

## **A Pragmatic Study of Manipulation: A Theoretical Perspective**

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### **Abstract**

Generally, language effectively influences people's opinions and activities. This means that coding a message is not the final aim of interaction. Rather, it intends to achieve other ends directed at controlling interlocutor's activities, i.e. to manipulate targets. Manipulation becomes one of the worldwide phenomena nowadays in various aspects of life as well as a relatively new trend of study in the framework of pragmatics. This motivates this paper to investigate this phenomenon. Strictly speaking, it is tackled from theoretical pragmatic perspective. As such, it aims at finding out the nature of manipulation, its main lineaments and the pragmatic strategies of performing it in an attempt to develop a model of analyzing this phenomenon. It hypothesizes that manipulation can be best seen as a pragmatic product which results from certain pragmatic strategies. The study has come with some conclusions that indicate the hypothesis of the study.

## 1. Manipulation

Communication is an interactive process by means of language delivering messages among interlocutors. Since communication exists among interlocutors, it is inevitably influenced by factors related to them such as their attitudes, ideas, and social status and so on (Al-Ebadi, 2012: 2). It seems pressing to categorize manipulation as a certain kind of behaviour or activity and then to distinguish it from other similar behaviours such as persuasion and misleading. For this purpose, a variety of views about manipulation are exhibited by several researchers in this concern. For instance, for de Saussure and Schulz (2005: 1), manipulation is related to 'benevolence'. Whenever the addresser, as de Saussure and Schulz (ibid.) point out, is not benevolent in a certain way is said to manipulate their targets. For Puzynina's (1992) and Galasinski's (2000), in Blass (2005: 170), depict manipulation as a way of influencing targets whose behaviors are the main tool for achieving the manipulators' intentions. They, manipulees, unintentionally perform these intentions. For this reason, Tokarz (2006: 24) consider these strategies, that can be used to carry out manipulation, as dishonest persuasive strategies. In the same vein, Asya (2013: 1) identifies the manipulative discourse negatively because it is the tricky intent of the manipulators and its covert character of influence. Hence, Asya (ibid.) concludes that a particular discourse is manipulative whether the target cannot realize the manipulator's real tricky intention behind it.

To summarize, generally, manipulation can be viewed as a combination of coercion (maximum physical

control), persuasion (maximum influence) and deception (maximum misleading). Differently put, it covertly forces targets to perform the intended action (coercion), and thus, it influences them to change their minds to accept the manipulators' tricky intentions (persuasion). As such, targets are misled to be manipulated (deception) (Handelman, 2009: 21).

## **2. Lineaments of Manipulation**

In addition to what has been surveyed above, an arsenal of identifying lineaments are necessary to characterize the nature of manipulative discourse. In this regard, Asya (2013: 1-2) puts it "a discourse becomes manipulative not due to the usage of linguistic units but through association with the speaker's intentions, unclear influential character of the utterance and conditions of communication". These lineaments include, among others, 'motivating action, interest or benefit and fuzziness'.

### **2.1. Manipulation as a Motivating Action**

Manipulation is seen as a motivating action intended by manipulators so as to change other people's minds, as just proved above, to accept their intentions. This means that it is a deliberate attempt by one person to get other persons by appeals to reason to activate them to accept freely beliefs, attitudes, values, intentions or actions (Philipps, 1997: 15-16 and Rigotti, 2005: 63). Handelman (2009: 6) supports this view when he considers the result of manipulative discourse

as "influencing the addressee to work in a way that under normal occasions he/she would probably reject".

## **2.2. Interest or Benefit**

Another identifying lineament of manipulation is 'benefit' which integrates with 'motivating action'. Here, a motivating action is manipulative when the manipulator earns profit from the actions of the manipulee, otherwise it is a non-manipulative discourse. So, this is why manipulators engineer their victims' behaviour towards their needs through creating particular emotions, valuations and orientations in the addressee's minds (Leontyev, 1981: 273 and Sytnik and Krivulya, 1989: 90). Van Dijk (2006: 360) agrees with this when he describes manipulation as an intrinsically goal-oriented phenomenon designed to satisfy manipulators' interest and against the best interests of the manipulee.

## **2.3. Fuzziness**

The motivated beneficial action can be successful executed with the help of 'fuzziness'. It aims at twisting the vision of the world in the mind of the addressees so that they are prevented from having a healthy attitude towards decision. As such, the manipulees pursue the manipulator's goal in the illusion of pursuing their own goal (Rigotti, 2005: 68). Thus, it must remain hidden and covert (Maillat and Oswald, 2009: 355). In their attempt to avoid any possible rejection, manipulators give strong incentives to guarantee the priority of their real goals in the target's scale of preferences. This fuzziness can be achieved by creating a

powerful wish or a strong desire in the targets' mind. The manipulator gives the impression that fulfillment or satisfaction can be achieved if the target follows the manipulator's instructions. On the part of targets, they try to fulfill a powerful wish or to satisfy a strong desire regardless manipulators' intentions and thus they are deceived (Handleman, 2009: 12-13).

To sum up, these lineaments represent indentifying features of manipulative discourse. They work together to distinguish such type of discourse from other similar ones.

### **3. Pragmatic Strategies of Manipulation**

De Saussure (2005: 117) mentions that manipulators should use linguistic strategies, namely pragmatic ones, to enable them to change their manipulees' minds for the sake of fulfilling the intended manipulative goals. However, such strategies appear spontaneously, as the language itself, to a certain degree to facilitate distortion of objective reality and to offer not only specific designations but in addition imprecise, blurred and ambiguous denominations. Linguistic manipulation, in its broad sense, is any verbal interaction regarded from the point of view of its motivation and realized by a subject (speaker) and an object (listener) of communication. The subject of communication regulates behavior of his interlocutor through speech, stimulating the latter to commence, alter or accomplish an action whenever the need arises. The manipulator can either stimulate proper responsive verbal or non-verbal action, or exercise indirect influence in order to mould certain emotions and perceptions required by the speaker. In the long run, these perceptions are

supposed to organize such behaviors on the part of the listener that the speaker was aiming for. By exercising influence upon a person, manipulators aspire to mould their behavior to suit their manipulees' needs (Asya, 2013: 2). Here comes the role of pragmatics. This role, as Mey (2006: 787) has pointed out, is to clarify what it means to 'see and not to see' an object of which the 'same words' are being used, yet are understood in different even deeply diverging ways. This task enables, according to Maillat and Oswald (2011: 3), pragmatics to deal with a central feature of human communication, namely the idea that producing and understanding verbal stimuli which involve much more than making use of a code system. In this view, Al-Hindawi and Al-Ebadi (2017: 115) stress the importance of pragmatic strategies in constructing meanings. When dealing with manipulation as an intentional, hidden, tricky behaviour, it becomes the task of pragmatics to identify and clarify how it is produced and understood. Accordingly, essential pragmatic issues including manipulative speech acts, manipulative conversational maxims, manipulative fallacious arguments and manipulative politeness will be surveyed in the following sections. Their aim is to clarify how manipulation is carried out by means of these pragmatic strategies.

### 3.1. Manipulative Speech Acts

Speech act theory has played an interesting role in the philosophy of language in modern times and aroused the widest interest among pragmatists.

As far as manipulation is concerned, it can be argued that it is related to speech acts in terms of infelicitousness. In this regard, Austin (1962:3-6) makes two important observations. The first is that not all sentences are statements, i.e. much of the conversation is made up of questions, exclamations, and commands. According to his point of view, by issuing an utterance in the proper conditions, the speaker may perform an act of naming, an act of apologizing, an act of welcoming, or an act of advising. These performatives are syntactically similar to the statements, but they do not have the truth/false value. However, according to Austin, they can go wrong or be *unhappy* or *infelicitous*. He believes that instead of truth values, performatives have *felicity conditions*. If speakers sin against any of these conditions the performative utterance is then infelicitous.

For Searle (1979:65-68), who sets out a significant contribution to the speech act theory, felicity conditions form a group of necessary conditions for the performance of a certain act. If these conditions are all present, the act will be performed successfully. He proposes four felicity conditions as follows:

#### **a. Propositional Content Conditions:**

*These conditions express the proposition of the sentence in question. They count as an expression of the psychological state.*

### **b. Preparatory Conditions:**

*They refer to the intention and knowledge of the speaker and the hearer. They tell us what the speaker implies in the performance of the act. In the performance of any illocutionary act, the speaker implies that the preparatory conditions of the act are satisfied.*

### **c. Sincerity Conditions:**

*They tell us what the speaker believes, intends and desires in the performance of the act. One cannot greet insincerely but one can state or promise insincerely.*

### **d. Essential Conditions:**

*They are the constitutive rules that determine the type of IA. For example; in making a promise, the speaker intends the utterance to 'count as' a promise, etc., and the hearer should know that intention.*

Searle (ibid.) finds these conditions more or less crucial to the successful performance of an act. They are collectively important for the performance of an illocutionary act and to enable the speaker to achieve and to communicate the force of the utterance to the hearer. For Rigotti (2005: 70-71), infelicitous or insincere speech acts are fundamental to manipulate targets because they form the basis of the actualization of 'falsity and insincerity'. By means of such infelicitous speech acts, manipulators twist the vision of world in the mind of the manipulee. More clearly, these speech acts will present the intended action positively. By using such speech acts, according to Rozina and Karapetjana (2009: 113), manipulators' main focus on prelocutionary effects of what is said.

### **3.2. Manipulative Conversational Maxims**

According to Grice (1975: 593), implicatures are derived from maxims of conversation including 'quantity, quality, relation and manner'. Whenever these maxims are obeyed, interlocutors are able to interact in a maximally efficient, rational and co-operative way; they should speak sincerely, relevantly, and clearly while providing sufficient information. Grice (ibid.: 45) formulates his principle in the form:

*Make your contribution such as is required, at the stage at which it occurs, by the accepted purpose or direction of the talk exchange in which you are engaged.*

Grice's principle (1975) assumes people's cooperation in the process of communication in order to reduce misunderstanding. In order to communicate accurately and efficiently, speakers and hearers try to cooperate with one another. In order to comply with the cooperative principle, speakers need to follow conversational maxims on which successful communication is built (Cruse, 2000: 357 and Miller 2001: 401). These four maxims can be shown as follows:

1. The Maxim of Quantity (Informativeness)

Make your contribution as informative as is required (for the current purpose of the exchange)

Do not make your contribution more informative than is required.

2. The Maxim of Quality (Truthfulness): try to make your contribution one that is true, specifically:

Do not say what you believe to be false.

Do not say that for which you lack adequate evidence.

3. The Maxim of Relation (Relevance)

Make your contribution relevant: be relevant.

4. The Maxim of Manner (Clarity): be perspicuous, and specifically:

Avoid obscurity of expression

Avoid ambiguity

Be brief (avoid unnecessary prolixity)

Be orderly

In actual forms of interaction, however, such maxims are often hard to apply: People lie, tell only half of a story for all kinds, or tell irrelevant talk. As regards manipulation, as Saussure (2005: 121) clarifies, a proposition is expected to convey false implicatures which help creating adequate social and psychological conditions to obtain irrational consent of the manipulee. These false implicatures can be used manipulatively to imply untrue general truth or validity about something. Such false implicatures are generated by violating conversational maxims. In this sense, Thomas (1995: 45) asserts that violating conversational maxims aims at misleading. Here, as Saussure (2005: 121) states, such generated implied meaning aims to twist the vision of the world in the mind of the manipulee. This occurs through involving misuses of basically positive human exigencies and tendencies exploiting the human need of referring to totality. Cognitively and ethically people feel an irresistible tendency to look for principles having general validity. In the same vein, Van Dijk (2006: 264) supports this view when he concludes that manipulators breach conversational maxims and rules of conversation. Such a breaching serves the

manipulator's intention like 'hiding the truth or reality of something or someone, hiding the manipulator's real communicative aim, expressing superficially the other's benefit and so on. Specifically, Boush et al. (2009: 68) refer to the significance of implied meanings in manipulative discourse because they lead manipulees to unwarranted inferences.

### **3.3. Manipulative Fallacious Arguments**

In general, there are different approaches to investigate arguments. Besnard and Hunter (2008: 2) claim that an argument is a set of assumptions together with a conclusion which can be obtained by one or more reasoning steps. The supports or premises of an argument provide the reason (or justification) for the claim (conclusion) of the argument. Similarly, Govier (2010: 1) puts it "an argument is a set of claims in which one or more of them are put forward so as to offer reasons for another claim". Govier (ibid.: 2) adds that arguments are tools of reflecting on how we could justify a claim that we already believe. In this paper, the argumentative perspective of considering 'argument' as 'dispute' is adopted to look at the concept of 'argument'. In other words, an argument is considered as a reasoned attempt but fallacious one.

Generally, arguments are judged as good or fallacious. Fallacious arguments are those that seem to be valid but in fact they are not so (Hamblin, 1970: 12). They, as Eemeren (2010:67) argues, are violations of the rules for critical discussion that prevent or hinder the resolution of a difference of opinion. As such, they are seen as 'derailment

of strategic maneuvering'. For Tindale (2007: 1-2), such fallacious arguments stand as a particular kind of an egregious error, one that seriously undermines the power of reason in an argument by diverting it or screening it in some way. Walton (2008: 21) states that to claim that an argument commits a fallacy means that the argument has committed a serious logical error, and even more means that the argument is based on an underlying flaw or misconception of reasoning and can therefore be refuted.

The significance of these wrong arguments is remarkably noticed in the argumentative discourse for their persuasive power (Johnson, 1995: 242). They, as Walton (1995: 22-3) points out, occur whenever an argumentation scheme or theme is used wrongly in a way that alters the correct sequence of the moves of the dialogue in which it is used, and thus, blocks the achievement of the aims of the dialogue.

According to Rigotti (2005: 69), fallacious arguments are closely related to manipulation when he connects dynamics of manipulation to those of human error. Worded differently, the addressees' errors in reasoning are intended by manipulators. Manipulators induce their addressees into error via promoting their errors and to pave them away by focusing their attention only on some good facets of the case in question. As Rigotti (ibid.: 70-71) concludes, manipulation steps in the inferential process of elaborating knowledge and making decisions on the basis of reliable information. The target becomes a victim of invisible interference in his judgment and critical thinking. Walton (2007: 159) appears in line with Rigotti (2005) about the

manipulative nature of fallacious arguments "they appear necessary devices that contain deliberate deception whose aim is to influence others to accept something in the arguments or claims". As a result of employing fallacious arguments, manipulation, as Asya (2013: 3) and Danciu (2014: 23) point out, is regarded rational in which the manipulator affects his interlocutor's rational sphere by means of convincing facts and arguments.

### **3.4. Manipulative Politeness**

According to Lakoff (1982: 34), politeness is the awareness of another person's face or the ways of acknowledging the public self-image of a person. It is a system of interpersonal relations designed to facilitate interaction by minimizing the potential for conflict and confrontation inherent in all human interactions. For Thomas (1995: 150), it is a genuine desire to be pleasant to others and to avoid conflict with them, an important aspect of human communication, and means of showing consideration of others and maintaining social harmony (Culpeper, 1996: 349). It is clearly used to avoid threatening others' face (Mills, 2011: 24). In order to work out what type and how much politeness the speaker should use, individuals calculate the social distance among interactants, the power relations between them and the rank of the imposition of particular speech act (ibid.: 25). On the basis of these observations, politeness can be better thought of a successful manipulative pragmatic strategy to manipulate targets. This view is clearly articulated by Boush et al. (2009: 65-66) "a manipulative

strategy includes plans and mechanisms to evade the negative consequences of being busted".

### **3.4.1.Face**

As far as politeness is concerned, the concept of 'face' is of great significance in connection to manipulation. According to Wardhaugh (1986: 284), it is "the public self-image that every member wants to claim for himself". In this regard, Brown and Levinson (1987: 61) state that 'Face' can influence participants' interaction in one way or another. Furthermore, as Renkema (1993:13), Richards et al. (1993:135) and Yule (1996: 61) show, it stands as the need of a person in interaction to be appreciated by others and the need to be free and not interfered with. Depending on these remarks, participants' reactions in interaction are governed by their face's treatments. In general, it comes in two varieties: positive face and negative face. On the one hand, the former is a person's wish to be well thought of, to be admired and to be understood by others. On the other hand, the latter is one's wish not to be imposed on by others and to be allowed to go about our business unimpeded with our rights to free and self-determined action intact (Grundy, 2000: 156, Holmes, 2006: 712 and LoCastro, 2012: 138).

Whether positive or negative, interactants may react with each other's face in one of two types of acts: face-saving acts and face-threatening acts. Worded differently, speakers and hearers should save their faces by avoiding any violation to one another. By contrast, when a person makes a demand or intrudes on another person's autonomy, s/he performs 'face-threatening act'. In the case of such threatening acts,

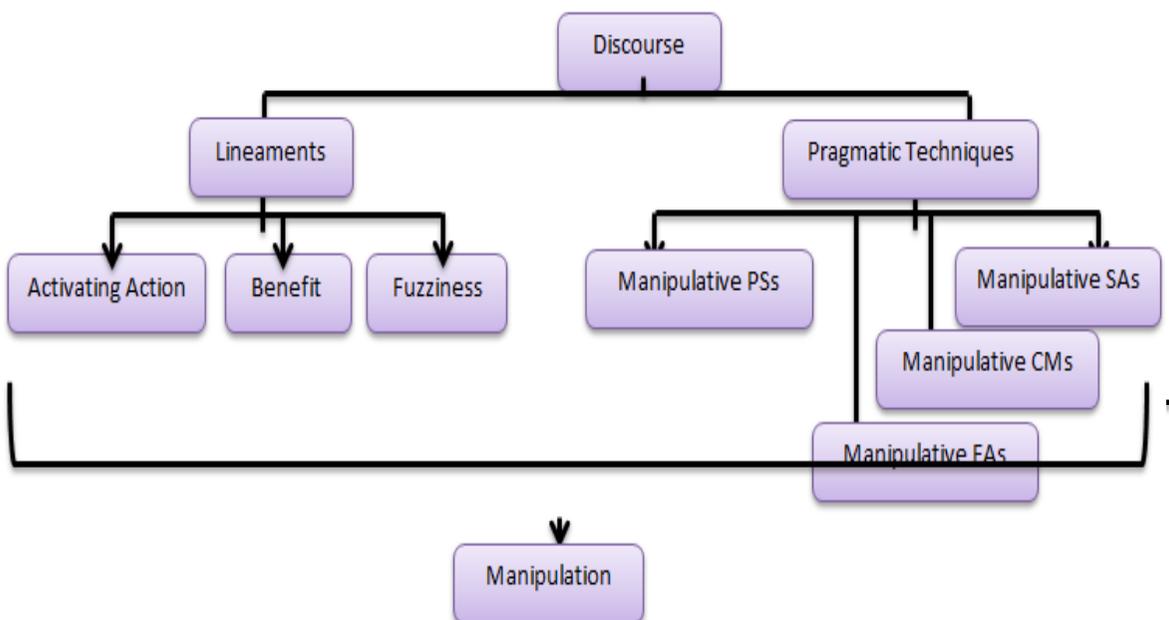
something is needed to reduce face violation to a minimum and therefore preserve stability as much as possible. This reduction can be done via certain strategies such as on-record and off-record (Brown and Levinson, 1978:70-3, Renkema, 1993:13 and LoCastro, 2012: 138, 140). According to these observations, manipulation, as a tricky behaviour, is best seen as a face threatening act. Therefore, it requires some kind of reductive work to mitigate threatening. In order to lead manipulees to perform the intended tricky action.

One possibility of politeness with performing face-threatening acts is on-record with positive politeness. It involves a redressive action conducted to hearer's positive face wants (ibid.: 103). In this respect, the redressive action, as (ibid.) shows, is an attempt to counteract the potential face damage of the face-threatening act by doing it in such a way or with such modifications or additions that indicate clearly that no such face threat is intended or desired. Speakers recognize their hearer's face wants to be achieved. As for positive politeness, it implies that the speaker likes the hearer so that the face-threatening act does not mean a negative evaluation of hearer's face (ibid.: 69-70). Positive politeness is not necessarily redressive of the particular face want infringed by the face-threatening act. Rather, the sphere of redress is widened to the appreciation of alter's wants in general or to the expression of similarity between ego's and alter's wants (ibid.: 101). Techniques of this type of politeness are usable not only for face-threatening redress, but as a kind of social accelerator where speaker indicates that he wants to 'come closer' to the hearer (ibid.: 103; Richards et al., 1993: 281 and LoCastro, 2012: 138).

Manipulatively, targets might be misled by means of on-record politeness strategies such as claiming common ground, conveying cooperation and so on.

Another possibility of manipulating others is utilizing on-record negative politeness. Here, participants' negative face can be the destination. Relying on this possibility, a redressive action directed to hearers' negative face demonstrating that the speaker's desire does not impose upon the hearer. Therefore, hearer's freedom of action is unimpeded, and thus, the addresser speaks out his respect to hearers' territory. Observing these remarks pinpoints the main function of this type of politeness. It minimizes the particular imposition that the face-threatening act unavoidably effects (Coupland et al., 1988: 255 and LoCastro, 2012: 138). Thus, targets are manipulated by utilizing strategies such as 'be direct, don't presume, don't coerce and communicate speakers' want to not impinge on H' (ibid.: 134-215).

To sum up, the different lineaments and pragmatic



strategies of manipulation in the discussion above, as Figure (1) below shows, can be incorporated together to yield an eclectic model of manipulation:

### **Figure (1): An Eclectic Model of Analyzing Manipulation**

Key: PSs=politeness strategies, SAs=speech acts, CMs=conversational maxims and FAs=fallacious arguments

## **Conclusions**

In the light of the discussion above, manipulation is seen as a tricky behaviour. It has certain identifiable lineaments. In other words, it is seen as an activating action aiming at fulfilling the manipulator's hidden intents. So as to achieve this purpose, it needs to pass covert and fuzzy. Such a behaviour is well carried out by an arsenal of pragmatic strategies such as manipulative speech acts, manipulative conversational maxims, manipulative fallacious arguments and manipulative politeness strategies, both covertness and fuzziness are successfully satisfied. Moreover, it is observed that the first three pragmatic techniques rely on the notion of violation. To be clearly put, manipulators violate felicity condition of speech acts and break conversational maxims in attempt to twist the vision of the world in the mind of their manipulees. Concerning manipulative fallacious arguments, manipulators violate the principles of good reasoning so as to lead manipulees to false inferencing about the issue in question. As regards politeness strategies, manipulators depend on the notion of 'observation' rather than violation.

Phrased differently, manipulees' face demands are observed by using politeness strategies, and thus, put them under the social pressure to cooperate, i.e. perform the intended manipulative action. Accordingly, manipulation is best categorized as a pragmatic product that successfully carried out by means of certain pragmatic strategies. Thus, the hypothesis of the study has been validated. In addition, the study presents a theoretical model of analyzing manipulation in different genres.

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