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Linguistic Etiolation

in Irony, Insinuation, and Audience-Indirection

AIMS:

- to elaborate on John L. Austin's idea of linguistic etiolation
  (Austin 1975: 22 and 92; cf. Friggieri 2014)
- and use the resulting notion to discuss a few phenomena
  ($\rightarrow$ irony, insinuation, audience-indirection)
  that seem to involve the *exploitation* or even the *parasitical use* of
  normal communicative mechanisms;

- to consider whether the idea of linguistic etiolation can be used to describe
  some aspects of speech acts reporting confounding findings (Michel 2022).

PLAN:

1. Linguistic etiolation:

   → serious /etiolated communicative mode;

   → example: ironizing as a socially constituted practice (Witek 2022);

   → signalling model of communication (Green 2007, 2009, 2019);

   → local and global etiolation;

2. verbal insinuation (Camp 2018) as an etiolated speech action;

3. audience-indirect acts (McGowan 2022) as etiolated uses of language;

4. utterances reporting confounding findings, → *URCF* (Mitchel 2022).

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In sum: Austin offered a *systematic doctrine* of illocution and perlocution.

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- serious uses → illocutionary and perlocutionary acts;
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> Language in such circumstances is in special ways – intelligibly used not seriously, but in ways *parasitic* upon its normal use-ways which fall under the doctrine of the *etiolations* of language. All this we are *excluding* from consideration. (Austin 1975: 22)

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In sum: Austin offered *no systematic doctrine* of etiolation.

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- Irony / ordinary metaphors / poetical uses of language:

(1)   John is a friend.

(2)   John is a computer.

(3)   I have measured out my life with coffee spoons.

<div align="right">(T.S. Eliot, The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock)</div>

1. Linguistic etiolation

Witek (2022):

- ironizing is a socially constituted communicative practice
  that consists in performing etiolated speech actions;
    - "socially constituted" → a *procedure* for ironizing;
    - "communicative" → the *signalling* model of communication (Green 2007, 2009);
    - "etiolated" → *echoic uses* (Wilson and Sperber 2012).

(1)   John is a friend.   (2)   John is a computer.

(C1) In uttering sentence T speaker S performs a locutionary act, i.e., produces a locution whose meaning involves (i) a certain more or less determined rhetic content, (ii) illocutionary potential, and (iii) perlocutionary potential.

(C2) The locution produced by speaker S is intended not to perform its normal functions, i.e., it is intended not to constitute the performance of speech acts which lie within the limits of its illocutionary and perlocutionary potentials.

(C3) The locution produced by speaker S is intended to evoke a thought that resembles in content an aspect of its locutionary meaning.

(C4) The thought that the locution is designed to evoke is available in the context in which speaker S utters sentence T.

(C5) Speaker S harbors negative or critical feelings or attitudes towards the evoked thought.

(C6) Speaker S intends that the utterance of T will present the evoked thought in an unfavorable light.

(C7) In uttering sentence T speaker S expresses her negative feeling or attitude towards the evoked thought.

(C8) In uttering sentence T speaker S intends that the evoked thought will be presented in an unfavorable light as a result of her expressing and the hearer's recognizing the attitude mentioned in condition (C7).

1.   Linguistic etiolation

Local and global etiolation:

- using language for writing poetry;
- making an ironic comment in the course of a serious talk-exchange;
- subsentential irony.

(1)   John is a friend.

(2)   John is a computer.

(3)   I have measured out my life with coffee spoons.

(4)   I left my bag in the restaurant, and someone *kindly* walked off with it.

(Wilson and Sperber 2012: 123)

2. verbal insinuation (Camp 2018) as an etiolated speech action

(5)   I'm in a bit of a hurry. Is there any way we can settle this right now?

(5')   Can I pay you to let me off the hook?

(Pinker et al. 2006; cf. Camp 2018)

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The point of insinuation:

- to communicate a certain content without being held accountable for it;
  to convey a certain troublesome content while preserving deniability about it.

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Q₁   What is it for an act of insinuating to be communicative?

Camp:

- in uttering *U*, the driver speaker-means:
  F(P)   —   an innocuous conversational move,
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Q₂   What does the insinuating speaker communicate?

Camp:

- $M(\text{Q})$ construed as an off-record implicature;
- insinuated contents = implicatures with deniability.

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Q$_3$ How is deniability possible?

Camp:

- "(…) an insinuated speaker typically intends H to recognize their intention
  [a] that $M(Q)$ be off-record, and
  [b] that they are prepared to deny having meant $M(Q)$ if challenged." (2018: 55)

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  → a higher-order *overt* intention.

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- implicatures can be reinforced (Włodarczyk 2019);
- the "force" of insinuating:
  $\rightarrow$ an attempt to shift the responsibility for contributing $M(Q)$ from S to H;
- is this force speaker-meant?

2. verbal insinuation (Camp 2018) as an etiolated speech action

Q$_4$ What is the characteristic effect of an act of insinuating?

Camp:

- the effect of insinuating $M(Q)$ = putting $M(Q)$ off-record and thereby minimizing conversational risk ($\rightarrow$ deniability).

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Q₄ What is the characteristic effect of an act of insinuating?

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Q₅ How to represent the effect of insinuating and its off-record status?

Camp:

- the insinuated content (or the fact that is speaker-meant) is mutually recognized
  ($\rightarrow$ **MB**), but S and H are unwilling to acknowledge this;
- therefore, the effect of insinuating is not registered by **CG**;
  it is not registered by **CR** either.

  CG = "what both parties are prepared to *acknowledge* as mutually obvious" (p. 48)

  CR = "commitments that interlocutors undertake in conversations
      which they are liable for defending or executing in other contexts" (p. 59)

$$CS = \langle \underline{\textbf{MB}}, CG, CR \rangle$$

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Alternative model

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Ambivalence (Isaacs & Clark 1990)

- in insinuating $M(Q)$, S puts herself in an ambivalent speech situation or takes an ambivalent conversational stance.

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H: "Do you really want me to adopt $M(Q)$?"

(*i*) → S cannot honestly reply "No, I don't";

(*ii*) → S cannot admit "Yes, I do".

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(1)   John is a friend.

(5)   I'm in a bit of a hurry. Is there any way we can settle this right now?

SM → in saying that John is a friend, S illocutes that John is a friend;

EM → in saying that John is a friend, S evokes a contextually available thought and expresses her dissociative attitude towards it.

SM → in uttering (5), S speaker means F(P) and speaker means M(Q);

EM → in uttering (5), S speaker means F(P) and **shows** her ambivalent stance, i.e., she uses her overt pretence to make her ambivalence manifest (see Green 2007 on showing, and Isaacs & Clark on overt pretence).

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A₁ $\rightarrow$ adopting the etiolated mode ($\rightarrow$ exploiting the inferential potential of (5));

           $\rightarrow$ using one's pretence to *show* one's ambivalent communicative stance;

A₂ $\rightarrow$ S's ambivalent communicative stance

           which involves her intention to get H to adopt $M(Q)$

           and her intention to avoid responsibility for having conveyed $M(Q)$.

3. audience-indirect acts (McGowan 2022) as etiolated uses of language

Audience indirection (McGowan 2022):

- the primary aim behind *S*'s utterance is to make her words *hearable* and, as a result, *quotable / (re)used* by agents other than the official addressee.

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Overt cases of audience-indirection:

- questions asked by a lawyer in the course of a cross-examination;
- their function is "to extract from the witness answers that build up to form a 'natural' argument *for the jury*" (Levinson 1979: 381).

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Covert cases of audience-indirection:

Senator Holly

(6) So, you don't regret allowing that monster right back into society in order to re-offend and scar our children.

Indirect audience:

- an entity in Lox News (e.g., a newscaster);
- Lox News viewers.

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Ideas:

- acts of audience indirection exploits mechanisms of inferential communication (i.e., *S* takes into account what intended overhearers can infer from her words);
- the main point behind audience indirection is not speaker-meant, but shown.

4.   utterances reporting confounding findings, $\rightarrow$ URCF (Mitchel 2022).

Questions:

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  How does it communicate its specific meaning (if there is any)?
  Idea: URCFs are cases of signalling and/or showing
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THANK YOU

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