LATERAL STRATEGIES IN COMMUNICATION

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Abstract: It often happens that every day interactions reveal a state of relationa linequality among the participants, which is characterised by a balance of forces, an unfavourable context (for one of them, at least), and a difference in status. The gap between the interlocutors' positions in these situations involves the recourse to means of limiting, or even of neutralizing the interlocutor's freedom of action, although s/he might benefit from a privileged status or circumstances. Wetherefore aim in this paper to reveal two discursive strategies of enunciation, which function as indirect or side strategies, in order to establish a balanced relational verbal exchange.

Key words: *discourse, enunciation, utterance, strategy, argumentation.*

Starting from the idea that, in communication, the message is not limited to linguistic updating (any behaviour is a message in terms of the Palo Alto Group), there is a relationship of equivalence, broadly speaking, between the content and statement on the one hand, and between the relationship and enunciation, on the other hand (D. Bougnoux, 2000: 55-56). The meaning of the communication proposed by the Palo Alto School, is made up of a content component and a relationship component. The message carries both the sequence of sounds, words, and sentences having a certain meaning, which form the content of communication and the indexical elements (serious / joking / bantering tone, mimicry, attitude or posture) likely to complete the literal meaning of phrases, sometimes even to modify it. They are meant to establish the register of message interpretation (whether it is a joke, a threat, an order, a suggestion, etc.) and are relative to the knowledge of the type of relationship, establishing the communication framework. In conclusion, the deciphering of a message is not limited to the meaning of the content.The classification of the message is imperative as elementary condition to proper reception. One may speak of the semantics of the framework that guides perception, the construction of meaning and, ultimately, the creation of our representations. Therefore, the perspective supports the pre-eminence of the relationship component as opposed to the content component in the development of the communication process.

There are situations where elements specific to the enunciation can be detected at the formal level of the statement. They are a set of explicit indices of the enunciation that Benveniste calls *embrayeurs*: space (or place) deixis, timedeixis and person deixis*I / we* and *you* (singular) / *you* (plural). Their role is to certify the carrying out of an act of enunciation, because beyond this act, these linguistic elements have no significance on their own, they do not possess their own reference; they acquire a meaning, are "stuffed" - semantically speaking - only in and through the act of enunciation. It is true that '*I*' means the person who communicates, but the significance varies according to the act of enunciation. We cannot say that'*I*' indicates a certain person, as it happens, for example, with the word *table*, which indicates a certain type of object. '*I*' metamorphoses, taking the shape of the person who commits an act of enunciation,by uttering the word'*I*'. To illustrate these assertions, we will

analyse two communication situations centred on the transmission of messages, which contain deictic elements in their formal aspect. The situations of communication proposed for analysis are fictitious, they are created for the communication workshops to facilitate students'understanding of the deixis issues and how they can be used in the construction of messages to achieve a certain effect (orality of communication).

  ➢ *Situation I*

On a certain day, at a certain time (time *t*), in hall *x*of a university *X* (place*l*), a teacher, as transmitter (E), spoke to one of the students, acting as receiver (R), and sent the following message:

Come here, please!

While uttering these words, the teacher pointed with his hand to the corner of the room situated on his right side.

  ➢ *Situation II*

At another moment (*t¹*),in the city centre square (another place *l¹*), a nursery school teacher (another transmitter, *E¹*),who accompanied several kindergarten children in a mini-tour, addressed one of the children, who has moved away from the group while following the pigeons in the square, (another receiver *R¹*), with the same message:

Come here, please!

While uttering these words, the teacher indicated to the child the place in the square where she stood with the group.

As one may notice, the verbal message is formally identical in both cases. However, we cannot talk about identity either on the part of the transmitter or of the receiver, either from the point of view of the timeor of the place. We see that the word*here* in the first situation means"hall x in the university X" and the same word *here*, in the second situation, means"a square in the centre of the town". Different meanings of the same word, in an identical context, indicatesthe fact that *here*acquires one or another of the evoked meanings only in an act of utterance made by a transmitter. That is, when the word is uttered by a particular transmitter (*E* respectively *E¹*), addressing a receiver (*R*, respectively, *R¹*) in a certain place (*l*for situation I and *l¹* for situation II), at a certain time (*t*, for situation I and *t¹*, for situation II). Although*here* designates generically the *place next to the speaker*, that place can be determined accurately only in and through uttering, i.e. when there is a transmitter whoutters/ executes an act of enunciation, addressed to a receiver at a certain moment, in a certain place, an act during which s/he says *here*. Only then can we establish accurately what *here* means. The uttering of the word exclusively gives it consistency, substance, and semantic visibility. The same thing happens to the receiver in the two communication situations. The verb *Come* contains in its grammatical termination the reference to the receiver (you) against which we establish a different referentiality in the two situations: the student, in situation I and the nursery school child, in situation II. The receiver's individuality is shaped depending on the transmitter who performs the act of enunciation, assuming it at the same time.

Theformal identity of the messages in the two communication situations does not involve their semantic equivalence.It is the framework or the context of the utterance that provides the distinctive attribute of the message in relation to the award of meaning. Alterity in the semantic plan generated by the enunciation has a crucial importance for building appropriate meaning of a message, and deictic elements, that are undeniable signs of the

performance of an utterance, area reliable indicator of the oral, interactive character of communication. In certaincommunicative situations, the use deixisto build up a message, besidesimprinting oral attributes, may also indicate the diminishing of the degree of formality, which leads to positioning the interlocutors at the same level, and therefore, to a proximity relationship, and to equilibrium.

Lending A. Goddard'sexample (2002: 77-86) focused on the comparison between the classical cooking recipe and Delia Smith's recipes that are distinct due tothe insertion of orality elements, we note that with the emergence of the oral aspect of communication,the formal character of the message disappears, giving way to the informal one. It is known that the specific linguistic features of the classical cooking recipe arethe use of impersonal pronouns, passive voice,and didactic register. The latter involves the placement of interlocutors in unequal positions: the transmitter is the owner of information and thus occupies a top position. Ignorance of that information by the receiver sends her/himto an inferior position. Using elements of orality, the message acquires the form of a confession; that is, of sharing "as between friends" which abolishes the didactic register and the formal character of the message.Thus the transmitter initiates a relationship of equality, of familiarity that is establishedamong protagonists. In this sense, we consider that orality can act asa strategy to reduce the distance between the interactants and to balance their relationship.

The distinction betweenstatement and enunciation (utterance) has a number of implications, one of them being at the level of argument.In this regard, the following terms are dissociated: argumentation/ counter-argumentationof the statement –based on the content, on the information of communication - and the argumentation / counter-argumentation of the enunciation (utterance) - based on the framework or the relationship of communication (D. Bougnoux, 2000: 56-60). The two aspects of argumentation are not subject to the same rules as the statementallows the assignation ofeither the *true* or the *false* value, while enunciation (utterance)evades such an assignation, being considered eminently true. According to D. Bougnoux,the message *I declare thatit has snowed this morning*, may be challenged formally, targeting the statement: *No, it has not snowed this morning (no trace of snow can be seen on the ground)*, but it is unassailable at the enunciation level. Given the mark of the enunciation / utterance (declare) by which the transmitter assumes its veracity, andthe conviction that the information contained in the message is true, there is no receiver who could refute the transmitter's belief (her/his faith in what he says), by a message such as*No, you do not declare / you are not confident / you do not think it has snowed this morning*. While the statement is questionable, the situation it describes being possible and easy to confute, the enunciation/utterance is clearly indisputable, and intrinsically true.

A belief, a conviction - generally the transmitter's position towards her/his own statement - is difficult to annihilate. However, there are techniques used in argumentation that, although not involving a change of the interlocutor's attitude and implicitly the adoption of a different behaviour, at least they are likely to determine the occurrence of question marks, of doubt or of a reluctance in expression. There are techniques aimed at the persons and at their ability to set themselves up in sources of enunciation. For example, enunciation can be challenged by messages such as *Are you sure ...?/ Are you convinced that ... / I cannot believe that you say this / Not this thing, not toldby you,*etc. Someone who is convinced s/he has seen a UFO and can be faced with an ironic formula aimed at both the person and implicitly the

enunciation:*Did you wear your glasses when you looked at the sky*?, knowing that the respective person does not wear glasses.

It is important to note that the reality of our communication exchanges frequently offers us such situations, where the message is not disputed by reasoning, but by an*aggression*of the enunciation, an annihilation of its source (tomention only the political field). In the same way that we talk about a defendant's presumption of innocence, there should be a *presumption of validity* for the interlocutors, which is a concept that refers to the interlocutors' manner of mutual identification and that is necessary in a dialogue, to conduct an exchange of communication that involves a divergence of opinions and ideas. (The *valid interlocutor* concept is taken from D. Bougnoux, 2002: 56)

By way of example, we reproduce below a set of messages exchanged in a working group. Please note that the communication situation presented is real, the messages suffering only some minor formal amendments. Here is its description: a chief of staff speaks to some (two) colleagues; he articulates in formal terms, a request for revision and correction of a material to be posted on the organization's website (Message 1). The presented answer is done by one of the two recipients (Message 2).

Message 1: *I'mcalling again with the request to review records and make themuniform from a formal standpoint. [...] They should be posted on the site and since they contain irregularities in terms of form (alignment, layout, spacing, etc.) they cannot be displayed as such. Please share the workloadamong you and make the necessary corrections. You must send them back to me by Tuesday evening so that I may send them further. Thank you,*

Xxx

Message 2: *Please be more specific about what has to been done and how. If you distribute tasks, then do this all the way through, say you take this [...], you take that [...], etc. On the other hand, it is not clear how many people are involved here, [...]. It is easier to send each one what they have to do than to send the whole package and leave us handle the situation. It's simple: if there are 2 people, then you divide the workload equally in 2 parts, if there are 3, divideit in 3 parts, etc.*

yyy

As one can see, the topic of the e-mail sent by the chief of staff is the request to correct possibleformal irregularities, existing in a text. The answer, however, is constructed as a piece of criticism in the manner in which the request is made. Actually, the detailed clues ("be more specific", "... say you take this…" or "It's simple: if there are 2 people, then you divide the workload equally in 2 parts, if there are 3, divide it in 3 parts, etc."), the use of the imperative ("If you distribute tasks, then do this all the way through", "say"),and in general, the formulation of a message to illustrate how the respective request should have been expressed suggest that the sender ofthe first e-mail lacks communication skills, that s/he is not able to conceive an effective message. The interpretation of the communication situation is quite simple. The recipient of the request is evading the task but, because s/he does not want to jeopardize her/his image / position in any way through an explicit refusal, s/he builds the response calling for a strategy: s/he alters the topic of the exchanged messages.In fact, s/he did not contradict the statement saying *I cannot / do not want / am not willing / do not have time ... to do what you're asking me*, but aggressed the enunciation, attacking the source of enunciation, referring to the lack of competence in the distribution and the design of the task.

The focus shiftin the discussion from the task that had to be done to the way in which it was worded reveals the transfer from the statement to the enunciation. Counter-argumentation does not concern the content of the original statement (the request itself), but it builds on denying the communicative competence of the chief of staff as an attack on the source of the enunciation. Therefore, the receiver builds her/his message as a way to attack the transmitter and her/his enunciation and not as an expression of refusal. S/he applied, in fact, a lateral discursive strategy designed toher/his own repositioning, that is, the transfer from the lower position (of the one who is required to perform a task which s/he must fulfil) to a higher position (at least equal to the one of the transmitter). The communication technique known as *breaking down the rider by aiming at the horse* is often used in everyday interactions, being assumed and practiced under the threat of losing any ofone's *faces* (E. Goffman and the Work-Face Theory in J. Moeschler, A. Reboul, 1999), depending on the stakes of the communication and on the interest of the participants. In our opinion, it has rather the configuration of a stratagem (T. Slama-Cazacu, 2000: 39) than a communication strategy, entailing a smaller or larger deviation from the ethics of the act of communication - as one may consider it appropiate.

The operationalcomponentof communication, whose prevalence to the contenthas becomeaxiomatic due to the studiesdone by the School of Palo Alto,is related tothe differentpositioningof theinterlocutors, generating differentinterpersonal relationships. There are a numberof theoriesininterpersonal communication-for example those developed byNewcomb, GoffmanorGrice-that claim to seek andmaintain the balance of arelationship.

In line with this trend, the protagonists of the verbal exchange create messages based on the discursive repositioning strategy, able to cancel the existing relationship of inequality and to achieve a balanced relationship. We believe that the examples presented in this discussion serve to demonstrate the role of indirect communication strategies, reflecting also the ongoing work of negotiating the placement of the participants in interaction.

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