SPEECH MANIPULATION IN A MULTI-PARTY INTERACTIVE FIELD

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This paper attempts to demonstrate the role of side participants and bystanders in co-constructing the multi-party and multi-modal interactive field of speech manipulation, where the corresponding senses emerge in the interactive effort of all participants. Types of participation frameworks are considered; ways of participants’ building on the common ground and the resources of the English language which are engaged in this process are brought to light (the anaphoric reference to some previously specified objects, code words, descriptive phrases, etc.).

Key words: linguistic resources of speech manipulation, multi-party interactive field, participation framework (speaker, addressee, side-participant, bystander).

When talking, people, as a rule, are rarely indifferent to the presence of third parties. Moreover, the type of activity that is going on at a particular moment, or the interaction frame [17, p. 8] of the situation, is quite often made explicit by the response of the audience (Cf. reaction shots during the performance of an actor, backstage laughter in sitcoms, etc.). Revealing linguistic mechanisms which are at work in a communicative encounter of multiple participants is considered to be one of the topical issues of studying language as a social process. Within the scope of this article the term ‘participant’ refers to the parties within the evolving structure of talk [17, p. 224] (Cf. more general sociological notions of membership in social groups or ritual activities).

Research into the problem goes back to the appearance of the seminal works of M. M. Bakhtin containing the core of his theory of speech communication, or using his own term, “metalinguistics” [1; 2; 3; 4]. Bakhtin holds that language is thoroughly lodged within human dialogue: it is given to us first and foremost as a social event of speech interaction enacted with the help of utterances [2, c. 113], and not as an abstract system of linguistic signs or as isolated monologic utterances. Hence, communication calls for active engagement of both the speaker and his interlocutor.
Then, Bakhtin emphasizes that the simplified graphic-schematic view of communication as the speech interaction of two communicative partners of unequal status – the speaker who actively produces speech and the hearer who passively receives it – is “a scientific fiction” which gives a completely distorted idea of the complex and multifaceted process of speech communication [5, c. 276] (see also [8]). Contrary to the views which were prevalent in the first half of the XXth century, he claims that the category of the speaker is not a unified whole: in a strip of talk produced by a single speaker one can distinguish the voices of several social actors. Thus, in reported speech (the talk into which the speaker incorporates the talk of others) the category of the speaker is dispersed among a few structurally different layers which correspond to: (1) the voice of the speaker pronouncing the utterance, (2) the voice of the one responsible for the talk being quoted in the utterance, (3) the voice of the one taking part in the dialogic scene described by the person whose words are quoted, etc.

However, Bakhtin confines his analysis of the interplay of multiple voices (or polyphony) to reported speech only. Thus sequences of talk by different participants (the most obvious manifestation of dialogism) turn out to be beyond the focus of his attention.

Bakhtin’s insights have served as a point of departure for a large body of research by subsequent scholars, among whom E. Goffman certainly stands out. Developing Bakhtin’s assumption of the need to consider utterances in a ‘dialogic’ system of coordinates, Goffman subjects to analysis forms of talk sustained within structured social encounters [17]. Taking on Bakhtin’s deconstruction of the category of the speaker, he demonstrates that the category of the hearer is ‘laminated’, too. In order to do that, he introduces an analytic concept of participation which focuses on the interactive work that hearers as well as speakers engage in [17, p. 224]. Goffman defines Participation Status as the relation between a participant and his utterance as viewed from the point of reference of the larger social gathering. The combined Participation Status of all participants in a gathering at a particular moment constitutes a Participation Framework [ibid, p. 137]. According to the participation status of the hearers (in his other works they are also referred to as “listeners,” “recipients”, or “participants”), Goffman draws a distinction between ratified / official and unratified / non-official hearers (also called side-participants and bystanders respectively). Within the group of side-participants, he distinguishes the “addressed recipient” (or the addressee, the one to whom the speaker expects to turn over his role) and the “unaddressed recipients” (who are the “official hearers” taking part in the speech event) [ibid., p. 133]. In their turn, bystanders are subdivided into eavesdroppers and overhearsers according to their intent and degree of interest, i.e. depending on whether they follow the talk deliberately or inadvertently [ibid., p. 132].
The ensuing linguistic analysis of participation has elaborated the classifications of participants [6; 7; 9; 10; 13; 15; 21; 22]. In particular, G. G. Pocheptsov [9; 10] contributes to the linguistic knowledge in this area by drawing on the Speech Act theory. He brings to light and systematizes constraints imposed on the course of communication by the knowledge of the speaker about the presence of peripheral participants (side-participants and bystanders). These constraints, the scholar holds, concern both the form (linguistic and paralinguistic) and the content of the respective speech acts, as well as the sociocultural situation of talk (etiquette, politeness, etc.). Formally remaining within the framework of the Speech Act theory in its traditional reading, Professor Pocheptsov actually makes a step towards the interactional Speech Act theory, according to which the sense of the utterance is constructed in the joint effort of all the participants of the communicative encounter which is situated in a broad sociocultural context. In particular, he maintains that, as a rule, the number of participants in a communicative encounter is not reduced to the main “anthropocomponents” of the speech act (the speaker and the hearer). He supports this statement by indicating that the situation with just two participants is usually marked verbally (e.g. *Let’s go out and talk; to talk in private, confidentially, têt-a-têt*) [9, c. 456]. Such linguistic marking suggests that a speech situation with only two participants (e.g. the situation of confession or an intimate talk of lovers, etc.) deviates from the communicative standard [ibid.].

It stands to reason to assume that in communicative encounters involving more than two participants, utterances are usually intended to be understood not only by the addressee, but by other hearers as well. Accordingly, H. H. Clark and Th. B. Carlson introduce a change into the traditional Speech Act theory by suggesting that in each utterance the speaker simultaneously performs at least two illocutionary acts. One is of the traditional kind, such as an assertion, promise, or apology; it is directed at the addressee. The other, called by the authors ‘an informative’, is directed at all the participants in the conversation [12, p. 332 et ff.]. However, the scholars still consider building utterances to be the job of the speaker, hence, according to their approach, his status remains prevalent among other participants’ ones. Consequently, participants other than the speaker “are formulated as points on an analytical grid, rather than actors with a rich cognitive life of their own” [18, p. 224].

Yet there is no denying the fact that talk is dynamic, and its structure is subject to permanent change since all the participants are displaying to one another not only what they are doing, but also how they expect others to align themselves towards the activity of the moment. Participants take turns talking, systematically modifying their talk as it is emerging [ibid.]. Coming to terms with this analytically, requires departing from the code and inferential models of communication in favor of the interactional one. Building upon the interactional model of
communication, Ch. Goodwin [18; 19] expands Bakhtin’s and Goffman’s frameworks in at least two ways. Firstly, he claims that the actions constructed within a verbal utterance should incorporate other semiotic modalities as well, such as visible, embodied displays. Secondly, he considers participation to be central to the organization of the multi-party interactive field. In other words, Goodwin holds that communication is “a multi-party, interactively sustained, embodied field within which utterances are collaboratively shaped as meaningful, locally relevant action” [19, p. 38].

It should be noted, however, that approaching multi-party communication interactively, Goodwin concentrates his attention on cooperative communicative encounters in which the efforts of the participants are aligned and directed towards a common goal. Using Goodwin’s framework as a bedrock, I am going to consider situations devoid of such harmony, namely, those of psychological manipulation accomplished by means of speech, or speech manipulation which is defined as a type of social influence that aims to change the perception or behavior of others through underhanded or deceptive tactics. Situations of speech manipulation are overtly cooperative yet uncooperative in their essence.

To date, linguistic characteristics of manipulative situations are well-studied (for the latest analytical review see [11]). However, situations of speech manipulation involving third parties have not received sufficient attention so far. The present paper purports to fill in this gap by considering the situations in which much of the manipulative effect is conditioned by the “living backdrop” [20, p. 241] of peripheral participants (side-participants or overhearers). I am going to mine manipulative utterances for the traces of arrangements of structurally different kinds of hearers. The empirical data are taken from non-real-life conversational situations in literary fiction.

In the paper, the situations of manipulation involving third parties (side-participants or bystanders) are characterized according to the following features: the effect of manipulation (beneficial or detrimental); the tactic employed (obliqueness or concealment); the channel of communication (face-to-face or mediated).

The effect of manipulation involving third parties should not necessarily be detrimental, as it is stereotypically believed; a characteristic exception here is the situation of moralizing, which is illustrated by the textual fragment below. The main participants of the conversational encounter described in it are Nick (Jessie’s former boyfriend) and Betty (Jessie’s friend); they are discussing Jessie, who is present at the scene, in the third person, as if she were not there:

“Jessie stumbled across a dead body a few days ago,” Nick said, “and for some reason that’s impossible for me to understand, she seems to feel it's her responsibility to find the murderer.” “Yes, yes, I know all about that.” Betty waved her hand in the air. “And I told her
from the start that I thought she could concentrate on more productive things.” “Why are you suddenly talking about me in the third person?” I interjected [23, p. 127].

The main participants both express their negative evaluation of Jessie’s behavior which they consider unreasonable (for some reason that’s impossible for me to understand; she could concentrate on more productive things). Being the true addressee of this communicative exchange, Jessie resents the talk over her head (Jessie, she, her), recognizing its exhortative force. Yet in such a way, even though Nick and Betty violate the etiquette norms (speaking about somebody in the third person in his / her presence is not considered polite in western cultures), they still manage to save the ‘negative face’ of Jessie: being an adult and a highly independent person, she would not take direct advice or imperatives.

The tactics employed in the situation of manipulation which has a detrimental effect (at least on some parties) may be those of obliqueness with partial concealment or of total concealment. The extract below presents the situation of the first subtype, i. e. the one where a lie goes down with the addressees (sham receivers) but does not fail to give relevant information to the eavesdropper (the true receiver). The main participants of the conversational scene are Friar Lorenzo, who is escorting a coffin with a young girl, Juliet by name, who is actually not dead but escaping from persecutors in such a way, and Romeo, who has delivered Friar Lorenzo from persecutors and helped him to transport the coffin to a safe place – Maestro Ambrogio’s studio, where the talk is unfolding:

“Come now, monk,” said Romeo, “I saved your life tonight. Have I not by now earned your confidence?” [...] Friar Lorenzo shook his head heavily. “Very well, then! I shall open the coffin. But allow me first to explain” – for a moment, his eyes darted to and fro in search of inspiration, then he nodded and said – “you are right, there is no monk in this coffin. But there is someone just as holy. She is the only daughter of my generous patron, and” – he cleared his throat to speak more forcefully – “she died, very tragically, two days ago. He sent me here with her body, to beg you, Maestro, to capture her features in a painting before they are lost forever.”

“Two days?” Maestro Ambrogio was appalled, all business now. “She has been dead two days? My dear friend –” Without waiting for the monk’s approval, he opened the lid of the coffin to assess the damage. But fortunately, the girl inside had not yet been ravished by death. “It seems,” he said, happily surprised, “we still have time. Even so, I must begin right away. Did your patron specify a motif? Usually I do a standard Virgin Mary from the waist up, and in this case I will throw in Babe Jesus for free, since you have come all this way” [25, p. 54].
The statuses of peripheral participants here are less straightforward than in the first fragment. At the beginning of the conversational encounter Maestro Ambrogio is a side-participant / a ratified hearer; as the talk unfolds, he becomes the speaker. Taking on this participation status, he demonstrates that he has fallen victim to the manipulative talk of Friar Lorenzo. In her turn, Juliet is an eavesdropper of a specific kind: to Romeo and Maestro Ambrogio she is dead, and thus can hardly be called a participant in the full sense (an eavesdropper would obviously have a metaphorical ring here); respective Friar Lorenzo, she is the true addressee, while Romeo and Maestro Ambrogio are sham receivers.

Lying as an ultimate case of speech manipulation comes in the first part of the scene, while the second part just serves to demonstrate that it has been successful. Technically, the first part of the Friar Lorenzo’s speech provides true information (you are right, there is no monk in this coffin. But there is someone just as holy. She is the only daughter of my generous patron), but what follows (she died, very tragically, two days ago. He sent me here with her body, to beg you, Maestro, to capture her features in a painting before they are lost forever) certainly does reflect the true state of things. The monk decides to lie since this is his last resort in order to perform his mission. The description of his nonverbal behavior (for a moment, his eyes darted to and fro in search of inspiration, then he nodded and said) serves to indicate that the decision does not come easy to him, that he is at a loss for an idea. Paralinguistic characteristics of his speech (he cleared his throat to speak more forcefully) show, firstly, how he finally manages to get hold of himself, secondly, how he raises his voice in order to give a warning to Juliet, so that she is not taken aback when the coffin is opened.

Thus, the situation of speech manipulation here has a specific participation structure: addressees are, on the one hand, true receivers of a series of false assertions, on the other hand, they are sham receivers of the illocutionary act of warning (cf. Clark and Carlson’s theory of two illocutions [12, p. 332 et ff.]). Accordingly, the factual receiver of the true information is an unratiﬁed participant – the eavesdropper.

It should be noted that whenever two participants have a piece of common ground (some knowledge which is not known to other participants), they can build on it spontaneously, exchanging tacit information without any prior arrangement while leaving others unaware, manipulating them. This is the way how things are with Friar Lorenzo and Juliet – both know that she is not dead.

This is also the case with a sham receiver in the next telephone conversation, which illustrates the case of a mediated conversation that takes place between Dennis (Kay’s husband) and the narrator of the story (referred to as “I”):
‘The reason I’m calling, actually, is that my wallet seems to have disappeared and I wondered whether I could possibly left it there.’

‘Hang on, I’ll ask Kay.’ […] ‘It’s OK, we’ve got it,’ Dennis said in my ear. […] ‘When do you want to come and pick it up?’ I got my wallet out of my pocket and held it up in front of my eyes. ‘You’ve got it?’ Kay found it when she was cleaning up’ [24, p. 22–24].

The person telling the story calls Dennis and wonders if he (the narrator) has left his wallet at Dennis’ place. Since the narrator is holding the wallet right in front of his eyes, the immediate intention behind his question is not clear if one takes that the question is addressed to Dennis only. Yet the question is in fact addressed to Kay, and the distant intention of the speaker is to learn whether she has nothing against his visit to her place in her husband’s absence. The relevant information is passed when Kay says that she has found the wallet, which is a lie that is obvious to the narrator and hidden from Dennis. Thus the narrator skillfully creates the common ground for Kay and himself, building on which they can exchange information over the sham receiver’s head.

The next talk, which is also telephone-mediated, has a different participation structure: the victim of manipulation is the ratified participant (unaddressed). The setting of the talk is as follows: Jessie, who is involved in investigating a murder case, is being driven by Nolan, a fake policeman, to some remote place. Upon learning certain things from Nolan, she realizes that he is the murderer she has been looking for and that he is going to kill her as well. Jessie calls a friend of hers, Nick, a private detective familiar with the details of the case she is involved in:

I dialed the familiar number. […]

“Hi, Betty. It’s me, Jessie.”

“This isn’t Betty. It’s Nick.”

“Yes, Betty, I know. It’s good to hear your voice, too. You’re sounding much better.”

“What’s going on, Jess?”

“I just wanted to tell you I found my notebook. Remember I told you I lost it?”

“I’m listening.”

“You’ll never guess where it turned up. In Jimmy Nolan’s car! Remember, the police officer I’ve been seeing? I’m with him right now.”

“Jess, you are telling me that cop is the one who broke into your house?”

“That’s right, Betty. And what you said about him before was completely true.” I chuckled, although it sounded woefully thin in the darkness of Jimmy’s car. “You’re such a good judge of character!”

“My God, Jess. Where are you?”
“Oh, yes, he’s a very interesting guy,” I babbled on. “He collects classic cars. Right now, he’s taking me to the place where he garages them.”

“Damn! Where are the cars, Jess? What’s the garage’s address?”

“It’s an industrial area, near a plumbing supply place –”

Hey, are you gonna be on that phone all night?” It was the first time I’ve ever heard Jimmy sound cross [23, p. 360].

Jessie pretends that she is calling Betty, a friend of hers, who is in hospital, but calls Nick instead and tries to make a ‘double-layer’ conversation. The surface layer is just small talk supposedly aimed at cheering up the sick friend (Hi, Betty. It’s me, Jessie; It’s good to hear your voice, too. You’re sounding much better). The recipient of information at this layer of talk is Nolan, who has no way of knowing the true identity of Jessie’s communication partner, but who attends with suspicion to every word Jessie says. This circumstance puts constraints on the conversation, since Jessie cannot openly say how bad things really are. The second layer of information is addressed to Nick. At this layer the speaker builds on a few pieces of common ground that she has with Nick and which are closed to Nolan: the identity of her communication partner (both know that it is Nick, hence her insistence in calling him ‘Betty’ generates the right kind of inference: Jessie cannot talk openly); reference to a notebook which has disappeared under very suspicious circumstances (hence the inference that the information she wants to pass is related to the case she is involved in); Nick’s opinion of Nolan (negative). The recipient of this layer of information has to be reflexive, cognitively complex, in fact assuming the role of the ‘dispersed speaker’ (“Jess, you are telling me that cop is the one who broke into your house?”) who is distributed across different participants and turns (“That’s right, Betty. And what you said about him before was completely true”). Thus finding a common ground is an impromptu method of concealing information from a side-participant while passing it to the addressee.

Such common ground may be created by some code words, as in the following fragment:

“The package ... you want ... has a name on it ... a make of film ... Jigoro ... Kano” [...]

“Sid asked me to fetch something she is keeping for him. Do you think you could help me find it?” “Sure,” I said. “What is it?” [...] “It’s a packet of negatives. Sid said your sister had several things of his, but the packet I want has a name on it, a make of films. Jigoro Kano.”

This fragment consists of three conversations taking place at different times and locations, and involving different participants. The first one is a fake confession of a person to his torturers who want to know where some film is hidden; the person truthfully says that his friend, Chico, has it; yet he adds untruthfully that there are two words – Jigoro Kano – written on the packet. The second piece of conversation is between the keeper of the film, Chico, and the person who comes to claim it; giving details, the latter pronounces the words ‘Jigoro Kano’ which serve as an alarm trigger for Chico since they are known only to those practicing judo and are not supposed to be known to many; besides, there is an obvious mistake here: there are no such words on the packet he has. The third conversation, which is unfolding between the person who has been subject to tortures and Chico, explicates the course of inference and the outcome of the situation (the criminal is captured by Chico because the latter draws the right kind of inference from the coded ‘alarm signal’ sent to him).

To sum up, the study of speech manipulation in a multi-party interactive field contributes to developing linguistic knowledge in at least two ways. First, it is obvious that such research should be carried out within the multimodal system of coordinates, which brings together the verbal means of transmitting information with the nonverbal (gesture, mimic and the like) and paraverbal (intonation, pausation, etc.) one. Second, all participants of the situation, not just the speaker and the hearer, are to be given attention as they are actively participating in construing the sense of communicative encounters. The participation framework of the situation of manipulation involving third parties is usually unstable: it tends to evolve with the development of talk even within the bounds of a single communicative encounter. An important resource in the situations of speech manipulation involving third parties is concealing relevant information (all of it or a certain part) from the victims of manipulation, which is usually achieved through the speaker’s building on the common ground with some of the participants, which can be the addressee, a side-participant or a bystander. The characteristic verbal resources employed in such cases are words with an anaphoric reference to some previously specified objects, code words, descriptive phrases, etc.

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