TRAFFIC'S PRETTY HEAVY, HUH?

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In 1952 Gregory Bateson received a grant to
study communication within the framework generated
by Russell's "logical types." (Russell 1910) Bateson
took Russell's concept of paradox and applied it to
human communication in an attempt to understand
the genesis of schizophrenia. It was Bateson's idea
that language encodes many levels of message in
and contextualizing the utterance. (Bateson, Haley
1972) In his article, "The message this is play,"
Bateson outlines a theory of communication in which
one communicative behavior is qualified or "framed"
by a higher "metacommunicative" message, which has
the effect of telling the hearer how to interpret
the behavior. Thus, in its primitive form, a theory
of frames evolved in which content messages could
and must be qualified by 'meta messages' of the sort,
'take this ironically' or 'sarcastically,' or
'literally,' etc. Non verbal communication becomes,
in this theory, a level of message that may be
congruent with the content message or incongruent.
Bateson gives an example where a mother of a poten-
tially schizophrenic child tells her daughter to,
"come and hug mommy, to show mommy you love her,"
then when the daughter hugs the mother, the mother
stiffens, clearly illustrating how levels of message
may dissaffirm one another. In the above example
of mother and daughter we may suppose that the verbal
message, 'your hugging me = love' is paradoxical
from the daughter's perspective, as her mother
seems to be saying one thing, and denying what she is
saying on another, non-verbal level. The child
learns to systematically distort her perception of
metacommunicative signals. (Bateson 1972)

In Bateson's schema, this is the essence of
schizophrenia, a systematic disjunction between levels
of message. Thus schizophrenia is a communicational
pathology.

In Bateson's theory, all communication involves 'relationship-defining behavior' what people say verbally and non-verbally is framed by the existing relationship between them If no such relationship exists, before adequate communication can take place a relationship must first be defined between the participants Relationships are of two basic types in his schema Symmetrical and Complementary. A Complementary relationship is one where participants do not compete for dominance, their behaviors fit one another - one directs, the other is directed In a Symmetrical relationship the participants compete or vie for dominance If one member does something spectacular, the other member tries to do as well or better This is a competitive relationship where members take turns in being "boss" over time In a complementary relationship there is characteristically one boss over time [1] Relationship defining behavior, for example, is the major function of greeting ceremonies [2] Phatic communication, as a whole functions to define relationships rather than content Watzlawick, an associate of Bateson's in his research on schizophrenia, has hypothesized that in 'healthy relationships,' relationship defining behavior recedes in importance and content becomes more important [3]

> relationships are only rarely defined deliberately or with full awareness. In fact, it seems that the more spontaneous and "healthy" a relationship the more the relationship aspect of communication recedes into the background Conversely, "sick" relationships are characterized by a constant struggle about the nature of the relationship with the content aspect of communication becoming less and less important .(Watzlawick et al 1952)

I will suggest that cooperation may be defined as a principle by which both participants agree to a mutual definition of the relationship they are involved in, and to its limits This agreement may not be overtly discussed but may be the result of one, or both participant's not challenging the relationship-defining maneuvers of the other Thus, I use cooperation to mean nonchallenging behavior

This paper is concerned with a class of utterances which are designed to control the hearer's behavior without appearing to do so. The speaker's strategy becomes one of extreme indirectness. It will be hypothesized that much of what is known as 'indirect speech' can be adequately explained in relational terms as the only viable way of directing from the bottom end of a complementary relationship without attempting to redefine the relationship as more symmetrical. (See note 1) First the examples, then the analysis. Functionally the following utterances have a similar effect on some hearer

(1) Traffic's pretty heavy, huh?
(2) The baby woke up three times last night.
(3) Does the kid have a cold again? (mother to daughter)
(4) Did you change the baby's diaper?
(5) Did you get a flat on the way home?

What (1)-(5) have in common is that they all criticize by implication. Witness the following dialogues in terms of the implication of criticism that obtains for the addressee. I have underscored the hearer's reaction to the implication of criticism

(1) A-1   Traffic's pretty heavy, huh? (slight sarcasm)
     B-2   I know. I should've been home sooner. I'm sorry.
     A-3   I wasn't blaming you.

(2) A-4   The baby woke up three times last night.
     B-5   You mean I should've gotten up too. I'm sorry.
     A-6   Oh no! What could you have done? He only wanted to nurse anyway.

(3) A-7   Did you change the baby's diaper?
     B-8   Sure. Why? Do you think I don't pay any attention to him?
     A-9   Why'd you say that? I just wondered if you changed his diaper, that's all.

(4)   A-10   Does the kid have a cold again?   (mother to
             daughter)
      B-11   I know   I should be more careful   I
             shouldn't take him out so much
      A-12   What do you mean, it's hard being a mother.

The hearer in each dialogue answers A by speaking
to the implication of blame or criticism   The speaker
then denies having intended this level of message thus
creating, in the hearer's perception, a paradox,[4] he's
being criticised (by implication) and he's not being
criticised (speaker denies having intended criticism)
Paradox, and not contradiction obtains, for the speaker
is not negating something she said, but rather is
denying an implication resulting from what she said,
and how she said it   The speaker is thus in the
position of being able to imply critism and then deny
having intended to do so since her intentions are not
directly "knowable" by the hearer   The speaker's
strategy becomes one of Paradoxical communication
she must imply something and deny that she is implying
something on the basis of not having said what she
implied   Paradox is possible for the speaker invokes
two communicative levels in her denial   she denies
implying 'x' on the basis of not having asserted 'x '

I suggest that the speaker's use of Paradoxical
communication is motivated by two opposing forces
They are   (1) The need to criticize (or direct the
addressee to change his behavior), and (2) the
inability to direct the addressee to change his
behavior because of being at the lower end of a
complementary relationship   Her use of Paradox is an
attempt to direct without challenging the structure
of the relationship in which their interaction takes
place

The speaker's success in getting B to accept the
fact that he's being criticized (though A is denying
this) depends upon B's cooperation with A's paradoxical
messages   B, then, cooperates with paradoxical com-
munication by not challenging it   Not challenging this
behavior amounts to legitimizing it within the limits
of their relationship

The interactional system represented by A and
B is highly resistant to change. The frame of
complementarity imposes restrictions on both partici-
pants. Let's imagine that B decides he wants A to
interact more symmetrically with him. This would
involve A being more direct, so B decides to answer
A on the literal-content level only, thereby frus-
trating A's attempt to communicate by implication.

(1) A   Traffic's pretty heavy, huh? (slight
          sarcasm)
     B   Yeh, it's a bitch! (or) No.

(2) A   Does the kid have a cold again? (Mother to
          daughter)
     B   Uh. huh. (or) No.

By answering only the literal form of the ques-
tion, B is giving A "negative feedback" about her
attempt to communicate indirectly. B can respond to
the literal form in other ways too as the following
interchange shows

(3) A   The baby woke up three times last night.
          (slight sarcasm)
     B   Why? (or) That's very interesting
           a   b
          (slight sarcasm)

In either of B's responses, a or b, his strategy, as
in (1) and (2) is to not cooperate with the implied
message. In a, B treats A's utterance as purely
informational and 'angelically' asks for more detail.
In b, B replies in kind, sarcastically. B is
communicating to A in b that strategies of the sort
A is employing are not viable ones within the frame-
work of their relationship. B, in both a, and b, is
uncooperative within the framework of indirect
communication

The field of cybernetics suggests that the
behavior of people in a relationship or behavioral
system may be analyzed in terms of a self-correcting
or cybernetic system   Speaking about family members'
interaction Haley says

It follows that people associating together
during long periods of time will not put up
with any and all kinds of behavior from each
other, they will set limits upon one another.
Insofar as family members set limits for one
another, it is possible to describe their
interaction in terms of the self-corrective
processes in the total system   The family
members respond in an error-activated way
when any individual exceeds a certain limit.
This process of mutually responsive behavior
defines the rules of the family system   In
this sense a family is a system which contains
a governing process. However there is not just
a single governor for the system, each member
functions as a governor of the other(s) and
thus the system is maintained   (Haley 1963)

The idea of a 'self-correcting' relational
system as a legitimate way to view linguistic behavior
becomes apparent in the following example

A-1-a Traffic's pretty heavy, huh?
B-2-a I know. I should've...
A-3-a I wasn't blaming you
B-4-a Then why did you ask me at all?
A-5-a Well, I just wanted to know if there was a lot
       of traffic   How could I know? I was home all
       day with the kid (you know).

B-4-a challenges A's right to communicate
paradoxically   But A-5-a answers B's challenge in
a way that at once suggests criticism of B   Thus,
A denies having intended criticism in A-1-a, and
when challenged in B-4-a once again implies criticism
in A-5-a   B can never 'trap' A into admitting that
criticism was intended, for A can eternally justify,
or make relevant her utterance in other ways. A
general principle emerges   A hearer can never prove
that an utterance is irrelevant   The relevance of
an utterance thus, depends upon knowing the intentions
of the speaker, and it is impossible to "know" directly
what some speaker intended in uttering 'x '

A more concrete example of the impossibility
of "knowing" speaker's intentions comes from Charles
Pyle at the University of Michigan.

Someone seems to be 'putting you down.' You ask
him what he's doing, (i e. why he's talking to you
the way he is) and he replies that he's "just playing."
You then have the option of accepting his statement
of his intentions as congruent with his "real" inten-
tions, or you can assume he's lying about his "real"
intentions, and is in fact, not playing. In either
case the hearer cannot prove directly what the
speaker's "real" intentions are in uttering 'x,' for
intentionality lies within the speaker's mind

In conclusion I suggest that the Batesonian
framework sketched above is a useful way of talking
about the teleology of 'indirect' speech forms   I
suggest, too, that "explaining" indirect speech
must explain why a more indirect form may be used,
and not merely map a surface form to an implied
form as Gordon and Lakoff (1971) have done. I
suggest that speaker A, in my examples, finds it
impossible to be more 'direct' without altering
or maneuvering for a different definition of
relationship.

Many linguists have treated 'indirect speech' and
'direct speech' as alternate forms having the same
content. This view has subordinated the pragmatics
of indirect speech usage and concentrated on the
content or 'information' aspect of message. The
theory of language usage presented in this paper
posits an equally important level of message to
the utterance, that of 'relationship defining.'
This latter view suggests that direct forms are
not substitutable for indirect forms as different
relationship parameters would then be entailed

I believe that much rethinking is needed
concerning the putative distinction between 'direct'
and 'indirect' speech. Some of these same questions
are addressed in Pyle's "The Function of Indirectness"
(Pyle, forthcoming)

Let me summarize several of the points I have
raised in this paper

(1) Talking involves both content and relationship
     defining behavior. (Even in "healthy" relation-
     ships this is so, for the relationship defining
     aspect of communication in such a case is a given,
     and not fought over)

(2) Relationship and content definitions frame each
     other   (are metacommunicative to each other)

(3) Indirect speech forms may be the only way someone
     at the bottom end of a complementary relationship
     can direct, without altering the definition of
     relationship in which he/she is involved.

(4) Indirect speech may feed paradoxical communication
     as in, "I'm implying criticism but I deny
     criticising you   Such Paradoxical messages may
     serve to maintain a communicational system
     of a certain type

(5) Cooperation is another way of talking about "posi-
     tive feedback" to a particular communicative
     strategy used within a behavioral system   The
     lack of cooperation, or "negative feedback,"
     then defines the limits or range of that
     particular system

(6) A hearer can never prove that an utterance is
     irrelevant, for relevance is tied to speaker's
     intentions, which are not directly "knowable "[5]

The usefulness of the Batesonian framework to
linguistic research is yet to be adequately projected
There are cases such as levels of pronoun usage in
S E Asia, nicknames vs proper names in the U S ,
and honorifics in Japanese (to name three examples)
where relative intimacy or distance of relationship
is obligatorilly marked in the grammar   Such examples
are well known   In English we might view the "got
passive" with the reflexive pronoun as a case where
English is developing a way of formally indicating

metacomplementary relationships, as "Jane got herself
kicked" indicates that Jane was responsible for
someone doing 'x' to her.[6] It seems, too, that in
English the active voice may be used in highly
personal discourse where the passive voice cannot,
so we get a paradigm of inappropriateness like the
following

$$
\left.\begin{array}{ll}
\text{?*} & \text{I} \quad \text{am} \\
\text{*} & \text{you} \; \text{are} \\
\text{?*} & \text{he} \quad \text{is} \\
\text{?*} & \text{They are}
\end{array}\right.
\left\{\begin{array}{l}
\text{loved} \\
\text{liked} \\
\text{comforted}
\end{array}\right\}
\text{by}
\left\{\begin{array}{l}
\text{you} \\
\text{me} \\
\text{her} \\
\text{him} \\
\text{us} \\
\text{them}
\end{array}\right\}
$$

A paper I'm working on now suggests that the use of
generic statements may, at times, be governed by
speaker's intentions to intimate, to a second person,
a closer relationship with some 3rd person, than
actually is the case. This research suggests that
a discussion of generic usage must include the
information that a speaker, in using a generic form,
implies that he/she knows the subject well enough
to be able to make such generalizations about him.
Overall length of a monologue in a discourse suggests
relationship defining behavior. Witness Hamlet's
objection to Laertes' pompous and flowery oration over
the grave of his sister Ophelia.

> "...what is he whose grief bears such an
> emphasis, whose phrase of sorrow conjures
> the wandering stars and makes them stand like
> wonder wounded hearers..." (<u>Hamlet</u>, Act V Scene 1)

Hamlet makes note of Laertes' insincerity as being a
function of lengthy discourse. The pervasiveness of
relationship defining behavior in language is yet
to be adequately handled in linguistics. I hope
that many more linguists will recognize the necessity
of future research in this area.

NOTES

[1]The schema as I present it here is actually
simplified. Bateson sets up a third category of
relationship which occurs when one directs the other
to direct. This he terms, "meta-complementary,"
which is a complementary relationship at a higher
level

[2]Albert Schefflin in his book Body Language and
Social Order has hypothesized that even before verbal
verbal interaction takes place two people exchange
relationship defining signals kinesically   They map
map out territorial parameters before uttering a
syllable   Relationship defining verbal behavior in
this structure, is redundant (information) to what
was first mapped out non-verbally.

[3]Although I agree in general with Watzlawicks'
statement I would qualify his strong version in that
unsettled relationships may further degenerate if no
attempt is made by the participants to talk about
their relationship   Such talk may actually amelio-
rate the relationship

[4]Note that paradox is here a product of at least
$A_1B_1A_2$, that is, A_1 must first imply 'x' to which B_1
responds   The A_2 must deny 'x' as having been
intended for paradox to obtain   Paradox is not
the result of ambiguity in A's intentions would be
satisfied when A answered that 'x' was not intended,
Paradox can only obtain for B if 'x' is perceived by
B as having been clearly intended, that is unambiguously
intended   Only in this case is A's later denial of
intending 'x' seen as paradoxical.

[5]In Pyle's example of B questioning A's intent,
A's response, "just playing," must also be inter-
preted by B as to intention   For example, A might be
trying to get B to believe that he (A) is 'playing'
where in fact he is not.   This sort of judgement is
once again B's to make, and again he is in the position
of not "knowing" with what intention A has uttered

"just playing." The regression as to "real intention"
is, from B's point of view, potentially infinite.

[6]The MetaComplementarity of the "got passive"
with reflexive was suggested by C. Pyle.

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