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On Wooden Language and Manipulation

Abstract: There are many ways people use some established wooden language and this differentiates them when they are targeted by manipulative discourses. Some people would be genuinely politically correct and use the speech code with all their heart. Those ones can be manipulated by the bias of targeted discourses in the given wooden language. Some other people would not believe that wooden languages could be used in real communication. Part of these later ones would fake using the established wooden language in their group or society, part of them would overtly refuse to use such a language, while some of them would use the wooden language in an ironic key, to rally human or social shortcomings. Counting apart the first category, all these kinds of people would escape any manipulation attempt.

Keywords: wooden language, speech codes, political correctness, manipulation

1. Introduction

They say that the use of wooden language is just a simulacrum of communication, a sort of communication used to manipulate people.

This is a generalization and a generalization is a mediocre mode of reasoning by its own specific functioning.

Trying to lose the *aurea mediocritas*, we should pay attention to details and refine the criteria for classification. Findings could be interesting, as users of wooden language could appear as broken down in different categories and this could weaken the value of the observation from the debut of the present text. Different approaches to wooden languages show different ways of positioning to the group one is a member

of. All in all, wooden language is linked with being politically correct by using speech codes, which means that it is mainly a matter of behavior.

Then, looking from the manipulation point of view, we will see that there are as many cases of ways of positioning against this phenomenon as there are categories of wooden language users.

This being my present thesis, I shall first present what wooden language is, from my point of view, and then compare different classes of wooden language users to the core property of manipulation in order to single out the case of manipulation in opposition with what is wrongly considered to be manipulation.

There will be four key-words for this study: *speech codes*, *wooden language*, *political correctness* and *manipulation*.

2. Wooden language and communication

Wooden languages have always existed, but some of them were better known, because they were in service of prominent evil institutions, such as the Inquisition, the Nazi regime and the Communist regime. The last two occupy the first places in human memory as they benefit of their closeness to the present time.

The Inquisition was protecting its wooden language like any other totalitarian institution, by the use of censorship. Some years ago, interesting information was brought to attention by a Spanish librarian, Manuel-Reyes Garcia Hurtado, who had manifested his curiosity regarding the interest of the Spanish Inquisition to eliminate certain pages in books from the 18th century. The information appeared on an electronic discussion list of French librarians (biblio-fr) and it read like this:

SAXE, Maurice (Comte de Saxe), Histoire de Maurice, Comte de Saxe, Mitaw, 1754.

In tome I, book 1, f. 52, from “il vivoit encore” to “conservé par habitude” to be deleted. In tome II, f. 352, from “il y porta les sentiments” to “dernier soupir de sa vie” to be deleted, and in f. 1354, from “est la victoire” to “sur le Monde” to be deleted.

In *The Political Testament of Mr. De Vauban*, where this gentleman describes the ways to make the life easier for the peoples of this flourishing kingdom [Spain, our note], published in 1707, in fol. 89 tome I, from “C’est la dernière des injustices” to “le Tribunal plus violent du Monde” have to be deleted.

We don't know for sure why¹, but censorship was always used to protect some official wooden language and its productions. So, we can assume that the fragments which had to be eliminated were heretical in some manner; otherwise there would have been no reason for them to appear in *Index Prohibitorum*, published in Madrid, in 1790.

In the 1930s, in Germany, where the crisis had stroke hard, the masses needed some explanations and some solutions. They weren't to think too much, some leader had to come and tell them why and how. This could be the explanation for the success of the anti-Semitic discourse as well as of the incentive discourse about their "vital space" they had to get from the others: the questions received answers and there was not that much cognitive dissonance. The common enemy was designated in terms of "inferior race" (the Jews, mainly) as opposed to the "superior race", the Arians (the Germans), and the solution came in terms whose general meaning lead to the possibility of using them in all discourses without really describing the horror the Nazi regime was hiding beneath it: "vital space", "final solution" etc.

The communism brought the use of a new wooden language, very similar to Orwell's *newspeak*: masses were supposed to listen and then to repeat indefinitely words and sentences which had lost their capacity to mean anything at all. Imposed in troubled times, the communist era based its discourse on promises and solutions that could fascinate and animate the masses starting – like the Nazi's discourse – in a Manichaeistic way, from a delimitation between the people (good) and the people's enemies (bad), the latest being whoever the official leaders wanted them to be. Masses were taught "to do everything possible" to achieve the goals set up by the unique party, "to be alert and never let people's enemy to spoil the new society" and "to follow the party in all the ways, all the way", "to do everything (required)".

So, following incomplete readings, Spanish Christians from the 18th century were kept close to the letter to the way promoted by the

¹ It is but a way of speaking, as censorship is not the main interest of this study. In fact, we know: any totalitarian regime is eager to control mass communication because of the impact it has on the mentality of the population. Talking of journalism only, Marc Paillet (in his *Le Journalisme*) describes this instrument of mass communication as a group of people gathering and editing news worthy information and a machine that multiplies and distributes simultaneously the product of their work to a large number of people, making them all aware of the fact that a lot of other people have received that piece of information in the same time with them. This is what gives mass communication an immense power and this is why censorship is required: to avoid heretical ideas touching the common spirit of a given population.

Inquisition; by presenting Jewish ethnics as source of the catastrophic situation in their country as well as the right of a “superior race” to rule the world, Germans were kept closer to the ideas promoted by the Nazi regime, hunting Jews and invading countries; through discourses full of promises of a heavenly life within the communist system, the masses in the communist countries were kept under the influence of the respective communist parties, willingly participating in all kinds of horrors in the advantage of the political leaders and also willingly spreading the word of the communist party. In all those historical situations, the leading institutions were not the only users of the wooden language in place. Everyone was expected to speak within the limits of the official language, a wooden code, making the free expression practically impossible.

In all three cases – and in many other as well – there were discourses in wooden languages, imposing a certain political correctness regarding the use of a speech code, which was protected by the bias of censorship (as explained in Note 1, p. 1).

Looking at this problem from a historical point of view, without attempting to rigorously retrace the history of the concept itself, we find that political correctness is imposed and demanded in all seriousness, in any situation when a dogmatic approach to a belief or a doctrine is provided. Thus, a belief or a doctrine, among those officially instituted within a social framework (by a religion, an ideology, or any other type of organization or institution, seen as an undeniable and irrefutable authority), no longer stands the chance of being questioned. It becomes a dogma, and nobody wonders anymore how its principles could be interpreted or expressed otherwise. All is reduced to a ritual governed by rules, which is no longer understood, not even by the persons who use it in order to dominate the others. It is almost the same situation as in Orwell’s *1984*: here, *newspeak* tended to become the only language spoken in the whole world. Its vocabulary was getting increasingly smaller, since it was no longer allowed – and, consequently, no longer necessary – to communicate on whatever topic would have crossed one’s mind.

Wooden languages are former speech codes some given society or group had set up for different purposes. At the beginning, this could have been in order to narrow the possibility for outsiders to decode discourses circulating within the members of that society or group; this could have been to avoid using terms or sentences whose ambiguity could have lead to misunderstanding the discourse; this could have been to differentiate that given society or group from other societies or groups; this could have been to create, through the endless reiteration of the same formulas, habits

of expression and, by that, habits of thinking among the members of the given society or group, etc. It seems that the wooden language issue is all about speech codes and political correctness.

The use of a speech code, day after day, all the time, makes it decay because speech codes have no dynamics, while life is nothing if not dynamics. So, there comes a time where the code shows its limitations as for expressing life, even taken the latter by segments. In such moments two ways out seem to be the general options: either the group agree to update the code, or they fake normality and keep going on using the code as if it were still functional. This second option leads to wooden language. Once in place, the wooden language will be nothing but a vehicle for fake communication.

We should remember that there is no linguistic code that could cover all what us humans need in order to communicate. If not strictly functional – as in some domain of human activity – a code proves unable to serve all purposes, as pointed out a few paragraphs before. Forcing a code to cover all purposes in communication is unnatural. Even codes pertaining to what is known as politically correct language prove to be unnatural, simply because they cut down the otherwise unlimited possibilities of expression each of us has, virtually, “at hand” in any moment. The good thing is that the codes change in time and yesterday politically correct codes become today’s objects of irony (or worse, of mockery!). The beauty of language lies, among other things, in the possibility for any user to give a particular, sometimes idiosyncratic or even astonishing meaning to some otherwise well known linguistic expression as well as in the possibility of assembling linguistic signs in the most unexpected constructions. Take the poets, for example, with their talent to create new worlds just by making unexpected uses of our ordinary words¹. In fact, most fiction relies on this. For example, the formal public discourse of kings and queens passing their judgments on their subjects was, in the past, very serious, yet limited, made of formulas generating dramatic situations. It is not the same effect a formula like “off with her head” has when shouted out by the Queen of Spades in the wonderland Alice discovers by stepping through the looking glass.

I owe you here (and myself) a parenthesis: in terms of possibilities, the language structures (even those considered to belong to wooden language) are part of our common thesaurus (those historical

¹ See on that Eugeniu Coseriu, Teze despre tema „limbaj și poezie”. In Eugeniu Coșeriu. 2009. *Omul și limbajul său: studii de filosofie a limbajului, teorie a limbii și lingvistică generală*. Antologie, argument, note, bibliografie și indici de Dorel Fînar, 161-166. Iași: Editura Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza.

languages that serve each of them some linguistic community). The use of these structures within speech will be decided by the speaker and observed by the listener. What can be repeated is the linguistic segment and not the utterance, the speech. This is why we are talking about *wooden language* and not about *wooden speech*. And we can also notice here that the same language segments can be used seriously or in a mocking manner, in different utterances. The discourse may carry the same linguistic elements as other speeches before its production; but, since it implies contextualization and a communication contract, it will “say” something different each time, it will mean something else each time and will be a new, unrepeatable act.

Wooden language, once in place, will be the politically correct way of expression for the people involved in the “agreement” concerning the use of the speech code. Conversely, any other way of expressing oneself would be considered politically incorrect and, if intended public speech, would be banished by the censorship.

3. Speech codes and speech codes users

At this point, we need to see how speech codes are related to wooden language. Speech codes are set up. They are set up by leading individuals, by institutions, by organizations, by State’s bodies, etc. At first, they are seen as a solution for group discipline, for group cohesion, for group efficiency, but also as a way of discrimination against other groups or against the surrounding population as a whole. Phrases which are used to put in place a whole ritual (a discursive ritual) can be such as: “we shall refer to this by the phrase X”, or “in such situations, we shall never use the word X”, or even “we shall never use the term X; instead, we’ll say Y, for this is the right word that represents us”. Speech codes can also be implemented “smoothly” by the bias of mass-media or of other opinion makers: well articulated discourses could become “in fashion” and then spread almost the same textual content. Carried out with persistence, such action would eventually institute a certain common code. As we can see above, groups or societies set up speech codes for identification reasons, to delimitate themselves from other groups/societies, but also because their leaders find it to be an easier way to a goal (which is their own more than of the whole group/society), or even because those leaders’ lack of humor, as pointed out by David

Sedaris in an interview about political correctness¹. Once embraced by all the members, the code will be their language until when they feel like losing contact with the real world because of the scarcity of means of expression against a too vast, too colorful, too complex world we all have to face (while being part of it, too).

As for the identification², there will be *us* and *them*, according to the “right” position with reference to the code: one can be either in or out the group simply by accepting/using a speech code or not.

With respect to speech codes any wooden language is made of, speakers fall into two categories: (1) those who use them and (2) those who don't. Speakers who use an established speech code could also be of two types: (1.1) those who do believe in their hearts that the code is right and that it serves one hundred percent the needs of expression of the given group or society they are members of and (1.2) those who don't believe this at all. Individuals from the first type internalize the code, they let it penetrate them, till beneath their reason and become part of their mentality. It is something Michael Billig explains through his rhetorical perspective over the social psychology: prejudices and stereotypes mark the way people reason, always under social pressure³. Individuals from the second type keep all this at the behavioral level: they don't believe it, they don't believe in it and all they need to do is fake the respect of the code to enjoy the benefits of being part of a group they have chosen to belong to. Nobody can tell the difference between those of the first type and those of the second type as long as the latter ones play their role without a flaw (fake only disappoints when found out). It is like there was no difference between the two kinds of individuals. They are part of the same group, they behave similarly (even for the linguistic aspect of their

¹ *Ce a căutat un faimos umorist american la București. Avertisment: interviu foarte incorect politic* de Vlad Mixich, HotNews.ro, Luni, 29 decembrie 2014 (eng.: What is a famous American humorist doing in Bucharest. Attention: this is a very politically incorrect interview, by Vlad Mixich).

² As in: Ashli A. Quesinberry. 2004. "Identification" in *Encyclopedia of Public Relations*. SAGE Publications. 1 May. 2010. http://www.sage-reference.com/publicrelations/Article_n207.html; as well as in: Basil Bernstein. 1996. *Pedagogy, symbolic control and identity: theory, research, critique* (revised edition), London: Taylor & Francis.

³ As in: Michael Billig. 1992. *Ideology and Opinions: Studies in Rhetorical Psychology* (Loughborough Studies in Communication and Discourse). London: Sage Publ.; as well as in: Michael Billig. 1996. *Arguing and thinking: a rhetorical approach to social psychology* (new edition). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

behavior, as they use the same speech code), they interact with one another as if they were all of just one kind.

In other words, in a given group, described by the use of a certain speech code, there will be people who identify themselves with the norms and values contained in that speech code and who came to appropriate the “newspeak” such that they feel their entire life being well represented within its limits (1.1 here above). These are not simple minded, stupid people, but individuals whose life experience brought them to a state of mind where they need some kind of a safe way in life, well protected by strong, clear boundaries and who feel no cognitive dissonance between their beliefs and the discourse they fall under. On the other hand, there are people who feel just fine as members of the group (or who have no other alternative) and who would keep it that way even if they know the code has reached its limits and this is what makes them uncomfortable as for means of expression. These individuals identify themselves only partially with the group, but they will fake for the rest (1.2 here above). They are not smarter than those described under (1.1). They just live in a larger language and they know it. Their life experience helps them remain free from any boundary. They are not necessarily happier than the previously described ones, but exceeding the code limits (even if it is but in their minds) gives them much more options and make them live much more numerous experiences, good and bad, but different. It sounds great, but it can be risky. Those individuals do not betray their group: they know more, but they don’t show it. For them, it is more important to stay in the group than proving different. We can see that speech codes function within a discrimination program: some people know the code and live by it, some people don’t. Then there will always be some people obeying to the code based on conviction (those who think that “only saying the right things is right”) and there will be also those who take it as a game where saying the generally accepted things make you win (these are the ones who know that behavior is not about being true, but about coping with the situation).

Then come the libertines (2.1), those who fight the code by using free speech, overtly, making this be their glory; finally, there will always be people making mistakes by ignorance, failing to keep and follow the rules, meaning that they genuinely cannot follow the code (2.2). And there are also those who pick a code and use it in a different context, with different meanings, just for laughing and being ironic to the society or group who first set it up and used it seriously (2.3).

Codes are sometimes used to shorten the way from the problem to its solution – like in the O. R. or in the military – and it happens in closed,

well regulated universes, where changes are not expected to occur. If used in normal, common universes, the same codes fail to serve all purposes and it is wrong to keep them as common language to be used in day by day communication.

Let's not fool ourselves! Using language, even under the form of codes, does not mean for everyone that they really know the meaning of each term, nor does it mean that they had internalized the meanings of the words or of the code itself. Then, there is the social convenience, with its norms, which one can respect without believing they are rational, nor right, not even normal. Speaking, using language is a behavior. One can genuinely obey to its rules, but one can also fake it. On the other hand, one can disobey those rules, just to make a point.

What happens then? What happens in time?

Linguists, anthropologists and semioticians agree on the idea that talking serves as a bias in a "game of make believe"¹. Beyond the acceptable limits, where wooden language took over lives, talking does not convey anything, it is just senseless.

And yet, the anthropology of communication, the theories of discourse and semiotics tell us that even senseless discourse can communicate something, relying on the fact that the target (the addressee) will have to try to find answers to questions like: "why is he telling me that, like this, here and now?". It is not the actual uttered words, but the fact that those words were uttered at a certain moment, in some particular place, by a particular addresser having a particular relation with the addressee. Decoding all this (and sometimes much more than this) the addressee will extract some meaning from the discursive intervention. There will certainly be communication there, but we can easily see that decoding, as a personal, subjective operation, will lead to very numerous different results. The most important thing to note here is that senseless phrases can make sense as utterances. So, even wooden language in use can make sense for the hearers: the believers will take it to the letter, what is said being the very meaning of the words and phrases, while the non believers will extract other meanings, also useful in interpreting a state of the affair. Effects of such discourses will be different for the two kinds of

¹ See on that: Eugeniu Coșeriu. 2009. *Omul și limbajul său: studii de filosofie a limbajului, teorie a limbii și lingvistică generală*. Antologie, argument, note, bibliografie și indici de Dorel Finaru. Iași: Editura Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza; Dan Sperber. 1995. "How do we communicate?" In *How things are: A science toolkit for the mind*, edited by John Brockman and Katinka Matson, 191-199. New York: Morrow; Umberto Eco. 1982. *Tratat de semiotică generală*. București: Editura Științifică și Enciclopedică.

hearers. The believers will feel stronger and adequate; they will find in wooden language's phrases the confirmation of their option, the (mainly emotional) support for their beliefs. The non believers will find in the discourse either confirmation of their strategy of faking the adherence to the group, or refutation of their position and strategy, which means that they have to correct their behavior, not to alert the group. Morally, these individuals accept duplicity as a way in life, but this is not the point here. Certainly, there will also be outsiders receiving the discourse in wooden language. They don't have to fake anything, as they don't belong to the group which had agreed on using the speech code that turned into wooden language. In totalitarian regimes, these are the dissidents. If they use the official speech code, it is for laughing and mocking the regime only. The social antibodies functioned, nevertheless, even within the societies oppressed by the stupidest impositions, such as the obligation to use the wooden language in social life, as an expression of political correctness. For example, during the communist period, the wooden language was already used within small groups to criticize the regime, and the humour thus created was a high quality one. Then, some of the journalists could amuse themselves by competing in finding each day more and more hilarious formulas of the communist wooden language, aiming to amuse their intelligent anti-communism readers. The short period in which the wooden language of the communist regimes was taken seriously, in the true spirit of the political correctness, was avenged by a long period in which the same wooden language was ironically used, in order to satirize the *politricks* and in particular the *culturniks*.

"Everything is for the man" was a well known phrase from the communist wooden language. When a popular character from our subversive jokes was asked by his teacher whom everything was for, he gave the right answer (the phrase above), but then he insisted: Madam, could I have another A if I disclose the name of that man? It was clearly evoking the name of the dictator of that time in Romania.

"Long live the socialism, precursor of the communism!" was a slogan very present in public spaces. There was this joke saying that a slave during Caesar's Roman Empire was seen holding a banner which read "Long leave the slave-system, precursor of the feudalism!" That was a way to show that eras of social systems were all transient and so was the communism.

"The land belongs to those who labor it" was a phrase from the political program of the communist regime. "But the crop does not" was the comment of the ironic dissidents.

But the users can also be from outside the regime, like in the following story: during the Cold War, the Western World would make fun of two Soviet periodicals, *Izvestja* (Bulletin) and *Novosti* (News), and jokes like “*Izvestja*¹ heralds no news” or “Nothing new in *Novosti*²” were highly popular.

Some people would enter the game unconsciously and willingly, some would enter the game perfectly consciously and also willingly, some would delicately refuse to enter the game, and some would make their glory of loudly refusing to enter the game. We only described four categories, but we could go deeper, by multiplying the number of categories or by describing subcategories for the four categories above. Someone could, for example, use his group’s wooden language to keep the other members in a frozen setting, to his own advantage, while somebody else could use the same language, in the same group, to prove himself obedient and reliable, and they will fall in two different subcategories of the first of the categories above.

4. Using language as communicative behavior

Consider the following scene from the film *She’s the one* (Edward Burns, director):

A father was reproaching one of his sons the idea of planning to get divorced, arguing that they were catholic and this was not in their religion. The son replied by reminding to his father that he (the father) didn’t believe in God and then the father answered:”It’s true, I don’t, but this doesn’t mean I cannot be a good catholic!”.

It’s all in the behavior! One can present himself as a different person from what he really is, provided that he uses rightly the right speech code and the proper ritual.

Let’s consider now the passage from speech codes to wooden language. Assuming the code as a necessary means to a goal (which is staying within the group), non believers will utter sentences within the daily rituals, without any conscience of really saying anything and without any expectance to understand what their respective interlocutors could tell them. It will be fake communication, but it will be registered as communication after all. It is the behavior that counts, the ritual itself,

¹ The name should translate in English as “bulletin”

² This name should translate as “news”

without any meaning of the uttered words at all. And, ironically, sometimes there will be the fake communicators, who will be promoted in the group hierarchy, as they can prove better command of the ritualic discourse (it is always easier to be politically correct when you don't really believe in the code's capacity of expression).

5. Politically incorrect uses of wooden language

To get a better perception of the connection between the concept of "wooden language" and the concept of "political correctness" we could resort to instruments pertaining to communication and information-related professions, only to signalize that acknowledged thesauri (organized for the Internet search engines) regard the two terms (*wooden language* and *political correctness*) as related: wooden languages are kept to establish a politically correct way of verbal interactions, while political correctness forces group's speakers to use the wooden language.

We will now have a look of different situations where wooden language codes are used outside the framework where they had come to existence, with quite different effects. There will be examples from the press, from the reality of 1950s America, from 1970s Chile, or from 1980s Romania, and from our days' Internet.

As far as the use of wooden language in press is concerned, I found an appealing perspective: that of seeing how the wooden language structures become instruments for the practice of irony in the journalistic discourse. Thus, I will cheer the journalists who use the wooden language, but only those – in good command of language – who make use of elements of the wooden language in order to rally, and even to mock their fellow creatures. All it takes is to read the term *Rom* spelt with three r's, in the *Academia Cațavencu* ("The Cațavencu Academy"), Romanian weekly newspaper, to understand that it is not political correctness (taken beyond the limits) that leads the journalist, but his/her wish to present the suffocation of the public space with imposed terms, instead of a rational approach to the ethnicity problem. It is also all we need for a good laugh to find, in the same journal, structures of the wooden language from the communist period in the caricatured discourse of a present-day politician (most often belonging to a particular political left wing party!): we understand that we are confronted with the ironic usage of a language that was meaningless to us for almost 50 years. The reader would recognize the patterns of the communist discourse and would understand that

someone talking like this nowadays is presented as obsolete, undeveloped, and inadequate.

The term *political correctness* together with its correlative, *wooden language*, were to reappear in the changing America of the 1950s and 1960s. Just as in the case of the totalitarian regimes, here too the two concepts were differently treated: at first, they were considered in all seriousness, and the respective terms were used with the utmost sobriety; then they became the target of ironies as well as means to rally dogmatists, those people who did not understand that the freedom of the individual cannot be separated from his/her freedom of expression. From the mid-20th century feminists and the anti-segregationists of the 1960s, we got to joke about some exaggerations deriving from the very stiffness of the proposed measures. A whole debate concerning the replacement of “Baa Baa Black Sheep” by “Baa Baa Rainbow Sheep” degenerated into jokes, some of which were really good (people required that the term *black* be forbidden in words such as “black coffee” or “blackboard”). I remember another story that circulated at the time, during the 1971 *coup d’etat* in Chile: it was about a descent of Pinochet’s forces at a scholar’s house, which ended in emptying his bookcase shelves; among the prohibited books on their list, there was also ... *Little Red Riding Hood*. During the same period, an intellectual from Iași was protecting an album in his bookcase, representing the freshly launched *Emmanuelle*, by adding “Kant” on the book cover. That intellectual was often “visited” by the agents of the Secret Police of the communist Romania (*Securitate*), who wanted to see what he had been reading lately and, as it was not prohibited to read Immanuel Kant, the visits would go well and the album would remain in his possession. The slight “deviation” from the correct spelling of Kant’s first name would go unnoticed.

As for the nowadays corporative politically correct (wooden) language, there is a story which could help in understanding what it is like. I found the proof on a site someone recommended to me and which I first visited on September 30, 2008. I used to recommend it, but I no longer do so as it has changed of content. The wooden language of trainers and corporations was targeted by jokes and mockery. Here are some samples of what was happening on that site:

“Do you keep falling asleep in staff meetings? What about those long and boring conference calls? Here's a way to change all of that:

1. Before (or during) your next meeting, seminar, or conference call, prepare your "Bullshit Bingo" card by drawing a square – I find that 5" x

5" is a good size – and dividing it into columns - five across and five down. That will give you 25 1-inch blocks.

2. Write one of the following words/phrases in each block: Synergy, Strategic fit, Core competencies, Gap analysis, Bottom line, Revisit, Take that off-line, 24/7, Out of the loop, Benchmark, Value-added, Proactive, Win-win, Think outside the box, Fast track, Result-driven, Empower (or empowerment), Knowledge base, At the end of the day, Touch base, Mindset, Client focus(ed), Ballpark, Game plan, Leverage, Cascade, Sequential or sequentially

3. Check off the appropriate block when you hear one of those words/phrases.

4. When you get five blocks horizontally, vertically, or diagonally, stand up and shout "BULLSHIT!". It is just like in Bingo games, when you score a line".

I have copied here some of the testimonials of those who put in practice the advices found on this webpage. I did it to show that it is worth finding the adequate ways to use wooden language. Here they are:

"Real Testimonials" from satisfied players, after the jump...

"I had been in the meeting for only five minutes when I won." - Adam W., Atlanta

"My attention span at meetings has improved dramatically." - David T., Orlando

"What a gas! Meetings will never be the same for me after my first win." - Dan J., New York City

"The atmosphere was tense in the last process meeting as 14 of us waited for the fifth box." - Ben G., Denver

"The speaker was stunned as eight of us screamed 'BULLSHIT!' for the third time in two hours. The Bullshit Bingo Championship will be played at the next meeting." – Ron H.

This is another case, which manifests itself as very powerful nowadays, but people don't talk about it, because it's too close to the present (in fact it is present!): it is the language of corporations, the business world's wooden language.

In all of the examples above we could notice the presence of humor. Codes begin by being used seriously, then they decay and using them seriously is no longer a serious approach. So, next we have the possibility to make fun of them. Some of us humans can do this, some

don't. The lack of humor is a sign of either genuinely failing to find it in our day by day life, or the assumed position of refusing to treat with humor what has been determined to be too serious an issue. Humor has this characteristic of being out there – in a situation, in a word, a tone, a moment, in some relation – just waiting for our spirits to get it and enjoy. When officially banished, it will still be there, but some individuals will simply not see it while some others will fake they don't see it (in order to stay in line). Only the courageous ones will continue to make fun of taboos.

6. On manipulation

As said before, at a behavioral level, there is no difference between the two kinds of group members, (1) and (2). And yet!...

There is a situation which shows they are different: it is when they are targeted by manipulative intent. When someone (individual, organization, institution, State's body, etc.) sets up to manipulate the group by using their own language, only the individuals of the first type will "bite" and follow the influencer. The individuals of the second type might follow the influencer as well, but it will be on a radically different rational basis (after understanding the enunciator's intention, they will calculate what there is to gain against what there is to lose). This kind of conscious perception tells us that there is no manipulation there (we will keep in mind that manipulation is a special kind of discursive influence which is exerted without target's awareness¹).

When we talk manipulation, we are in the realm of influencing people's activities, the realm of discursive influencing, to be precise. Now, it's a fact that any discourse produces some influence on the hearer (who can be the addressee, but also some third person being present by accident). Influences provoked by discourses are of all kind: the addresser can inform or misinform the addressee, he can trick, amuse, comfort, the addressee, he can praise, criticize, back up or menace the addressee and he can simply make some discourse just not to let a moment become awkward because of a prolonged silence (as in what we traditionally call "a British conversation"). Sometimes the addresser is set up to influence the addressee in a certain way, sometimes it just happens because of what we have just said, and there is no discourse without bearing some effect.

¹ On that: Dan S. Stoica. 2015. *Limbaĵ, discurs, comunicare*, Iași: Editura Universității Alexandru Ioan Cuza.

To understand how it works, we could have a look again to Jakobson's model of communication (which is in fact a description of language functions in a standard instance of communication). Without an equal, well balanced presence in all the instances of communication, the six functions of the language Roman Jakobson discusses are: the emotive function, the referential function, the poetic function, the connative function, the phatic function and the metalinguistic function. Each of them can be seen as related to one of the six elements any instance of communication contains: the addresser, the world around us, the message itself, the addressee, the medium of communication and the code. Utterances produced by the addresser constitute the message about something in the Universe, which is conveyed to the addressee by the means of the medium, in order to obtain some reaction from the latter one; if there are signs that the choice of words or the way they are arranged in the message do not fit the linguistic competence of the addressee, the language offers services of glossing by the bias of its metalinguistic function and the addresser enjoys the possibility of rephrasing his message as many times as necessary, until he feels he is using the same linguistic code as the addressee, with the same meaning.

Looking closer we could remark that some of the functions have a prominent subjective character, while other functions seem to be closer to the reason. Of course, the emotive, the poetic and the phatic functions are linked to the excitability. On the other hand, the referential and the metalinguistic functions seem to be more related to the reason. The connative function would be partly subjective, partly objective, meaning that it works simultaneously on emotional and on rational level. In fact, any discourse makes its effect advancing simultaneously with an emotional component and with a rational one. The two components are never in equal ratio and this made Chaïm Perelman say that a discourse makes its effect either mainly emotionally, or mainly rationally. In their *Treatise of New Rhetoric*, Perelman and Lucie Olbrechts-Tyteca proposed a discrimination among discourses' type of influence following this criterion: "emotion vs. reason". Then they proposed to name *conviction* the influence a discourse makes using mainly its rational components and to name *persuasion* the influence a discourse makes using mainly its emotional components.

The manipulation is a particular kind of discursive influence, which has as key characteristic the fact that the target does not feel like being influenced and is certain of the fact that he-she has made his own options as a free individual. Manipulation can be done either by

conviction or by persuasion. Bringing someone to the threshold of a decision by feeding him with half truths, rotten information and even falsified scenarios will make that individual feel like making a free, rational option and take a wrong decision. This would be a case of manipulation by conviction. Pushing someone to the threshold of a decision by crashing him with your personality as a speaker, or by constructing a very emotional message and/or sending him the message through a certain medium that would accentuate his emotional state might make that person take a wrong decision while believing he took the right one and, most important, believing that he'd done that by himself, with no pressure whatsoever. That would be manipulation by persuasion.

7. Manipulating wooden language users

Putting together the above information with the classification of speech codes users, we can understand that only those of the class 1.1 can be subjects of a manipulative action. In the situation of those who accept consciously to use speech codes of wooden language just to stay in line (1.2), those who rally the use of wooden language and those who use segments of some wooden language in order to make fun of past or current sins or tares (2.1 and 2.2) we are not in presence of manipulation. Those people cannot fall under the influence of a discourse, because they know what is going on and if they fake being influenced it is a conscious option and it's not natural. As for the individuals under 2.3, this is not even an issue...

The clerics from the 18th century Spain were for a large part interested in maintaining their privileges, not in maintaining and strengthening the faith. The rigid discourse of the Inquisition could only manipulate the masses, those kept in the dark and indoctrinated with the poison *du jour*. The German people, stroked by the crisis, would have believed anything their leaders would have told them as explanation or as way to take in order to get strong again. The masses in the communist countries were happy to be given attention and to have a promised Heaven on Earth within the communist system.

One could get the impression that it is always and only the masses that can be manipulated. This would be a wrong impression. Masses brake in segments sooner or later, and there will always be part of those masses moving from believers who can be manipulated to non believers who cannot be manipulated. On the surface, one could remark just a massive number of people doing what they are told to do, but a learned

observer could notice that they don't follow for the same reason and even that they are not all there to follow, some of the individuals subvertedly mocking the official, politically correct discourse.

The present study starts from a particular view of the phenomenon of manipulation and from several distinctions that could be operated among the users of any wooden language. The conclusion could be that not all the users of a given wooden language can be considered manipulated by the respective speech code.

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