

Ethos of Communication: Dirty Tricks and Sneaky Manipulations

performance lecture

In polemics with John Searle and Paul Grice, the author suggested to define speech act types not in terms of conditions of their successful performance (to be fulfilled by the speaker) but in terms of their consequences for the speaker-audience relation. The core of the proposal is to approach speech acts as sets of manifestations, in which the speaker presents herself *vis-à-vis* the audience as having certain intentions and beliefs. Each of these manifestations can become the main motive for performing a speech act, even if the speaker actually does not have the manifested intention or belief. The possibility of these shifts of communicative functions and of the discrepancies between actual and manifested attitudes creates space for communicative tricks of a subtler kind than straightforward lies, insincere promises etc. For example, Napoleon was reported to have said to the Russian negotiator before the battle at Austerlitz: „I am well prepared for the decisive battle“(*p*), manifesting thereby his intention to create in his audience the belief that *p* – while hoping that the audience will interpret this intention as part of the speaker’s attempt to deceive him and hence will conclude that *non-p* is the case. (The trick worked, with well-known consequences; obviously, it can be replicated on higher order levels.) The author will attempt to demonstrate the diversity of possible communicative strategies based on the structure of speech act types. The question will arise, what would the collapse of some area of discourse into a series of such tricks and manipulative moves mean for the communicative functions of language, mutual understanding, coordinated action and the ethos of communication.

Bio:

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