

LINGUA PRANCA

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## CONVERSATION AS PARANOIA

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This paper has arisen as a direct reaction to Allwood 1976. In his thesis, Allwood tries to show that human beings are rational and cooperative and that this is particularly true of them when they talk. This, of course, is utter nonsense. Such an absurd view can only be the result of the author's complete neglect of all serious research in the study of human behavior, such as the work of S. Potter and C. N. Parkinson. I now want to show that human communicative behavior is not guided by any principles of rationality and cooperation but rather by the UNIVERSAL PRINCIPLES OF PARANOIA.

The point of departure for the paranoia theory is the well-established fact that the primary goal of every human being is to increase his own prestige. We formulate this as an axiomatic principle.

### THE PRINCIPLE OF MAXIMIZATION OF PRESTIGE

- (1) Maximize your own prestige.

From (1), another important principle follows directly. Prestige is not an absolute but a relative concept. My prestige is always measured in relation to the prestige of the people in my environment. It follows that if their prestige is diminished, mine is increased. Hence (2):

### THE PRINCIPLE OF MINIMIZATION OF OTHER PEOPLE'S PRESTIGE

- (2) Always try to minimize other people's prestige.

From (2), we then derive the Fundamental principle of paranoia by projecting our own principles on others (i.e. we assume that other people are just as bad as ourselves):

### THE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLE OF PARANOIA

- (3) Always assume that other people are trying to get at you, even if you have good reason to believe otherwise.

(1-3) are general principles which guide human behavior. We should now proceed to the question how they apply to communicative behavior. A person who consistently follows (1) always has his own prestige as the primary goal for his communicative activities. This has a number of implications. First and foremost, a person's prestige is directly dependent on the character of the information about him that other people have at their disposal. One must therefore always see to it that the information which is spread about oneself is favorable to oneself and unfavorable to others. Hence (4) and (5).

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF FAVORABLE INFORMATION

- (4) Maximize the spread of favorable information about yourself and minimize the spread of favorable information about others.

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF UNFAVORABLE INFORMATION

- (5) Minimize the spread of unfavorable information about yourself and maximize the spread of unfavorable information about others.

(4-5) can be applied to different kinds of speech acts, e.g. as in the following principles.

- (6) Never tell the truth if it is not favorable for you or unfavorable for someone else.

In fact, (6) can be made stronger. You should not only maximize the spread of favorable information, you should try to see to it that the spread of neutral information be stopped as much as possible (since you can never be quite sure that it is not unfavorable to you). This is particularly the case for questions (Why should anyone ask a question if he did not think that the answer would be favorable for him (and unfavorable for you?)). Hence (7):

- (7) Avoid answering questions. If you cannot avoid answering them, give a misleading answer.

The fundamental principle of paranoia says that people are always trying to get at you. Consequently, you should always try to disturb their activities as much as possible (even if you cannot directly see that they are directed against you). In a conversation, it is evident that the person who has the floor has the best possibilities of attaining his goals. Hence (8):

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF MAXIMIZING TALKING, or THE FILIBUSTER PRINCIPLE

- (8) Always try to talk as much as possible, in order to keep other people from saying what they want to say.

However, in order to keep the floor, a set of further principles are necessary. To start with, you must try to keep the conversation off the track as much as possible, or else the other participants might come too close to their goals.

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF IRRELEVANCY

- (9) Make your contribution as irrelevant as possible.

But you must also keep the others from realizing that what you are saying is irrelevant, or else they could try to make you stop talking.

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Hence (10):

#### THE PRINCIPLE OF INCOMPREHENSIBILITY

(10) Make your contribution as incomprehensible as possible.

There are of course several ways of attaining one's goal. One of them is preferable since it also automatically increases your prestige. that is the principle formulated in (11):

(11) Use as many difficult words as possible.

Space does not allow me to go any further into the fascinating realm of paranoic principles. I hope that what I have said here will suffice to show that I am right and Allwood wrong, thus increasing my prestige and lowering his.

#### REFERENCE

Allwood, J. (1976): Linguistic Communication as Action and Cooperation: A study in pragmatics. Gothenburg Monographs in Linguistics 2. Dept. of Linguistics. University of Göteborg.

#### BIOGRAPHICAL NOTE

Hugo Aelgh is a *form* under which various linguists manifest themselves from time to time. This means that his actions will not always seem consistent or congruous.

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