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ANOTHER LOOK AT INFORMATION MANAGEMENT: A REJOINDER TO MCCORNACK, LEVINE, MORRISON, AND LAPINSKI

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In this brief response to McCornack, Levine, Morrison, and Lapinski (this volume), we consider how the information management concept in Interpersonal Deception Theory (IDT) is related to Information Management Theory (IMT) and address their criticisms of our dimensional approach to deceptive messages. IDT and IMT are compatible in some respects but differ on (a) the primacy of Grice's Cooperative Principle (CP), (b) the number of conversational expectations senders can violate to produce deceptive messages, and (c) whether communicators are sensitive to these violations. We focus on three claims: Grice's cooperative principle (CP) and its four maxims represent the best theoretical explanation for information management during deception; IDT takes a decoding perspective on information management, whereas IMT takes an encoding perspective on this process; and our experimental manipulations are problematic because they exaggerated changes in information management and produced results unlike natural conversation.

THE HISTORY OF INFORMATION MANAGEMENT IN IDT

Our interest in information management began in 1987 when we made the distinction between strategic and nonstrategic communication (Buller & Burgoon, 1994). The first published discussion of our strategic/nonstrategic distinction occurred in Buller and Aune (1987) and permeated subsequent studies of deception (Buller, Comstock, Aune, & Strzyzewski, 1989; Buller, Strzyzewski, & Comstock, 1991). The term *information management* as a class of strategic behavior was coined in 1992 and subsumed behaviors that signalled uncertainty, vagueness, reticence, and withdrawal. We considered information management to be largely accomplished through verbal behavior that altered information features in deceptive messages. Our thoughts about these verbal behaviors and information features appeared in a paper presented at the 4th International Conference on Language and Social Psychology in 1991 (Buller & Burgoon, 1991) and are further explicated in our theoretical essay in *Communication Theory* (Buller & Burgoon, in press).

We were certainly aware of McCornack's work as we were formulating our own thinking about information management. We also were strongly influenced by Bavelas, Black, Chovil, and Mullett's (1990) work on equivocation, as well as some of the studies on which McCornack also based his IMT (e.g., Hopper & Bell, 1984; Grice, 1969; Metts, 1989; Metts & Chronis, 1986; Metts & Hippensteele, 1988;

Turner, Edgely, & Olmstead, 1975). It is not surprising, therefore, that the informational features we included in IDT are similar to, but not isomorphic with, IMT.

Although Grice's CP and its four maxims represent conversational expectations that can be violated in deceptive messages, we did not place the CP at the center of our definition of information management. Nor did we ignore other information features previous researchers, particularly Bavelas et al. (1990), implicate in the creation of alternative forms of deception. Our approach to information management is compatible with McCornack's IMT but expands on ideas it advances.

THE COOPERATIVE PRINCIPLE AND ITS MAXIMS

McCornack (1992) contends that Grice's CP represents a theoretical explanation for the manipulation of information in deceptive messages and that the maxims of quantity, quality, relation, and manner represent the relevant domain. McCornack et al. (this volume) criticize the IDT approach to information management as being atheoretical because we neither posit the CP as a single unifying mechanism nor provide an alternative. IDT does offer an explanatory mechanism, as we will demonstrate.

Explanatory Power of CP

McCornack's (1992) use of Grice's CP does not constitute a "theoretical" explanation of *how* messages deceive. At best, it provides a taxonomy of four conversational expectations that communicators possess. The CP as used in IMT does not explain how, why, or under what circumstances senders flout these conversational expectations to deceive. Neither does it account for receivers' steadfast assumption that senders conform to the CP, despite disconfirming surface features of messages, or the empirical evidence that receivers do in fact detect deception. The second-order unidimensionality of the four maxims as discussed by McCornack et al. (this volume) suggests that we should treat the CP as a single superordinate expectation that is violated when senders deceive. As a superordinate expectation, the CP alone is hardly a causal mechanism.

In IDT, we offer the notion of expectancy violations as a potential explanatory mechanism for understanding how deception transpires. Several theories of communication rely on expectancy violations to explain how communicators enact and interpret conversational behavior (e.g., Burgoon's [1983; Burgoon & Hale, 1988] Expectancy Violations Theory, Andersen's [1985, 1989] Cognitive Valence Theory, and Cappella and Greene's [1982] Discrepancy-Arousal Theory). Applied to deception, expectancy violations explain why receivers recognize messages as deceptive. Their relevance to the encoding side of the equation is that senders attempt to keep their violations covert.

Domain of Conversational Expectations

There are also problems with accepting Grice's CP as the principle that specifies the domain of conversational expectations relevant to deceptive messages. Unfortunately, McCornack (1992) does not provide a compelling rationale for accepting the CP as the *only* theoretical concept around which to organize conversational expectations. His primary justification for accepting the CP appears to be that Grice said the CP existed and contained the four maxims. Bowers, Elliot, and Desmond (1977) observed that deviations from these four maxims could conceivably create "devi-

ous" messages; Metts (1989) concurred. This is hardly a compelling, logical rationale for accepting the CP as the single unifying construct in information management.

We disagree. As an organizing principle, Grice's CP can be questioned on two fronts. First, our work and that of Bavelas et al. (1990) suggests that the CP is too imprecise and needs to be expanded. Second, it is not clear whether the four expectations specified by the CP are equally important to deception, whether the quality expectation has primacy over quantity, relation, and manner expectations, as Jacobs, Dawson, and Brashers (this volume) argue, or whether the CP is actually a single superordinate expectation. If it does not specify the entire domain of relevant conversational expectations with precision, if the quality expectation is the primary expectation, or if it is really a single expectation, then the CP is not sufficient for organizing information management.

At present, the empirical support for the primacy of Grice's four maxims is not as firm as McCornack et al. (this volume) seem to believe. Turner et al.'s (1975) work revealed only two dimensions, completeness and veridicality. Bavelas (1989; Bavelas et al., 1990) cites relevance and clarity, along with the personalization dimension included in our analysis, and a fourth dimension, the extent to which the sender acknowledges the listener, as features that can be manipulated to create equivocal statements. McCornack's studies of the four maxims do not establish their primacy because he only assessed the four dimensions. He did not measure other message features; therefore, his study could do nothing more than provide support for the four maxims (see McCornack, Levine, Solowczuk, Torres, & Campbell, 1992). Our research (Burgoon, Buller, Guerrero, Afifi, & Feldman, this volume) and Bavelas et al.'s (1990) investigations of equivocation clearly show that senders violate other conversational expectations. Unfortunately, inductively-derived theoretical explanations like IMT run the risk of overlooking important facets of a phenomenon because they are limited by the methods and approaches of previous research.

The Domain of Information Management

With the theoretical questions surrounding the CP unresolved and the shortcomings in the empirical investigations on the CP, it is premature to limit investigations of the dimensions of information management to those incorporated in Grice's CP. The four conversational expectations associated with the CP are far richer than McCornack (1992) implied. We distinguished between actual and apparent veridicality, information and conversational completeness, syntactic and semantic directness, and syntactic and semantic directness. We also contend that Bavelas et al.'s "personalization" expectation is an information feature managed by senders when deceiving. A presupposition of conversation is that people producing messages "own" their messages unless they explicitly disavow them. Consequently, disassociation, verbal nonimmediacy, or depersonalization reflect a central feature of discourse that can be manipulated for deceptive purposes.

McCornack et al. (this volume) fault us for providing imprecise definitions for our information management dimensions. To the contrary, our dimensions expand on IMT's four maxims and, therefore, add more precision to the concept of information management. Further, we do not claim that our dimensions are orthogonal, especially the subdimensions within completeness, clarity, and directness, but neither are they completely confounded as McCornack et al. suggest. They reflect sender versus receiver or syntactic versus semantic distinctions. For instance, an utterance that

appears sufficient to the receiver within the current conversational context (conversational completeness) may not provide all germane information known by the sender (informational completeness). To illustrate, the reply, "Not too bad," would be conversationally complete in a dinner-party conversation when asked, "How have you been?" But, there is much more information known to the sender that would be germane to the question. This information does not have to be articulated for the reply to be conversationally complete. Consider another example: An irrelevant reply to a question might be semantically indirect, in that the semantic content is not germane but is syntactically direct because it fits the question/answer pattern for adjacency pairs. Finally, senders reduce message clarity semantically by using terms that obfuscate (e.g., jargon or sophisticated words, such as, "In the Taoist sense, I'm more aligned with a contemporary sophist perspective") or syntactically by linguistic constructions that are indecipherable (e.g., "Accordingly, and to most, I was to have been a sophist"). Thus, these distinctions are meaningful in capturing key nuances in the production and interpretation of messages.

ENCODING VERSUS DECODING PERSPECTIVE

McCornack et al. (this volume) also criticize us for taking a decoding perspective on information management and claim that our primary interest in information management is as a tool for detecting deception. This is a mischaracterization. IDT considers both the encoding and decoding of deceptive messages, as well as the conjoint creation of deception by interactants. It is notable that McCornack does not consistently adhere to an encoding perspective. McCornack et al.'s (1992) test of IMT relied on a decoding methodology, involving over 1000 naive judges who evaluated surface deviations along the four maxims. Surprisingly, he now criticizes us for using a similar methodology.

McCornack et al.'s mischaracterization of IDT may arise from their mistaken impression that our interest in "distinguishing" between truthful and deceptive messages reflects an interest in detection. Actually, we are interested in distinguishing between how senders construct truthful and deceptive messages, receivers discriminate between them, and scholars theorize about them. This mischaracterization also appears to stem from a fundamental disagreement between IMT adherents and us about whether communicators are sensitive to violations of conversational expectations. In relying on Grice's CP, McCornack et al. (this volume) view maxims as tacit assumptions about the principles that guide cooperative and rational exchanges. Communicators supposedly fail to recognize surface deviations from conversational expectations and assume instead that senders are being cooperative.

We believe the opposite: Communicators are sensitive to these surface deviations and at times conclude that deception occurred. The empirical evidence favors our position rather than Grice and McCornack's assertion to the contrary. It indicates that people do detect differences between honest and deceptive messages (Burgoon, Buller, Ebesu, & Rockwell, 1994; DePaulo, in press; DePaulo, Stone, & Lassiter, 1985). Even McCornack's own test of IMT (see McCornack et al., 1992) revealed different perceptions of honesty according to which information dimensions are manipulated. McCornack (1992) raises the question of whether people can detect these covert violations. IDT says yes, his own work implies the answer is yes, and other evidence suggests that deception is noticeable in the degree to which messages

are deviant or out of the ordinary (see, e.g., Bond, Omar, Pitre, Lashley, Skaggs, & Kirk, 1992; Fiedler & Walka, 1993).

McCornack et al. (this volume) claim that our position rests on the assumption that deceptive messages necessarily entail substantial and noticeable changes in information and that recipients always judge such changes as deceptive. We make no such assumptions. Information management can include a wide range of adjustments, some of which are quiet, unostentatious, and covert (to use McCornack et al.'s language), others of which are substantial. These changes need not result in a judgment of deception, but the larger the deviation and the more dimensions entailed, the more likely that suspicion and the possibility of deceit will be entertained.

McCornack et al. (this volume) base some of their criticisms of our position on Fiedler and Walka's (1993) assertion that people rely on conventionalized rules to judge the honesty of messages rather than figuring out the validity of behavioral cues. We are surprised by this, inasmuch as we interpreted Fiedler and Walka's position as consistent with ours. Fiedler and Walka proposed that receivers attribute deception when nonverbal behavior is conspicuous, which we believe occurs when deceivers violate nonverbal expectations. Their infrequency rule (i.e., less frequent answers are judged to be more dishonest than more frequent answers) and verifiability rule (i.e., objectively verifiable information is more likely to be judged as deceptive than subjective information that is difficult to verify) also require that receivers attend to the plausibility and type of information provided in messages. That is, conventionalized rules require that receivers attend to message features, and receivers use these rules to assess messages. Ultimately, these assessments help receivers discriminate between messages. We wonder whether McCornack et al. would accept our information management dimensions if we called them "conventionalized rules" or heuristics.

Finally, by invoking Fiedler and Walka's idea of conventionalized rules, McCornack et al. have conceded that people have cognitive templates for judging deceptive and truthful messages. Consequently, there must be an explanation accounting for when, how, and why receivers opt to ascribe deception rather than cooperation, or even incompetence, to deviations in message features. Any explanation for these issues is likely to be more consistent with IDT than with IMT's claim about the tacitness of expectations.

EXPERIMENTALLY MANIPULATING TYPES OF DECEPTION

McCornack et al. (this volume) criticize two aspects of our experimental methodology. They assert that our experimental manipulations exaggerated changes on the information management dimensions and made them noticeable to observers, but in natural conversations such changes would be subtle and not noticed. This assertion is open to empirical verification and several sources of evidence dispute the criticism. McCornack's own test of IMT (McCornack et al., 1992) revealed that changes produced by hypothetical circumstances rather than experimental instructions were noticed by observers. Also, our secondary analysis of equivocal messages from Bavelas et al. (1990), which were elicited naturally by experimental circumstances rather than by experimental instructions, produced changes in information management dimensions that were noticeable to observers. Thus, the convergent evidence from three experimental manipulations—hypothetical circumstances, ex-

perimental circumstances, and experimental instructions—all support our conclusion that changes in information management dimensions are recognized by senders and receivers.

McCornack et al. (this volume) further fault our results on the grounds that we instructed participants to encode messages that deviated on the dimensions we measured. Implicit in their criticism, once again, is the belief that messages in natural conversation are different from the ones we created experimentally. Beside the fact that the convergence of evidence we cited in the preceding paragraph undercuts this criticism, we believe that McCornack et al. miss the mark in other respects. We opted to alter information features by describing in natural language three forms of deception commonly manipulated and recognized by senders and measuring the ways senders then varied information. We did not, however, describe to senders all of the information features we measured, nor did we provide them with detailed descriptions of the dimensions. Also, we never commented on these dimensions when senders practiced their messages prior to experimental conversations. As we noted, senders could have ignored our instructions or found it impossible to manipulate the information features we briefly described in the instructions, but this was not the case.

SUMMARY

Our approach to information management in IDT is compatible with McCornack's IMT. However, our disagreements concerning the primacy of Grice's CP, the relevant conversational expectations, and communicators' sensitivity to expectancy violations produce points of departure in our approaches. Additionally, unlike IMT, our information managements dimensions are intended to underlie both the encoding and decoding of messages and to apply to truthful as well as deceitful discourse. IMT does not provide an explanation for how senders create deceptive messages, how listeners, upon detecting surface deviations, judge sender honesty, or how messages actually deceive. IDT's notions of strategic manipulation of information and expectancy violations are a promising starting point in explaining this process. It is clear that information management in deception is an important area for theoretical development and empirical testing. McCornack and his colleagues have been instrumental in bringing it to the attention of deception researchers. Our approach to information management in IDT, like McCornack's IMT, describes properties entailed in information management during deception. Theoretical exchanges, such as this one, help clarify and extend the idea of information management in both deceptive message production and processing.

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TRUTH AND DECEPTION

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McCornack, Levine, Morrison and Lapinski (this volume) correctly point out that there is more similarity than difference in our models of deception. Nevertheless, pinpointing theoretical differences and pushing their logical and empirical consequences is still the best way to engage in a serious program of progressive social scientific research.

