



AN INVESTIGATION INTO THE LINGUISTICS OF FALSEHOOD

DR. G. PARASHURAMA MURTHY

Assistant Professor,
Department of English
Maharani's science college for women
(Autonomous) Karnataka, **INDIA**

DR. UDAYA RAVI SHASTRY

Head,
Department of English,
Pallagatti Adavappa Arts Commerce
College Tiptur, Karnataka **INDIA**

ABSTRACT

The present article tries to argue that the languages used by liars are distinct and distinguishable from the language used by truthful people. Linguists have managed to arrive at ready-made, user friendly key indicators of falsehood in the language that can help to detect deception. Just as every individual has a unique fingerprint, we leave linguistic "fingerprints" behind as we write, and stylometrics helps in the authorship identification. Similarly, detecting the deception is also possible, because the liars 'leak' cues of their deceit not just through facial expressions, body movements and voice changes, but by their verbal choices as well.

INTRODUCTION

Falsehood, deception or plainly lying, has been in existence ever since man began to speak. A lie is a deliberate misrepresentation of a fact to cause malice intentionally. A lie is an assertion that is believed to be false, typically used with the purpose of deceiving someone.

Lies come in all colours and shapes. You have bald faced lie, bold faced lie, white lie, blue lie, big lie, an honest lie, bullshit, cover up, etc.. We all have lied at some point of time or the other. Some are expert liars while others are bald faced liars.

Scope:

DR. G. PARASHURAMA MURTHY

DR. UDAYA RAVI SHASTRY

1 Page



But I consider language in the context of falsehood. The article tries to argue that the language used by liars is distinct and distinguishable from the language used by truthful people. Linguists have managed to arrive at ready-made, user friendly key indicators of falsehood in the language that can help to detect deception. Though this paper focuses on the linguistic aspects like the lexis and syntax, the psycholinguistic contribution to this is also brought into focus, time and again.

Why people lie?

People, by and large, resort to falsehood in order to circumvent the law, to attain recognition, popularity and accolades which they cannot glean by truthful means, to save themselves from any possible physical harm, or to avoid a scandal or humiliation in the society. The intention of telling a lie could range from a very inconsequential reason to a very substantially solemn reason.

Detection of Falsehood in olden days:

There have been several attempts made to detect falsehood in the history of humankind. During the medieval period, they used the third degree methods through torture devices during interrogation to extract information.

In later period, many electrical and electronic lie detecting devices were invented. A **polygraph**, popularly referred to as a lie detector test, is a device or procedure that measures and records several physiological indicators such as blood pressure, pulse, respiration, and skin conductivity while a person is asked and answers a series of questions.

Eye tracking, voice stress analysis, infra red brain scanners, narco analysis and even EEG, (Electro encephalogram) have also been used to detect falsehood. Association between lying and increased pupil size and compressed lips has been established. Liars may stay still more, use fewer hand gestures, and make less eye contact. Liars may take more time to answer questions but on the other hand, if they have had time to prepare, they may answer more quickly than people telling the truth would, and talk less, and repeat phrases more. Though all these observations have been made none of these has been a reliable fool-proof tests to catch the perpetrator.

Non Linguistic modes of detection:

The protagonist of the children's novel written by An Italian novelist Carlo Collodi, is Pinocchio. He is an animated puppet who is punished for each lie that he tells by undergoing

further growth of his nose. Unfortunately it doesn't happen to us in the real world. So we should find other methods of detecting lies.

An average person on a given day, lies about ten to 200 times. Many of them could be harmless white lies, told to avoid hurting some one's feeling for politeness. Strangers lie three times within the first ten minutes of their meeting each other. We lie more to strangers than to co-workers. Extraverts lie more than introverts. A Man lies eight times more about himself than women. Women lie mostly to protect other people. There are good liars and bad liars. But we all use the same techniques.

Mind reading is real. When we act in a certain way, certain things in our bio chemistry take place on which we have no control. When we are lying to people, deception is a very taxing process to the human mind and this makes them speak in a strange way. With a bit of training it will be easy for us to make out whether a person is being truthful to you or he is cooking up a story.

Here are a few non-linguistic cues:

- a. **Referral:** When you ask a person a question, if he starts referring to others like, "you can ask my friends, you can ask Mohan, you can ask Raju, they say everything.... The moment they start referring to others it means they are going out of their way to convince you.
- b. **Use of bolstering statements:** liars try to do this to increase their credibility, words like, you know, to tell you the truth that did seem weird.

You know something, it is a good thing that you brought this up to me, because I was thinking exactly the same thing... with this they try to give you an impression they are in the same position as you. Their thinking is exactly the same as yours—innocent.

- c. **Anger and Protest statement:** The moment they realize they are being cornered, they show anger and protest. This is a defence mechanism. " why are you treating me like a criminal? This is just to deviate from the question you are asking.
- d. **Guilt trip.** : Closely associated with the above type of reaction, creating a guilt trip in another person may be considered a psychological manipulation in the form of a punishment for a perceived transgression. It is a form of passive aggression..Guilty people will ask questions like: why are you interrogating me? Why aren't you questioning others? Why have you singled me out?

- e. **Water down the issue:** Who really cares about all this? Why is this so very important? It is a great joke! With such statements they are trying to water down the importance of the issue to distract you.
- f. **Gas lighting or brain scrambling:** this is a term coined after an American Psychological thriller film *gaslight* produced in 1944.

Gas lighting is a method of brainwashing a person and making them doubt their own faculties and judgment. It creates inconsistent thoughts relating to their decisions and attitudes. It can create a sense of low self esteem also. One starts suspecting his own rationality: Ex: 'you surprise me honey! How can you ever suspect your own wife? Shame!'

- g. **Being over polite:** using excessively polite terms is a key indicator that he is lying.
- h. **Self depreciation:** (criticism of oneself)Liars purposefully downplay themselves to make them look weak . ex: "Hei! You are the person who hacked into the computer and stole the money?".. "come on!, I am not that smart". This is to make himself look less intelligent.
- i. **Personal removal:** truthful people when answering a question use 'I' . I went there, I did this, I did that, ... When some one is lying, subconsciously, they try to avoid associating themselves. They use third person words like they, them, their.etc...
- j. **Thin slicing:** We can receive bits of information sub-consciously within 1/25th of a second before it reaches our conscious mind. Sub-conscious processes data way before the conscious mind can logically justify it.
- k. **Charishma (karishma)** The masters of deception are usually charishmatic. They use their charishma to blind you.
- l. **Tell details:** A deceptive person tells his story with a lot of details. Under the assumption that more details he gives, the more realistic it appears and people trust him.
- m. **Gestures:** They smile at the delight in getting away with that, when they are convinced that they have lied successfully. Such smile is called **duping delight**. They increase their blinking rate, unconsciously point their feet towards the exit, they make their vocal tone much lower.

However, they are all just behaviour, but not any proof of deception. Though such tools have worked under certain circumstances, they can be fooled with enough preparation. So, we can take a more direct approach. That is using communication science to analyse lies.

How can linguistics be used as a tool?

Disciplines like clinical laboratory science, ballistic science, dentistry, engineering and chemistry help in providing authentic evidences that can be produced before the court as evidences to solve legal proceedings. Similarly the methods and insights of Linguistic knowledge can also be used to sort out certain word crimes. Such a science is called Forensic Linguistics.

Just as every individual has a unique fingerprint, we leave linguistic “fingerprints” behind as we write, and stylometrics helps in the authorship identification. Similarly, detecting the deception is also possible, because the liars ‘leak’ cues of their deceit not just through facial expressions, body movements and voice changes, but by their verbal choices as well.

Key Indicators:

A corpus of criminal statements and police interrogations were gathered to arrive at these cue indicators that I’m going to present before you.

The indicators fall into three classes;

- I. The Liar has a lack of commitment to the statement or declaration. The speaker uses linguistic devices to avoid making a direct statement of fact.

There are five sub indicators in this class:

- a) **Linguistic hedges:** This is called the linguistic hedges which include non factive verbs and nominals like: *may be, I think, to the best of my knowledge..etc.*
- b) He makes **qualified assertions** which leave open whether an act was performed: example: I needed to get my inhaler.. (not mentioning whether he got it or not)
- c) He uses **Un-explained lapses of time:** example: later that day,
- d) The use of Overzealous expressions: like I swear to God...
- e) He tries to make a **rationalization of an action:** ex: I was unfamiliar with the road.

2. We find the liar give Preference for negative expressions in word choice, syntactic structure and semantics.



a. Negative forms either complete with words such as never or negative morphemes as in inconceivable.

b. **Adjective Overuse:** In the normal basic communication we use nouns and verbs. When you find a person start using adjectives they are using fillers to distract you from the fact. The person , place or the thing or the event is all that we expect in an answer in a situation. Anything beyond that is an attempt to distract.

c. Negative emotions like – I was a nervous wreck..

d. Memory loss - I forget..

3. Inconsistencies with respect to Verbs and noun forms:

a. **The tense of the verb changes:** When you ask a person a question, and they answer in future tense vs. past tense they are subconsciously trying to disconnect from the lie they are telling. When you ask them: Did you steal the money? They will answer you: I would never do that (future) whereas a truthful man would say I did not do that. Or they may speak sentences like: I just feel helpless, I can't do enough, my children wanted me, they needed me, and now I can't help them....

B.Thematic role change: Changing the thematic role of a noun phrase from agent in one sentence to the patient in another. (subjective case and Objective case).

c. **Noun phrase changes:** Where different Noun Phrase forms are used for the same referent: for example: In the narrative of Dr. Mc Donald, he describes 'My wife', "my daughter" but he refers to them as '**Some people**' when he reports to the poice about their stabbing. They use distancing language. They unconsciously distance themselves from the subject. (Bill Clinton)

d. Pronoun **changes:** Pronouns change the referent or omit the pronoun entirely. Example: Scott Pearson's description of his activities during the time of his wife's murder has no first person reference:
drove to the warehouse, dropped off the boat...

The correlation between the occurrence of each cue type and the ground truth is to be looked at while deciding whether the person is lying. Fabricated statements have higher occurrence of negative forms. When the criminal becomes conscious of his language, he becomes unable to concentrate on both the message and the mode of presentation. This is due to the cognitive overload. Then the deceiver will leak a lot of cues of guilt.



I conclude this paper with this remark. Now that I have told what features mark the liar, what if a person lies a fool-proof lie taking precautions not to use those terms mentioned here? I quote from Chinua Achebe, as a reply to this: “Eenke, the bird says that since men have learned to shoot without missing, he has learned to fly without perching.”

If liars become smart, linguists must become smarter. There is always scope for further specialization.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Arciuli J, Mallard D, Villar G. 2010. “Um, I can tell you’re lying”: linguistic markers of deception versus truth-telling in speech. *Appl. Psycholinguist.* (Print)

Carson TL. 2010. *Lying and Deception: Theory and Practice.* Oxford, UK: Oxford Univ. Press(Print)

Dynel M. 2015. Intention to deceive, bald-faced lies, and deceptive implicature: insights into Lying at the Semantics–Pragmatics Interface. *Intercult. Pragmat.* (Print)

Vrij A. 2008. *Detecting Lies and Deceit: Pitfalls and Opportunities.* Chichester, UK: Wiley. 2nd ed.(Print)