (to listen to)' should be interpreted differently, so that an action of the subject is perceived as more active, while at the same time maintaining a certain passivity that acquires a 'positive' activity? Maybe, instead of waiting for everything only from the object, the subject needs to expect more from oneself and not blame the object for unsuccessful contact? Maybe we need to generate (eg. the genitive case) not only the negation of action in the form of not listening (not obeying), but also something more constructive? We could then talk about the verb 'to obey (to listen to yourself)' not in the 'waiting', but 'permissible' case, i.e., in terms of admissibility of someone or something into one's world and, respectively, of oneself into the world of the Other. This way, the gap between the subject and the object can be bridged, their contact appearing natural.

As we can see, it is easier to listen to (to obey, to admit) those whom we consider to be like us, cf. animate nouns that denote primarily people; hence it is natural to listen to (to obey) your mother. The situation is different, however, with those whom we perceive mainly as 'inanimate' objects: that is why the phrases with the verb that is not reflexive, such as 'slushat' prirodu' – 'to obey (to listen to yourself) nature', 'slushat' Zemlyu' – 'to obey (to listen to yourself) the Earth' and 'slushat' Vselennuyu' – 'to obey (to listen to yourself) the Universe', are well-formed and sound natural, unlike the phrases with the intransitive verb – 'slushat'sya prirodu', 'slushat'sya Zemlyu' and 'slushat'sya Vselennuyu'. Meanwhile, it can be argued that the more natural such phrases are perceived (admitted), the more successful communication with the Other becomes. It should also be noted that it is easier to listen to (to obey, to admit) everything at once,

rather than an individual object; thus, the phrase “slushat’sya prirodu’ ‘to obey (to listen to yourself) nature’ seems to be more well-formed than ‘slushat’sya travinku’ – ‘to obey (to listen to yourself, to admit) a blade of grass’. The ideal of communication, though, can be seen as complete transitivity between us and the Universe, when ‘\*listening to yourself (obeying) the Universe’ is admitted as naturally as ‘listening to yourself (obeying) your mother’, eg. the concept of reversibility in the philosophy of Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Maybe, if we learn how to obey (to listen to ourselves) the Universe, it will stop running away from us?

In a perfect world, every message would be successful if listening to (obeying) yourself equaled listening to (obeying) everyone and everything; then, the ‘permissible’ case would replace the accusative case since there would be no need to accuse anyone or anything for a communication failure. Moreover, the ‘permissible’ case could change its name to the ‘vegetative’ case because all actions would contribute to the growth of being itself. People are not perfect, though, and so the accusative case will always exist along with the genitive. It can be hoped that the genitive case in its ‘permissible’ rather than ‘waiting’ sense be applied to those negative actions that are unnatural, cf. ‘ne slushat’sya zavisti’ - ‘not to obey (not to listen to yourself) envy’, or ‘ne slushat’sya voiny’ – not to obey (not to listen to yourself) war’. That way, an action that has a negative expression will have a positive orientation, similar to such phrases, as ‘slushat’sya dobrotu’ – ‘to obey (to listen to yourself) kindness’, or ‘slushat’sya mir’ – ‘to obey (to listen to yourself) peace’.

### III. THE SKY IS NOT THE LIMIT

Due to its elusive nature, listening does not lend itself easily to sustained conceptualizing; yet this is exactly why it “is a philosophical challenge that invites communication theorists to rethink communication through the lens of listening”<sup>24</sup>. Indeed, by analyzing listening it is possible to shed new light on communication and understand it more deeply.

As noted earlier, of the verbs of the main five senses in their reflexive form, only ‘to listen’ combines the subjectivity of action with its object as an immediate (natural) complement by everyone/everything. Only the phrase ‘Ya slushayus’ – ‘I obey’ (‘listen to myself’) presupposes that one

<sup>24</sup> L. Lipari, *Listening, Thinking, Being*, 2010, p. 348.

cannot touch an object without passing one's action on to it, i.e., essentially transferring oneself; 'to obey ('to listen to yourself')' means being both oneself and everyone/everything. Communication, therefore, presupposes transitivity, a spatial and temporal openness, a certain 'porosity' – the term used by Walter Benjamin in relation to the city<sup>25</sup>. Like Benjamin's *flâneur* wandering around a city, one goes through life, now touching objects, and now transferring oneself onto objects, listening to (obeying) them and, as it were, becoming part of them. This way, we constantly try to fill this porosity by closing a gap between us and the world. However, there is no pure transitivity or pure intransitivity: there is only our desire 'to go the distance' (eg. transitivity), and there is always something that we can only indirectly touch (eg. intransitivity).

Communication, then, is a passage (eg. 'trans-'), always contact and – at the same time – the inability to completely close a gap between the subject and the object. Communication is a contingent process, since it presupposes contact: in simple terms, something always touches us. In this regard, touch and taste as 'tactile' senses are the most contingent. However, they also constrain communication due to their being too close to the object; as a result, more distant senses are needed to free up communication.

In general, communication involves metaphor and metonymy as two kinds of transfer or passage. The nature of metonymy is more immediate, since it is based on contiguity, which is why the creation and understanding of metonymy require less effort. Hence, it is easy to take out (and also restore, if needed) 'unnecessary' words in metonymic expressions, eg. 'I like ('to read', 'works by' 'poems by,' etc.) Pushkin.' The nature of metaphor is more indirect, as transfer is based on similarity, which is why more effort is required both for their creation and understanding. Filling the gap with the right words is much more difficult, cf. the lines from Alexander Pushkin's famous poem: 'Anchar, kak .... / Stoit odin vo vsei Vselennoi' ('The Upas tree, like ... / Stands alone in the entire universe'. Critics still argue about the meaning of this metaphor: 'kak groznyi chasovoi' ('like a fearsome guard'). Indeed, why not, for instance, 'kak rokovoii skelet' ('like a fateful skeleton')? One way or another, the meaning of a metaphor requires an active search for the best interpretation out of many. Similarity

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25 W. Benjamins, and A. Lacis. "Naples", *Reflections: Essays, Aphorisms, Autobiographical Writings*, 1978, pp. 166-167.

is more difficult to establish because it does not really exist in its natural form: similarity, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder (and, of course, not only in the eyes, but in the organs of all other senses). For that reason, a metaphor cannot be ‘correct’; it can only be more or less acceptable, i.e., perceived as more or less natural.

Transfer is required to fill in the gap, which is always present in communication. With the help of a metaphor, this gap is concealed based on a similarity between two things (a metaphor is often defined as ‘a hidden comparison’). In other words, a common ground (similarity) between something and something is established, and the better it hides, the more natural the metaphor, cf. ‘The calm lake was a mirror’. At the same time, this point of similarity can always be restored (‘opened up’) by using the subordinate conjunction ‘like’, which shows the subordination of one domain (‘lake’) to the other (‘mirror’). In ideal communication, these two domains would be completely reversible, indicated by the disappearance of the conjunction ‘like’. Everything would be equal to everything else, for example, it would be equally natural to say: ‘The lake was a mirror’ and ‘The mirror was a lake’. Metonymy tries to fill in the gap in a different way – on the basis of contiguity, i.e., the state of bordering or being in direct contact with something.

Thus, we can listen to (obey) someone or something through metaphor (transfer based on similarity) and metonymy (transfer based on contiguity). Elena Paducheva, a well-known Russian linguist, elaborates on their key differences by noting that a metaphor involves a categorical shift, e.g., ‘The valley is sleeping’, while a metonymy suggests a shift in the focus of attention, e.g., ‘The *hissing* of the *foaming glasses*’ (Alexander Pushkin). She also notes that similarity as a basis of metaphor is an ideality, while contiguity as a basis of metonymy is a matter of reality<sup>26</sup>. In this light, it can be said that metonymy is more down to earth and mundane, while metaphor is more elevated and unusual; it is no coincidence that Roman Jakobson noted the predominance of metonymy in prose and metaphor in poetry<sup>27</sup>.

Communication thus is a passage between the transitive and the intransitive. Every communicative act is a ‘stop’ along this path that can

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26 E. Paducheva, *Semanticheskie Issledovaniya*, 2010, p. 234.

27 R. Jakobson, *Marginal Notes on the Prose of the Poet Pasternak*, 1935.

be conceptualized as contact setting a limit; the most distant, difficult and important limit is that of ‘obeying (‘listening to yourself’)’. Earlier, we quoted Alexander Peshkovsky who was not sure where to place the genitive of the verb ‘to obey (‘to listen to yourself’), wondering if one could speak here of ‘the genitive of edge, or border’<sup>28</sup>. Here, we deal with liminal, threshold zones. As part of one’s lived experience, they are barely perceptible and can be known only by its effect; most naturally, it appears to the stream of one’s consciousness through listening (obeying). It is at the edge of our consciousness that we listen to being, including its silence, quiet, muteness. For that reason, it is crucial that we not only speak, but also listen; one such liminal situation is the SETI project (Search for Extraterrestrial Intelligence), trying to hear signals from extraterrestrial civilizations. In the framework of this project, the program ‘Breakthrough Listen’ is set to listen to the cosmos, instead of sending messages, i.e., speaking. Many scientists believe that our own messages can cause an unpredictable reaction from possible extraterrestrial civilizations, and so listening is a wiser approach. This was understood well by Ludwig Wittgenstein, eg. the seventh proposition of his *Tractatus*: ‘That whereof we cannot speak, thereof we must remain silent’. Maybe the fate of the humankind depends on how attentively we can listen to (obey) the Universe?

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<sup>28</sup> Peshkovsky 1962, Ibid.

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- *Communication. A House Seen from Everywhere*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2022.

- (With Galina V. Sinekopova) *Communication Theory through the Ages*. New York: Routledge, 2019.

- *A Communication Universe: Manifestations of Meaning, Stagings of Significance*. Lanham, MA: Lexington Books, 2010 (awarded with the NCA Philosophy of Communication Division 2012 Best Book Award).

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