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Persuasion and Manipulation: Relevance Across Multiple Audiences

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PERSUASION AND MANIPULATION:
RELEVANCE ACROSS MULTIPLE AUDIENCES

by

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Bachelor of Arts, Taylor University, 2004

A Thesis
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty

of the

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This thesis, submitted by Kevin Sparks in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts from the University of North Dakota, has been read by the Faculty Advisory Committee under whom the work has been done and is hereby approved.

Chairperson

This thesis meets the standards for appearance, conforms to the style and format requirements of the Graduate School of the University of North Dakota, and is hereby approved.

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ABBREVIATIONS

A	Assumption
AIG	American International Group
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
CPP	Capital Purchase Program
DJIA	Dow Jones Industrial Average
P,Q	Individual Assumptions
Rep.	Representative
TARP	Troubled Asset Relief Program
U	Utterance
US	United States of America

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ABSTRACT

A speaker who is addressing multiple audiences has split intentions. In order to derive the optimal benefit toward accomplishing her intentions, the speaker crafts her utterance to be relevant to her various audiences in different ways and to differing degrees. Similarly, the hearer will infer meaning based largely on how much he thinks that the speaker intended her utterance to be relevant to him, while also considering how the utterance may have been intended to be relevant to others. The goal of this paper is to describe how the presence of multiple audiences affects both the speaker's formation of an utterance and the hearer's interpretation of it. I particularly focus on utterances that are aimed at persuading or manipulating the speaker's various audiences. Using the framework of Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986, 1995), I analyze a hearing in which eight bank CEOs testified before the US House Committee on Financial Services regarding how they used money that the government had invested in their banks in the midst of a severe financial crisis. I show that when communicating to multiple audiences, the speaker's utterance is frequently less than fully ostensified to his various audiences. I conclude that Relevance Theory can be used to explain communicative stimuli that are less than fully ostensified by making a modification to the Relevance Theoretic notion of the presumption of optimal relevance to account for such cases of scalar ostension.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION

As technology continues to expand our available modes of communication, it has become easier and easier to communicate to multiple indeterminate audiences at the same time. In literary criticism, the notion of reader response has emphasized the fact that each reader can infer a different meaning from a single text. In a similar manner, a speaker can actually intend to mean different things to different people through a single utterance. The present study focuses on the properties of communicative utterances intended to be made manifest to multiple audiences. Specifically, I will analyze a hearing (the Hearing) in which eight Chief Executive Officers (CEOs) of financial institutions testified before the Committee of Financial Services of the US House of Representatives on February 11, 2009. Given the tendency of those involved in a political discourse to advocate for their own positions, the Hearing provides excellent examples of how speakers attempt to persuade or manipulate others simultaneously across multiple audiences. While the analysis of this particular hearing is interesting in its own right, it also serves as a useful tool to test the theoretical claims that I will make about how communication works across multiple audiences.

To begin, I will provide the context of the hearing that serves as the primary source of examples. Then, I will lay out the framework by which I will analyze persuasion and manipulation. While the primary framework for my analysis is Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986,1995), I will make several unique elaborations and applications of Relevance Theory with reference to persuasion, manipulation, and communication across multiple audiences. I will also draw on recent research surrounding epistemic vigilance

(Sperber *et al.* 2010), which concerns how people choose to accept or reject information that is communicated to them.

In addition, I will illustrate that neither persuasion nor manipulation constitutes a linguistically separate type of communication. Rather, the extent that information differs from persuasion or manipulation is based on non-linguistic features such as trust and honesty.

I will close with an extended example of how the presence of multiple audiences impacts the lexical choices of the speakers to the point that a speaker can intend a single word to have different meanings for different audiences.

Chapter 2

OVERVIEW OF THE CASE STUDY

2.1 Setting of the Financial Crisis

In banking, reputation is supreme. If a bank loses its reputation, its depositors and creditors will lose confidence in the bank's ability to meet its obligations, causing it to become illiquid (unable to meet its short-term obligations) and, therefore, to fail. When a bank fails, the bank's shareholders will be the first people to lose all of their financial interest in the bank. Essentially, the shares (fractional ownership) of a failed bank are worthless; that is, there is no benefit in owning part of a bank that is not worth anything even when taken as a whole. If a bank is in danger of failing, there are multiple options that could be pursued: (1) a more healthy bank could acquire the failing bank, thus causing no loss to depositors and creditors but a substantial—if not complete—loss to the shareholders; (2) the government or another private lender could provide emergency loans to the troubled bank; or (3) the bank could declare bankruptcy, which will typically result in a complete loss to shareholders, a substantial loss to creditors (entities to whom the bank owes money), and perhaps a loss to depositors whose accounts exceed the face value of any insurance on the deposits.

Another important characteristic of the banking industry is that companies are inter-related. Banks lend money to each other and participate in other related transactions that are dependent on each entity fulfilling its own part of the deal. Thus, the failure of a large bank could be so detrimental that it could cause other banks to fail as well because the large

bank would be unable to fulfill its obligations to the other banks. This is known as systemic risk (risk to the entire financial system that is inherent to the nature of how the banks are interrelated) and is illustrated well by the image of a domino effect, in which the falling of the first domino causes many others dominos to fall as well. The notion of systemic risk is also illustrated by the phrase “too big to fail.” According to the too-big-to-fail philosophy, the government knows that the failure of very large financial institutions would cause a domino effect throughout the financial system, thus crippling the economy. As a result—so the theory goes—the government will not allow banks to fail if it believes that the bank’s failure would be crippling to the overall economy; rather, the government will either rescue the potentially failing bank by providing it with loans, equity, or by forcing it to be acquired by a healthier bank.

In September 2008, there was a severe disruption in the US financial markets. This disruption was marked by the failure of multiple large banks and by the federal government coming to the rescue of some specific institutions but also to the entire financial system as a whole. Without going into too many details, one way in which the government tried to stabilize the financial system was by purchasing \$205 billion in preferred stock in various financial institutions. This government initiative was known as the Capital Purchase Program (CPP), which was part of the broader Troubled Asset Relief Program (TARP). Of the \$205 billion in federal funds disbursed under the CPP, \$165 billion (80.5%) were disbursed to the eight institutions who participated in the first round of funding.¹ The US Secretary of the Treasury encouraged these eight institutions to participate in this program

¹ Technically, there were nine institutions that received funds in the first round of funding. However, by the time of the Hearing, two of the banks had merged: Bank of America had acquired Merrill Lynch. Because the merger was agreed upon prior to the receipt of CPP funds, I have included the funds received by Merrill Lynch in the total of funds received by Bank of America. See Table 1, Page 5.

whether or not they thought they needed the money in a desire to strengthen the whole financial system.

Table 1. List of 8 Banks that Participated in the Hearing

Bank Name	CEO Name	CPP funds received (\$ billion)
Goldman Sachs	Lloyd Blankfein	10
JP Morgan Chase	James Dimon	25
Bank of New York Mellon	Robert Kelly	3
Bank of America	Ken Lewis	45
State Street Corp.	Ronald Logue	2
Morgan Stanley	John Mack	10
Citigroup	Vikram Pandit	45
Wells Fargo	John Stumpf	25
Subtotal (8 banks from the Hearing)		165
Plus: Total funds to other banks ²		40
Total CPP funds:		205
First 8 banks as a % of total CPP funds		80.50%

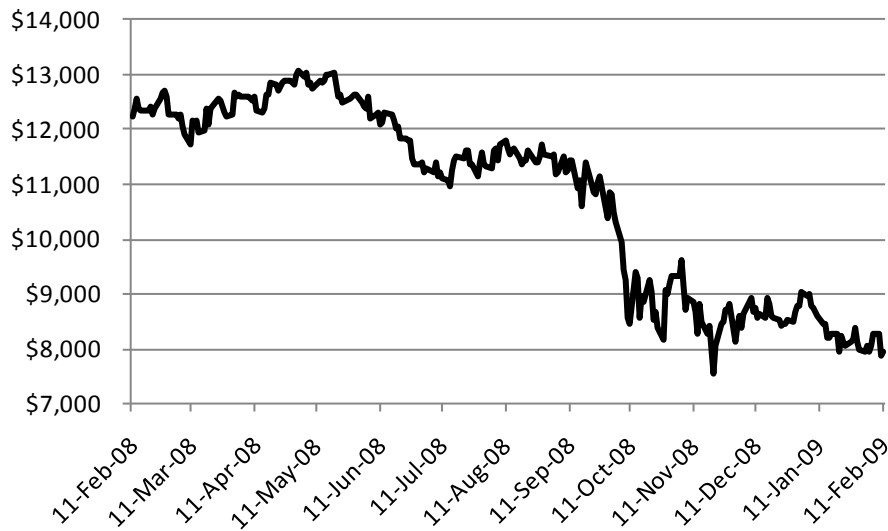
In essence, the government became a shareholder of financial institutions on behalf of the US taxpayers. By investing directly in the banks, the government hoped to minimize public fear that various banks would fail while also providing the banks with additional funds that, in theory, they would then lend to the public. As a result of the financial crisis, it had become increasingly difficult for individuals and companies to obtain credit. Investing money in the banks was one way that the government hoped to meet the public's needs for credit.

The financial crisis affected the general public as well. As a frame of reference, the Dow Jones Industrial Average (DJIA), which is used as a barometer to measure the value of the US stock market, decreased drastically during the financial crisis. During the one-year

² Total funds to other banks exclude funds provided to American International Group (AIG).

period illustrated in Figure 1 below, the DJIA's closing price ranged from a high of \$13,058 on May 2, 2008 to a low of \$7,552 on November 20, 2008, which is a decline of 42%.

Figure 1. Closing Price of the DJIA (Feb 11, 2008 – Feb 11, 2009)



The rapid decline in stock prices drastically reduced or erased the savings of millions of US citizens, not to mention pension funds and other investors. In addition to the drastic reduction in personal wealth, US businesses and citizens had a very difficult time in obtaining credit to finance their business operations, home or automobile purchases, education expenses, etc.

While the Representatives and the CEOs were communicating directly with each other during the Hearing, they also had indirect audiences that they were trying to please. To begin, the members of the US House of Representatives are elected by the voters in the areas that they represent. Consequently, the Representatives have a high level of motivation to please their constituents, who have the power to vote them out of office during the next elections. (US Representatives serve two-year terms.)

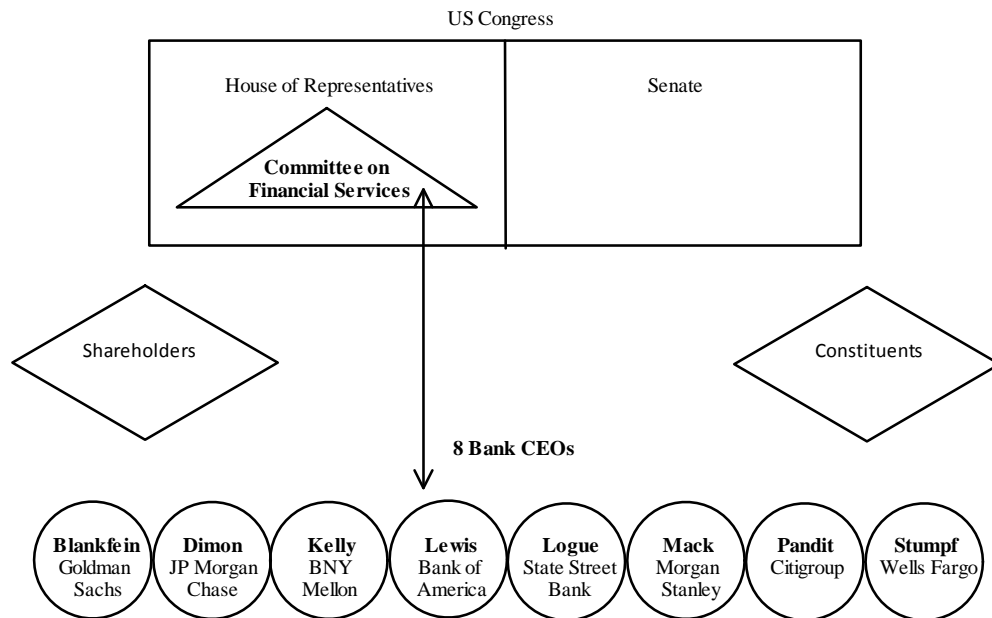
A key indirect audience of the bank CEOs includes all individuals who invest in the stock market, including those who own shares in various financial institutions. The shareholders of a company are the ones who own the company. They vote to elect a company's Board of Directors, which in turn hires and fires management and sets the management's compensation. Shareholders expect to earn returns on their investment in a company. If a company is not doing well, shareholders will sell their stock to avoid losses or seek better gains. The CEO of a company, therefore, has as a primary obligation to maximize the value created for the shareholders. If a CEO fails his shareholders, he will likely be fired. Not only so, but also a CEO's compensation is typically linked somehow to the stock price of the company. Indeed, the CEO often receives much of his compensation in stock or stock options, thus linking the CEO's personal wealth to the price of the company's stock. Consequently, a CEO has a high motivation to please his shareholders.

2.2 Setting of the Hearing

At the request of the House Committee on Financial Services (House Committee), the CEOs of the first eight financial institutions to receive CPP funds testified before the House Committee on February 11, 2009. They appeared before the House Committee to testify about how they used the money that the government had invested in their respective institutions.

Given that my goal is to analyze how communication works across multiple audiences, some key factors to consider are (1) who are the audiences and (2) what are their goals. Given the many potential audiences and goals, the present study will focus on four key groups and one of their conflicting goals. The four groups include the two groups of interlocutors, the Representatives and the eight bank CEOs, and two of the indirect audiences, the constituents of the Representatives and the shareholders of the eight banks (See Figure 2 below).

Figure 2. A Diagram of the Major Participants and Audiences



The direct communicators in the hearing are members of the House Committee (“Representatives”) and the eight bank CEOs. At the time of the Hearing, 61 members of the House Committee were present: 39 Democrats and 22 Republicans.³ Although the Representatives have some interest in the stated purpose of the meeting, they are much more interested in appealing to their constituents. A continual dilemma for a democratic republic like the United States is the quest of those who are elected to be re-elected. Thus, regardless of whom they are addressing, a chief goal of the Representatives is to please their constituents.⁴ Henry Paulson, the Secretary of the US Treasury during the onset of the financial crisis, described the futility of congressional hearings as follows: “I considered congressional hearings to be a waste of time. I’d never seen any piece of legislation get done

³ Democrats and Republicans are the two dominant political parties in the US.

⁴ Granted, I am painting a broad stereotype that does not hold true for each Representative in each conversation. However, to a large extent, the desire to please constituents is a major constraint on their communicative choices.

there, never saw any compromise get worked out at a hearing. I only saw politicians making statements meant to be seen back home” (Paulson 2011:149-150). After a specific hearing, Paulson credited the politicians’ comments as causing a 26-27% decline in the stock prices of two companies that were the subjects of the hearing (2011:151). Contrary to the inefficiency of public hearings, Paulson often found that he was able to accomplish a lot in private meetings with members of Congress.

Whereas the Representatives want to please their constituents, the CEOs desire to please their shareholders. They are careful guardians of their institutions’ reputation. They desire to portray their institutions as financially strong, their leadership as competent, and their conduct as ethical. A material disclosure of weakness could ruin an institution’s reputation and possibly cause it to fail. At the very least, a failure to protect the shareholders’ interests would cause the institution’s stock price to decline, thus reducing shareholder value.

While the CEOs and Representatives have a myriad of differing goals, I will focus specifically on their respective goals to control public opinion regarding the nature of the government’s Capital Purchase Program (CPP). On the one side, the Representatives tend to portray the CPP as a bailout: The government came to the rescue of financially irresponsible and greedy bankers for the dutiful protection of citizens on whose behalf the Representatives are faithfully serving. On the other side, the bankers sidestep any notion of wrongdoing or weakness, portraying their institutions as financially strong and ethically responsible. Rather than being bailed out by the government, the CEOs cooperated with the government to protect the interests of the American people.

What is at stake is public opinion, which affects both how people vote and how people invest. Given the differing goals of the interlocutors, this hearing provides an excellent opportunity to examine the nature of persuasion and manipulation. Since manipulation and

persuasion are more nuanced and precise types of communication, however, it is first necessary to place these types of communication within a broader communicative framework, namely that of Relevance Theory (Sperber and Wilson 1986, 1995).

Chapter 3

RELEVANCE THEORY

3.1 Speaker Meaning

In language use, at least two parties are involved: a speaker and a hearer. Even in the case of talking to oneself or writing a personal diary for one's own private use (or even consciously processing internal thoughts), there is still both a speaker and her audience, albeit that these two roles are filled by the same person. Given that an utterance has both a speaker and a hearer, the understanding of the utterance must be examined both from the speaker's and the hearer's perspectives.

Stereotypical cases of informing include showing someone something (direct evidence) and telling someone something (indirect evidence). If a speaker wants to inform a hearer that his favorite drinking glass has been broken, she can either show him the broken pieces of his drinking glass or state (1).

1. "Your favorite drinking glass has been broken."

The hearer's understanding that his favorite glass has been broken is dependent on his ability either to recognize the broken pieces of glass (direct evidence) or to trust the speaker's competence and honesty in uttering (1), "Your favorite drinking glass has been broken" (indirect evidence). In the case of the indirect evidence, we might say that the speaker meant for the following to happen as a result of her utterance:

2. The hearer holds the following assumption as true: "My favorite drinking glass has been broken."

Another way to describe what the speaker meant in the utterance (1) is as follows:

3. (a) The speaker intended her utterance (1) to produce a response (2).
- (b) The speaker intended for the hearer to recognize her intention (3a).
- (c) The hearer's recognition of the speaker's intention (3b) served as at least part of the reason for the hearer's response (2).

The formulation of (3a-c) above follows along the lines of Grice's definition of speaker meaning: "Perhaps we may sum up what is necessary for A to mean something by x as follows. A must intend to induce by x a belief in an audience, and he must also intend his utterance to be recognized as so intended" (1957:383; see also Strawson 2002:120).

Sperber and Wilson further refine Grice's notion of speaker meaning by describing the speaker's intentions as follows (1995:29):

4. (a) Informative intention: to inform the audience of something
- (b) Communicative intention: to inform the audience of one's informative intention.

In their model, the informative intention (4a) is similar to the Gricean model in (3a), while the communicative intention (4b) resembles (3b). Sperber and Wilson purposefully exclude the equivalent of (3c) from being part of speaker meaning because (3c) is dependent on (3a) actually happening. If the hearer fails to believe that his favorite glass has been broken, despite the utterance of the speaker, then the informative intention will have gone unfulfilled. Thus, contrary to Grice's notion of meaning, what the speaker actually means by an utterance is independent of the consequences of her utterance.

In the case of the broken drinking glass, let us suppose that, at the time of the speaker's utterance, the hearer was distracted by some other thought and did not understand what the speaker was trying to tell him. In this case, both the communicative intention and the informative intention will have gone unfulfilled. The communicative intention will be fulfilled only to the extent that a hearer understands a speaker's meaning. The informative

intention, on the other hand, will be fulfilled to the extent that the hearer accepts the speaker's meaning and adopts the relevant assumptions into his own view of the world.

Again, the actual fulfillment of the speaker's intentions is independent of her meaning. The very fact that a speaker's intentions can go unfulfilled is enough to show that human communication is more than just the encoding and decoding of information. Words are not codes for static representations of ideas; after all, each individual has different mental associations with words, and the meaning of a word can change in different contexts (Carston 2002, Moreno 2007, Wilson 2003, Wilson and Carston 2007). Although human communication often results in misunderstandings, people must experience a great deal of success at it, or they would have abandoned it (Sperber 2001). As Sperber and Wilson note, "Failures in communication are to be expected: what is mysterious and requires explanation is not failure but success" (1995:45). The key heuristic to understanding human communication is the principle of relevance.

3.2 The Principle of Relevance

People communicate at a risk. For example, the speaker risks being misunderstood, while the hearer risks misunderstanding what the speaker uttered. Not only are there risks in communication, but there are also costs. The speaker exerts effort in formulating and delivering her utterance, and the hearer exerts effort in receiving and processing the utterance. Those who make investments with inherent risks do so in the hope of a possible or expected benefit. In the sphere of communication, the expected benefits include the following: "For the addressee, the normally expected benefit is to acquire some true and relevant information. For the communicator, it is to produce some intended effect in the addressee" (Sperber *et al.* 2010:360). These costs and benefits are coordinated by the same underlying principle: the principle of relevance (Sperber and Wilson 1986, 1995).

Sperber and Wilson have proposed two complementary principles of relevance: one cognitive and the other communicative. According to the cognitive principle of relevance, human cognition is naturally wired to maximize the amount of relevant information to an individual. People adjust their attention to various stimuli based on their perceived notion of benefit from these stimuli. When processing a specific utterance, the hearer processes the utterance efficiently, following the Relevance Theoretic comprehension procedure (Wilson and Sperber 2004:613):

5. (a) Follow a path of least effort in computing cognitive effects: Test interpretive hypotheses (disambiguations, reference resolutions, implicatures, etc.) in order of accessibility.
- (b) Stop when your expectations of relevance are satisfied.

The cognitive principle of relevance contrasts with theories of communication that posit that a hearer first entertains a literal meaning before entertaining a figurative meaning. Instead, the cognitive principle of relevance posits that a hearer naturally chooses the interpretation that satisfies his expectation of relevance. For example, consider the following exchange between Rep. Grayson and Citigroup CEO Vikram Pandit (Hearing:95)⁵:

6. (a) Rep. Grayson: Have you heard the phrase, Mr. Pandit, “Heads, I win; tails, you lose?”
- (b) Mr. Pandit: I appreciate that, Congressman. I don’t think it applies here.

In his remarks, Rep. Grayson accused Citigroup of trying to cheat the US government—and therefore the US taxpayers—by entering into an arrangement whereby Citigroup would be assured a benefit while the US government would be assured a loss. While Rep. Grayson phrased his accusation as a question—likely so that he could deny making an accusation if

⁵ For direct quotations from the transcript of the Hearing, I will simply list *Hearing* and the page number in the in-text citation. The full citation is in the Reference section.

so accused, Mr. Pandit successfully interpreted the utterance as an accusation. Rather than answering his question, Mr. Pandit denied the accusation, saying, "I don't think it applies here" (6b). According to the cognitive principle of relevance, Mr. Pandit did not have to reject the literal interpretation of this utterance's propositional form (a question) before assigning a different illocutionary force to the utterance. Mr. Pandit had no reason to believe that a literal answer to Rep. Grayson's question (whether or not he had ever heard of a certain phrase) would have been relevant to either the inquirer or any other indirect audience. On the other hand, the interpretation as an accusation would have been both immediately accessible and relevant to everyone. Therefore, Mr. Pandit understood Rep. Grayson's utterance as an accusation without first entertaining and dismissing a literal interpretation.

The cognitive principle of relevance forms the basis for a second, or communicative, principle of relevance, which states that every act of ostensive communication communicates (1) that it is worth the hearer's processing effort and (2) that it is designed to achieve the optimal amount of relevance for the hearer (net effect of processing costs and cognitive benefits), constrained by the speaker's own abilities and preferences. At first, this might sound as though the speaker is expected to act to her own disadvantage in order to accommodate the hearer, but it actually says that the speaker will act in her own best interests. As stated earlier, the speaker's communicative motivation is to produce an intended effect in her audience. Therefore, the speaker is motivated to produce a stimulus that will most effectively and efficiently enable the hearer to infer her intended meaning. If her utterance is too difficult to process, then the hearer will abandon his processing of it as soon as he believes that it is no longer worth his effort. Of course, a speaker invests only as much effort into formulating an utterance as she expects her efforts to help her achieve her own goals. Similarly, a hearer does not expect a speaker to utter something that runs

contrary to her own goals, abilities, or preferences. The communicative principle of relevance is motivated by the fact that both the speaker and the hearer are presumed to be pursuing their own best interests.

However, in order for a speaker to presume that her ostensive act of communication will be worth the hearer's attention and processing effort, she must have a reasonable expectation of what would be relevant to the hearer. Not only so, she must also have a reasonable expectation of how to produce a stimulus that would allow the hearer to recover a representation of the thought that she was trying to communicate. In other words, the communicators must have the ability to generate *metarepresentations*, (representations of other representations). For example, an intention is a representation of a desirable state of affairs. To attribute an intention to someone else is to metarepresent because it involves forming a representation in one's own mind of a representation in someone else's mind. According to Sperber (1994:187), attributing intentions to others is a defining aspect of (at least adult) human communication:

Very few animals have any meta-representational ability. There is some experimental and anecdotal evidence suggesting that chimpanzees and possibly other non-human primates do possess some such ability in a rudimentary form. What about humans? Do they have a meta-representational ability? Do birds fly? Do fish swim? Humans can no more refrain from attributing intentions than they can from batting their eyelids. The only issue regarding humans is developmental: at which age and through what stages do meta-representational abilities develop, if they are not there from the start?

These claims presume that communication is mainly an inferential process, whereby the utterance is merely a clue of the speaker's intended meaning. Just as the speaker has to make assumptions about how her stimulus will be relevant to her audience, so the hearer

has to make assumptions about how the speaker intended her utterance to be relevant. The ability to metarepresent enables human communication to be so efficient.

Continuing on the topic of metarepresentation, consider the following excerpt from Rep. Capuano's comments to the CEOs (Hearing:57):

7. Rep. Capuano (to all the CEOs): I cannot believe that no one has prosecuted you [for how your banks' complex legal structures allowed you to incur excessive risk]....my hope is that you will be answering those questions in court some day.

It would be hard for any adult to read Rep. Capuano's comments without attributing certain intentions to him, for example, that he intends the CEOs to know that he thinks their behavior was criminal (an informative intention). Even the propositional form of Rep. Capuano's utterance is itself a representation of a thought in his own mind. The utterance does not fully convey his thought but is merely an interpretation or representation of it. (For more on this, see the Underdeterminacy Thesis in Carston 2002, Moreno 2007.) The chart in Figure 3 (below) (adapted from Sperber and Wilson 1995:232; see also Carston 2002:331) maps how an utterance can be interpreted. In the right margin, I have included the mapping of the utterance from Example (7) for comparison.

pursuit to improve their understanding of the world. Since the notion of improving something is a comparative notion, it follows that some stimuli will be more relevant than others. It also follows that some things can cause relevance to increase while others cause relevance to decrease.

The main item that decreases the relevance of an utterance is the processing effort required to interpret the utterance, which is dependent on factors such as the accessibility of a given context or the processing abilities of the individual. While the cost of relevance is measured in processing effort, the benefits are measured in *cognitive effects*. Cognitive effects generally fall into one of the following three categories: (1) contextual implications, (2) contradictions of previous assumptions, or (3) the strengthening an existing assumption. All three types of cognitive effects are demonstrated clearly in the following dialogue between the Bank of America CEO Ken Lewis and Rep. Foster. Prior to Mr. Lewis' initial comment below, Rep. Foster had asked the eight CEOs about the worst-case planning scenarios that they had entertained prior to the height of the financial crisis (Hearing:90).

8. (a) Mr. Lewis: We had [adequately prepared for a] 30 percent decline in real estate prices about a year ago.
- (b) Rep. Foster: "So you saw this [financial crisis] coming and were relatively quiet about it for quite a while."
- (c) Mr. Lewis: "No."
- (d) Rep. Foster: "You gamed out a survival strategy."
- (e) Mr. Lewis: "Right."
- (f) Rep. Foster: "That is different."

Let us see how each of Mr. Lewis' comments achieved relevance for Rep. Foster. Mr. Lewis' utterance in Example (8a) achieved relevance by combining with other assumptions of Rep. Grayson to yield contextual implications. In this case, Mr. Lewis' statement about his

company's worst-case scanning scenario served as an input for the contextual implication that Rep. Foster then stated in Example (8b). The process by which Rep. Foster derived the contextual implication (8b) may have gone like this:

9. (a) Assumption (implicated premise): If one plans for a certain scenario, then he must have a reasonable expectation that the scenario will happen. (If P_1 , then Q_1)
- (b) Assumption (from Example (8a)): Mr. Lewis planned for a crisis scenario a year in advance. (P_1 , therefore Q_1 : Mr. Lewis had a reasonable expectation that the financial crisis would happen.)
- (c) Assumption (implicated premise): If Mr. Lewis had a reasonable expectation that the financial crisis would happen a year in advance and did not do anything to warn the rest of the economy, he is at least partly to blame for the financial crisis. (If Q_1 and P_2 , then Q_2 .)
- (d) Assumption (8b): Mr. Lewis did not do anything to warn the rest of the economy. (P_2)
- (e) Contextual implication from Example (8b): Mr. Lewis is at least partly to blame for the financial crisis. (Q_1 and P_2 , therefore Q_2)

To achieve relevance by means of contextual implication (as illustrated above), the processing of the utterance must combine with other assumptions to yield implications that were worth the hearer's processing effort to derive and that were not available without the premises derived from the utterance. For instance, in the Example (8) above, Rep. Foster could not have derived (8b) unless Mr. Lewis had uttered (8a).

Another type of relevance that would improve one's understanding of the world is to have a previously held assumption contradicted. This type of cognitive effect is illustrated by Mr. Lewis' response, "No," in (8c). By stating, "No," Mr. Lewis contradicted Rep. Foster's

implicated premise (8b/9e). By simply uttering “No,” Mr. Lewis did not make explicit how he was contradicting Rep. Foster’s implicated premise. He could have been contradicting one or both of Rep. Foster’s assumptions as in the following (non-exhaustive, hypothetical list):

10. (a) Contradicting (9c): As a private citizen, I have no duty to protect the rest of the country. My duty is to my company, not the US people.

(b) Contradicting (9a): Even though I planned for a worst-case scenario, I did not expect the worst-case scenario to come true. By definition, my worst-case scenario should be more pessimistic than my expected case.

As it turns out, Rep. Foster understood Ken Lewis to mean something along the lines of (10b) rather than (10a). This can be explained by Rep. Foster’s expectation of relevance. He would not expect for Ken Lewis purposefully to come across as arrogant and inconsiderate of the US people as in (10a); after all, the bankers were trying to portray themselves as morally responsible, thus shifting blame for the financial crisis off themselves. One attitude that the bankers were trying to convey was expressed succinctly earlier in the hearing by the Wells Fargo CEO, John Stumpf (Hearing:20):

11. John Stumpf: “We are Americans first, and we are bankers second.”

Thus, Rep. Foster was quickly able to infer which premise Mr. Lewis was questioning. Rep. Foster even corrected his previous implication (8b/9e) by stating (8d), “You gamed out a survival strategy then.” Mr. Lewis then responded (8e), “Right,” which provided relevance by strengthening Rep. Foster’s assumption that Mr. Lewis’ worst-case scenario was created in order to help his own company survive. Without being explicitly refuted, Rep. Foster abandoned his prior implicature that Mr. Lewis behaved irresponsibly by not warning the general public.

Some utterances do not produce cognitive effects and, therefore, do not yield relevance to an individual (that is, do not improve his understanding of the world) (Sperber and Wilson 1995:120-121), or at least they do not yield relevance in the way that the speaker intended. In order for an utterance to be relevant to an individual, the hearer must have access to a context from which he will be able to derive true contextual implications, to contradict previously held assumptions, or to strengthen previously held assumptions. The communicative exchange between Rep. Foster and Mr. Lewis (8a-f) illustrates the importance of context in interpreting an utterance. Contextual factors about their knowledge, their goals, and their expectations helps one understand the meaning behind their utterances. In order to provide a more precise description of the communicative process, it is now necessary for me to refine how contextual factors influence utterance interpretation.

3.4 Cognitive Environments

The notion of *context* tends to refer to a wide variety of factors that contribute to the way that an utterance is understood. I will employ some more precise terms from Relevance Theory to specify the context for each participant in a communicative exchange. To begin, an individual's cognitive environment consists of all the assumptions that are manifest to him at a given moment. To be manifest in a given moment, an assumption either needs to be perceivable from one's environment or inferable based on the assumptions of the individual (Sperber and Wilson 1995:38-46).

Each person has a unique cognitive environment that is dependent both on physical and cognitive factors. Regarding the physical environment, the things that someone can hear, smell, see, taste, and feel all affect the assumptions that are manifest to him; the factors of one's physical environment are—or would be if noticed—processed through the individual's cognitive system. The purely cognitive factors that affect one's cognitive

environment include his logical and encyclopaedic entries. A logical entry provides rules or instructions on how to process information. Examples of logical entries include deductive rules such as “If P, then Q” or the logical meaning of the word *and*. Encyclopaedic entries, on the other hand, store information about properties of things, memories, and other items that describe a conceptual representation rather than a strictly logical form. When processing thoughts, one typically combines encyclopaedic and logical entries to form full thoughts.

Two people can have similar items manifest to them at the same time. For instance, two people in the same room have access to a lot of the same physical observations about the room; their environments are not entirely equal, however, because that they occupy different spaces within the room and have different perceptual abilities. Likewise, each person has different experiences, different associations with words, and different cognitive abilities. Thus, there are certain parts of a speaker’s cognitive environment that she shares with her audience, while there are other parts that are different. Consider Figure 4 below:

Figure 4. Mutual Cognitive Environment

In a conversation between Rep. Posey and Bank of America CEO Ken Lewis, the square represents the cognitive environment of Rep. Posey and the circle that of the Mr. Lewis.

The shaded area of overlap between these two environments represents their *mutual cognitive environment*. The mutual cognitive environment represents the assumptions that are manifest to both the Representative and the CEO; these assumptions are considered to be *mutually manifest*.

When Rep. Posey addresses an utterance toward Mr. Lewis, for instance, it is mutually manifest that Rep. Posey is making claims on Mr. Lewis' attention, thereby presuming that his utterance will yield contextual effects that will be worth Mr. Lewis' attention to process. Mr. Lewis, then, is justified in having expectations of relevance. First let us consider an actual conversation from the Hearing (73):

12. (a) Rep. Posey: "Mr. Lewis, you are Mr. Countrywide, Mr. Bank of America?"

(b) Mr. Lewis: "No, I am not Mr. Countrywide."

As background information to Example (12), Rep. Posey's utterance is a question because he was calling on Mr. Lewis to provide a second opinion to a question that he had just posed to Mr. Blankfein of Goldman Sachs. (The specific question is not relevant to this example; it is simply relevant that Rep. Posey was not merely questioning Mr. Lewis' name.) As additional background information, Bank of America had acquired Countrywide, a bank that was in severe financial distress at the time that it was acquired. Countrywide was notorious for having very poor lending standards, which was a big cause of the financial crisis. Mr. Lewis had gone to great lengths to separate the reputation of Bank of America from that of the weaker banks that it had acquired, namely Countrywide and Merrill Lynch. These background assumptions were highly accessible to both interlocutors.

Relevance Theory claims that mutually manifest assumptions guide the hearer in how to attribute intentions to the speaker. While Rep. Posey's statement surely produced a variety of contextual effects for Mr. Lewis, let us consider how Mr. Lewis could have deduced the contextual implication (13e):

13. (a) Mutual assumption: I am the CEO of the company that acquired Countrywide. (P₁)
- (b) Mutual assumption: Countrywide played a significant role in causing the current financial crisis. (P₂)
- (c) Implicated premise attributed by Mr. Lewis to Rep. Posey based on the utterance (12a): If I am the CEO of the company that acquired Countrywide and if Countrywide played a significant role in causing the financial crisis, then I am responsible for playing a significant role in the financial crisis. (If P₁ and P₂, then Q.)
- (d) Contextual Implication: I played a significant role in causing the financial crisis. (P₁ and P₂, therefore Q)

Without missing a beat, Mr. Lewis rejected the implicated premise (13c) and the contextual implication (13d) by stating (12b): “No, I am not Mr. Countrywide.”

Mr. Lewis’ ability to assign intentionality to Rep. Posey’s utterance illustrates that Mr. Lewis has the ability to construct a representation of what he thought that Rep. Posey was thinking. Following Sperber (1994), I will place each successive layer of representation on a separate line.

14. (a) Rep. Posey intends
 - (b) me [Mr. Lewis] to know
 - (c) that he intends
 - (d) me to accept as true
 - (e) that he believes
 - (f) that I played a significant role in causing the financial crisis.

Let us work through each of the layers of these representations. The first two layers (14a-b) simply posit that Mr. Posey had a communicative intention: He intended to communicate that he had an informative intention. The next two layers (14c-d) constitute the informative intention: He intended to inform Mr. Lewis of something. The final 2 layers (14e-f) would typically include the representation of the thought that Rep. Posey wanted Mr. Lewis to believe. However, Rep. Posey could not have reasonably expected for Mr. Lewis to accept a self-incriminating proposition such as (14f). Therefore, both Rep. Posey and Mr. Lewis must attribute the belief in (14e-f) to someone else. As I suggested in (14e), for Mr. Lewis to attribute this belief to Mr. Posey is at least one possibility; unless he were speaking deceitfully, it would generally be expected that he would accept as true the propositions of whose truth he was trying to inform others. Given that he was not trying to inform Mr. Lewis of the proposition (14f), he may have been trying to inform some other audiences, such as the following:

15. (a) Possible relevance of (14f) to Rep. Posey's constituents:

By placing blame on Mr. Lewis, Rep. Posey might be identifying with the opinion of his constituents, who had great anger toward the banking industry. By finding someone else to blame, his constituents might be less likely to blame him.

(b) Possible relevance of (14f) to Rep. Posey's fellow Representatives:

He might be trying to convince his fellow Representatives that the banking industry deserves the distress that it is in. Perhaps he desires to push a political agenda that is punitive to banks.

At any rate, I have now laid the foundations of Relevance Theory sufficiently to explore more complicated issues such as communication across multiple audiences, persuasion, and manipulation. These will be the main subjects of the next chapter.

Chapter 4

COMMUNICATION ACROSS MULTIPLE AUDIENCES

4.1 Implications of the Mutual Cognitive Environment

The Hearing before the House Committee on Financial services was nationally televised. The transcript and video of the Hearing are public records. Even during the hours of the Hearing, the words of the CEOs and the Representatives impacted the stock prices of the banks. On a more delayed note, the behavior of the politicians contributed to their reputation and, ultimately, to their ability to be re-elected. While relatively few shareholders or constituents probably paid attention to the details of the Hearing, the movers and shakers of the stock market, the media, and the political engine digested the Hearing on their behalf.

Because the Hearing was a matter of public discourse, the politicians and CEOs certainly spoke differently than they would have spoken if the Hearing had taken place in a confidential environment. But why? And how? The answer to both of these questions rests in the Relevance Theoretic notion of the mutual cognitive environment. If the Hearing had been confidential, one of the mutually manifest assumptions (to the CEOs and Representatives) would have been the very fact that the Hearing was confidential. In such a confidential setting, the utterances could have been processed only by the CEOs and the Representatives themselves and not by the public at large. As a result, the interlocutors would have strived to achieve relevance only for those who had access to their utterances. Under the actual scenario, however, in which it was mutually manifest that the Hearing was a matter of public discourse, the CEOs and the Representatives knew that the general public

would have immediate access to their utterances. Thus, the interlocutors sought to achieve relevance not only with each other but also with the indirect audiences in whom they wanted to produce certain effects.

Granted, speakers do not strive to achieve relevance to each of the myriad possible audiences who might have access to their utterances. Rather, speakers prioritize their efforts to achieve relevance according to their higher-level plans and intentions. After all, the motivation of a speaker is to produce an intended effect in her audience. Therefore, a speaker exerts only as much effort in formulating and delivering an utterance as she expects her effort to benefit her by producing intended effects in her audiences. To the extent that a speaker's intention to produce an effect in one audience is greater than her intention to produce an effect in a different audience, her higher-ranked intention will take priority over her lower-ranked intention. In an ideal world, the speaker would love to accomplish both the higher- and lower-ranked intentions. When these intentions are in conflict with each other, however, the speaker's utterance can provide clues about which intention was primary.

For instance, the following dialogue between Rep. King and Morgan Stanley's CEO John Mack illustrates this point. Before examining this example, however, we need some background information. The banking industry is highly regulated. That is, there are various government entities that set rules for banks that are under their supervision; these entities are called *regulators*. The regulators examine the banks for compliance with their rules and also have the power to punish banks that are not in compliance. A single bank could have numerous regulators, each overseeing compliance for a different area of risk within the bank. The severity of the financial crisis exposed a major flaw in the fragmented regulatory framework: No single regulator had a comprehensive view of a bank's risk profile. As a result, there was considerable discussion about the possibility of creating a

systemic risk regulator that would have a comprehensive view of a bank's risk profile. In light of this background information, now consider Example (16):

16. (a) Rep. King: If we establish this systemic risk regulator, which existing regulators would this replace?

(b) Mr. Mack: There needs to be, I believe, a coming together of regulatory oversight. So that is at the first level. And I think it is up to a number of hearings and discussions on how that takes place, but I would like to see a combination of some of our regulators.

In (16a) Rep. King asks a very specific question about which regulatory agencies should be shut down if a new systemic risk regulator were established. This presented a problem for Mr. Mack: He likely wanted to answer the question completely and honestly, but he could not do so because he knew that the regulators would hear his answer. This would be like asking an employee to state which of his supervisors should be fired while it was mutually manifest that the supervisors were listening to the employee's answer. If the employee says, "You should fire supervisors Smith, Jones, and Williams," then the employee might face negative repercussions from any supervisors who were not fired. Thus, the employee is likely to provide a sincere and complete answer only if he expects his reply to result in the immediate firing of the supervisors, thus avoiding any negative repercussions. On a similar note, Mr. Mack knows that his opinion will not result in the immediate termination of any of his regulators. After all, changes in government move very slowly because of all the bureaucracy. Therefore, in his response in (16b), Mr. Mack affirms that some of the agencies should be replaced but he does not name any specific regulator for fear of retaliation. However, if the Hearing had been confidential, Mr. Mack would likely have taken the opportunity to speak more openly about which regulators he considered to be unnecessary. As a result, his vague response reveals that his desire to please his regulators

was greater than his desire to answer Rep. King's question fully. Furthermore, Mr. Mack's desire to please his regulators is based in his desire to please his shareholders. If pleasing the regulators is good for the company, then pleasing the regulators is good for the shareholders as well.

Another implication of the existence of multiple mutual cognitive environments is that a speaker can use a single proposition to mean different things to different people. In formulating her utterance, a speaker anticipates how the hearer will infer meaning from it. Thus, to the extent that she cares about the effects on each audience, she will consider how her utterance will be interpreted by each addressee based on what she considers to be the mutual cognitive environments of her addressees.

In assessing how to be relevant to her target audiences, the speaker is aware of multiple ways in which her audiences' cognitive environments differ:

17. (a) Different physical environments: Some assumptions are perceivable based on one's surroundings and, therefore manifest to that individual. No two people share the exact same physical environment.
- (b) Different cognitive abilities: People have different abilities to perceive and process information.
- (c) Different assumptions: In processing an utterance, the hearer uses his previously held assumptions to infer meaning. When a new utterance is processed against previously held assumptions, four possibilities are (1) combining with assumptions to yield new contextual implications; (2) contradicting previously held assumptions; (3) strengthening previously held assumptions; or (4) having no direct effect on previously held assumptions because of a lack of a context where the utterance is relevant.

- (d) Different expectations of relevance: Each hearer has expectations of how a speaker is trying to be relevant to him. He processes an utterance to obtain the contextual effects that are most readily accessible to him, stopping when his expectations of relevance have been satisfied or when the cost of further processing outweighs the expected benefit.

The speaker uses her assumptions about these differences in guiding her addressees' interpretations of her utterance. Sperber and Wilson's analogy of dancing fits the situation (1995:43):

Co-ordination problems are avoided, or considerably reduced, in dancing by leaving the responsibility to one partner who leads, while the other has merely to follow.

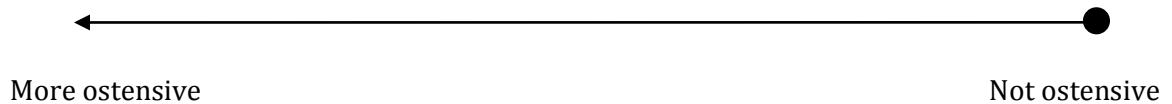
We assume that the same goes for communication. It is left to the communicator to make correct assumptions about the codes and contextual information that the audience will have accessible and be likely to use in the comprehension process.

Indeed, communication is speaker-initiated. As stated in the communicative principle of relevance, each ostensive act of communication comes with an implicit presumption of its optimal relevance.

4.2 Scalar Ostension and the Idealized Target Audience

The presumption of optimal relevance is applicable only to acts of ostensive communication. When a speaker makes it obvious that she is trying to communicate with an addressee, she communicates that she intends for her utterance to be optimally relevant to the hearer. When she does not make it obvious that she is communicating to a particular audience (hiding her communicative intention), her audience still might gain relevant information from the utterance. However, because the speaker makes no claims on her audience's attention, she also does not imply that her stimulus will be worth her audience's

Figure 6. Scalar Ostension



The purpose of positing scalar ostension is to show that a speaker can vary the strength of her ostension to a particular audience, which will directly affect the degree to which she presumes that her stimulus will be relevant to her audience. From the hearer's perspective, the perceived strength of the ostension will impact his expectation of relevance, which will affect the amount of processing effort that he is willing to invest in pursuit of cognitive benefits.

As a clarification, scalar ostension does not always provide a useful comparison. In particular, as communication becomes more and more ostensive, the value in comparing the differences in ostension trends asymptotically toward zero. The same is true on the other side of the ostension spectrum. Comparison can also be difficult or unfruitful in cases in which multiple variables have changed. However, in cases in which the level of ostension varies slightly, especially in ambiguous cases, there is much comparative value. In particular, later on I will illustrate how scalar ostension helps to explain the communication from the Hearing.

If my notion of scalar ostension is accurate, a revision of the communicative principle of relevance would be warranted as follows (my change to Sperber and Wilson 1995:260 is in italics): "Every act of *fully* ostensive communication communicates a presumption of its own optimal relevance." This revision is not a contradiction of Sperber and Wilson's Relevance Theory, whose domain was exclusively ostensive communication and for which this caveat would be superfluous. Rather, it is an expansion of the application of Relevance Theory to communicative domains that, while still being ostensive, may not be *fully* ostensive. I will make my revision to the communicative principle of relevance even more

explicit: “The degree to which an act of communication is ostensive to an individual is the degree to which it presumes to be optimally relevant to that individual.” This elaboration of the communicative principle of relevance provides key insights when analyzing communication across multiple, indeterminate audiences.

Sperber and Wilson provide other hints of the possibility of scalar ostension. One such hint, already mentioned, is their mentioning of a “continuum of cases of ostension” (1995:53). A stronger hint, though, is in their brief comment about how the presumption of relevance works in relation to indeterminate audiences (1995:158):

The addressees of an act of ostensive communication are the individuals whose cognitive environment the communicator is trying to modify. They can be specific individuals, as when Mary addresses Peter, or they may be individuals falling under a certain description, as when we address the present paragraph to all individuals who have read the book so far and found it relevant to them. In broadcast communication, a stimulus can even be addressed to whoever finds it relevant. The communicator is then communicating her presumption of relevance to whoever is willing to entertain it.

Sperber and Wilson’s description of ostensive communication above discusses the possibility of a speaker offering a presumption of relevance (which requires that the speaker be ostensive about her communication) to an indeterminate audience such as a hypothetical reader of a book or a hypothetical audience of broadcast communication. I will explore both of these illustrations in detail.

In the case of a reader of a book, the reader adjusts his expectations of relevance in real-time as he reads the book. If he finds his expectations of relevance satisfied, then he will be willing to invest more processing effort into the author’s utterances because of his trust in the author’s willingness and ability to offer stimuli that improve his understanding

of the world. The reader also adjusts his expectations of relevance based on the topic or even on the basis of formatting (bold font, italics, underlining) or the location within the larger document (footnote, section heading, topic sentence, abstract, conclusion, etc.). Even if the reader had never had any prior experience with a particular author or publisher, he could gain an increasingly strong expectation of to whom the author had intended his writing to be optimally relevant. For example, publicly traded companies issue annual financial statements. To some degree, the company presumes that its financial statements will be relevant to anyone who finds them interesting. The casual reader could probably figure out, for example, whether or not the company was operating at a profit or a loss and derive some cognitive effects from that information. However, a skilled financial analyst would be able to reap a lot more relevant information from the same communication because his cognitive environment shares a larger overlap with the authors' idealized target audience. In the case of a written public document (a published book, a public report, etc.), it is true that—as Sperber and Wilson suggested—the written communication is relevant to anyone who finds it interesting (1995:158). However, the presumption of *optimal* relevance (versus the presumption of *some* relevance) would be true only for the idealized target audience.

I will elaborate on the example of the company's public financial statements to illustrate that both internal (indirect: "telling that") and external (direct: "showing that") evidence contribute to the presumption of relevance from the speaker and the expectation of relevance from the hearer. The external (direct) evidence refers to the manner of delivery in making it ostensive that a speaker is making claims on her audience's attention, while the internal (indirect) evidence refers to the audience's ability to estimate the idealized target audience based on the content of the utterance. In terms of direct evidence, a company could ostensify its presumption of relevance related to its financial statements to

different degrees: by mailing some people a hard copy while making an electronic copy accessible to the general public on the company's website. Even though they ostensified their presumption of relevance in external terms more to the people to whom they mailed the hard copy than to the indeterminate audiences who were required to take their own initiative to access the electronic copy on the company's website, this does not mean that the people who received a mailed copy were promised more relevance. Rather, while reading the document, the reader would construct an opinion about how closely he resembles the idealized target audience (based upon both the direct and indirect evidence) and would adjust his expectations of relevance accordingly.

The same principle is true for other types of communication across multiple audiences. For instance, a local newspaper does not presume to be equally relevant to all of its subscribers even though the publishers make their external ostension the same to all subscribers by delivering the same newspaper to their houses. Even within a particular edition of the newspaper, certain articles or advertisements will be optimally relevant to different readers based on their respective cognitive environments. The publishers of the newspaper realize that they are serving a wide variety of audiences: local residents and visitors, the old and the young, those looking for a job and those who are not. However, by limiting the presumption of relevance to whoever finds it interesting, Sperber and Wilson have delinked the presumption of relevance from the ostensive nature of the communication (1995:158). Certainly, the fact that someone estimates that he falls within the author's idealized target audience is convincing *internal* evidence that the text comes with a presumption of some relevance to that individual. However, there is also the external evidence to consider. The external evidence that the publishers delivered the newspaper to some, but not all, residents in a town indicates that the publishers had presumed some relevance to their specific customers. Indeed, without subscribers the

newspaper would go out of business. Thus, the newspaper publisher has split interests because she is addressing a wide variety of audiences (subscribers, the general public, whoever finds it interesting) and has a variety of intentions (to please the subscribers, to please the advertisers, to produce good journalism). The newspaper publisher will calibrate the stimulus (the newspaper, both external and internal evidence) to accomplish the maximum benefit based on how she ranks her various priorities.

The distinction between internal and external evidence of ostension has clear applications in the case of the Hearing. On the one hand, the CEOs and Representatives provided external evidence of their communicative intentions by showing that they intended to communicate with each other: They addressed each other, often by name; they made eye contact with each other; and they exchanged written statements that would later become public records. On the other hand, an internal analysis of their conversations reveals that their idealized target audiences were frequently the shareholders and constituents. Granted, the notion of scalar ostension does not allow an authoritative calculation of who the primary audience was, but it can certainly provide clues. We can examine the external evidence and the internal evidence to form judgments about how the various speakers presumed their utterances to be relevant to their respective audiences. In reality, the weighting of the internal and external evidence will vary from audience to audience and from occasion to occasion.

A key contribution in the notion of scalar ostension is the recognition that a speaker can presume *some*, not necessarily *optimal*, relevance to an audience when she is trying to communicate to multiple audiences at the same time. Further, this presumption of relevance varies with the level of ostension of the speaker's utterance. A Representative who has multiple intentions (i.e. a desire to produce an effect in the CEOs, a desire to produce an effect in her constituents, a desire to produce an effect in her fellow

Representatives, etc.) will—typically subconsciously—weight the priorities of these effects to try to achieve a maximal benefit from her utterance. Likewise, a hearer can expect that a speaker is providing him with *some*, but not necessarily *optimal*, relevance, if he suspects that the speaker has intended her utterance to produce effects in other people besides himself.

Next, let us consider Sperber and Wilson's other example of an indeterminate audience, namely that of the audience of a broadcast communication, to whom the speaker presumed that her utterance would be relevant "to whoever is willing to entertain it" (1995:158). As a specific example of broadcast communication, let us consider a televised news program. The producers of the program clearly realize that their different audiences will gain different amounts of relevance from a particular utterance⁶ based on factors such as the audience's command of the broadcast language, familiarity with the content of the utterance, sympathy toward the political bias of the producers, and so on. For any given utterance, the producers presume optimal relevance only for their idealized target audience. However, given the public nature of broadcast communication, each hearer expects that the producers intended some degree of relevance to all of their audiences, variable based on the degree to which each hearer fits within the producer's idealized target audience. The hearer adjusts his expectation of relevance in real-time based on how well his expectations of relevance are being satisfied. The notion of an idealized target audience does not require a hearer to possess *a priori* knowledge of the idealized target audience. Rather, the hearer naturally adjusts his expectations of relevance throughout the broadcast communication event.

⁶ Or, as Unger (2006) properly notes, a speaker can presume relevance across a series of connected utterances, which is more appropriate for analyzing complex stimuli of more than one utterance.

Sperber and Wilson addressed the possibility of entertaining an ostensive intention beyond the communicative intention, but they dismissed this as unnecessary (1995:30-31,60-64). Their reason for dismissing the need to appeal to an ostensive intention was essentially that they had limited the domain of the principles of relevance to ostensive acts of communication. In their model, the ostensive intention is conflated with the communicative intention, in which case it is “mutually manifest to audience and communicator that the communicator has [an] informative intention” (1995:61). This is true for fully ostensive communication, in which case the ostensive nature of the communication is mutually manifest to the speaker and hearer. However, in cases of communication to an indeterminate audience or other cases of scalar ostension, it is necessary to detangle the ostensive and the communicative intentions. Thus, I have separated these intentions as follows:

Table 2. Speaker’s Intentions

Intention	Speaker's desire to...	Intention is accomplished to the extent that...
Ostensive intention	inform the hearer of the degree to which she presumes her stimulus to be relevant to him	the hearer recognizes the degree to which the speaker presumes her stimulus to be relevant to him
Communicative intention	inform the hearer of her informative intention	the hearer understands the assumption of which the speaker is trying to inform him
Informative intention	inform the hearer of some assumption	the hearer accepts as true the assumption of which the speaker is trying to inform him

My elaboration of Sperber and Wilson’s examples of communication to indeterminate audiences supports my theory of scalar ostension. The notion of scalar ostension explains, from the perspective of the hearer, how much she presumes her stimulus to be relevant to a possible audience and, from the hearer’s perspective, how much relevance he expects to gain from processing the speaker’s utterance. The recognition of the degree of a speaker’s

ostension in communication is only one part of the communicative process, and this ostension is itself based on a combination of external and internal factors.⁷ A hearer who recognizes that a communicator intends to communicate with him still has the task of understanding what the speaker means. As noted in Chapter 3, the task of understanding an utterance depends on the hearer's ability to assign communicative and informative intentions to the speaker. In the next section, I will illustrate through the notion of *epistemic vigilance* that the assignment and fulfillment of such intentions is fundamentally rooted in the trust that a hearer places in the speaker. Then, in the subsequent section, I will summarize how persuasion and manipulation fit within a broader communicative theory, with particular emphasis on persuasion and manipulation across multiple audiences.

4.3 Epistemic Vigilance

As noted in Chapter 3, speakers and hearers each have their own costs, risks, and expected benefits when they engage in communication. While the speaker desires to produce an effect in the hearer, there is always the risk of miscommunication. Likewise, while the hearer desires to gain a better understanding of the world, he might not gain a better understanding of it or, worse yet, might gain false assumptions about the world.

Interestingly, even though people typically want to know only true information⁸, the independent truth of a given assumption does not impact the individual's cognitive processes so long as he holds the assumption as true. Sperber and Wilson note: "From a cognitive point of view, mistaken assumptions can be indistinguishable from genuine

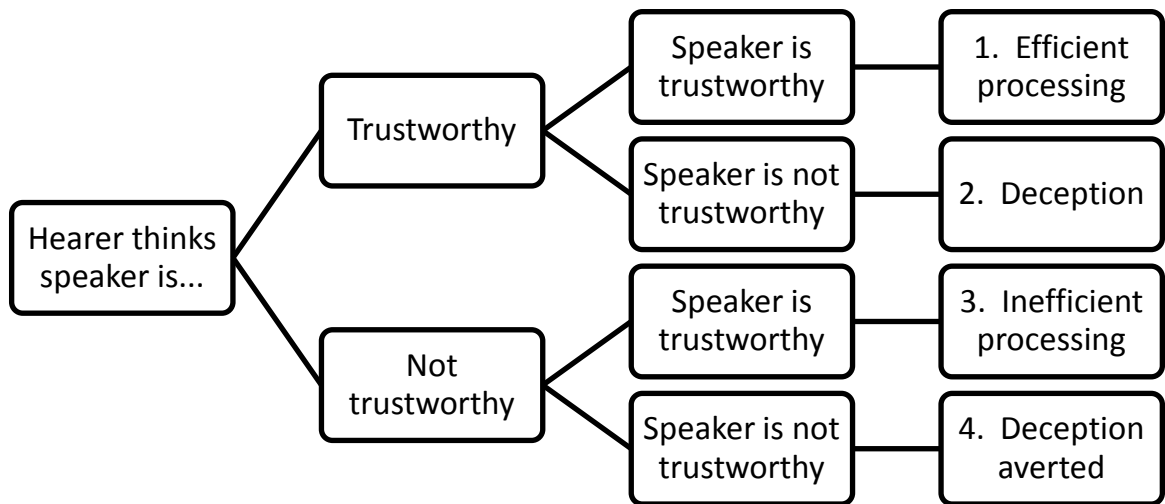
⁷ This corresponds to the continuum of cases of ostension in Figure 5, page 32.

⁸ Granted, a hearer might desire to believe false assumptions if, for instance, the false assumptions satisfy a desire that the individual ranks higher than truth. For example, an individual might want to believe false assumptions to promote social cohesion or to avoid discomfort.

factual knowledge, just as optical illusions can be indistinguishable from true sight” (1995:39). Thus, if I believe that you are communicating to me in good faith when in reality you are lying to me, I will process your utterance just as though it were true even though it is not. Most of us have realized at some point that some assumption we had held as certain turned out to be false.

Sophisticated communicators realize that a speaker can intend her audience to accept a proposition that she herself does not believe. To protect themselves from being misled, people have become *epistemically vigilant*; that is, they calibrate their trust to avoid accepting false information as though it were true (Sperber *et al.* 2010:359; see also Sperber 1994, 2001). The higher the degree of trust that a hearer places in a speaker, the less processing effort that he will spend to assess the veracity of her statement. If a hearer doubts a speaker who is actually behaving in a trustworthy manner, the hearer will spend extra processing effort without gaining any more cognitive benefits than if he had simply trusted her. This corresponds to case three, “inefficient processing,” in Figure 7 below.

Figure 7. Epistemic Vigilance and Processing Cost



If, however, a hearer’s doubt is justified because the speaker is actually being untrustworthy, and if the hearer uncovers the speaker’s untrustworthy conduct, the avoidance of accepting false information will be worth the extra processing effort (case four, “deception averted”). The human tendency to calibrate one’s trust in a situation to maximize cognitive benefits while minimizing processing effort is an application of the cognitive principle of relevance. Because human cognition is geared toward the maximization of relevance, individuals adjust their trust based on their expectation of trustworthiness in both the speaker and her content. In essence, the expectation of trustworthiness is a component of the expectation of relevance. Both the speaker and the hearer have expectations about how much they trust each other, which affects both how much processing effort the hearer is willing to exert and how much relevant information he expects to infer.

Sperber and his collaborators credit the human tendency toward epistemic vigilance as being foundational to making the sharing of information worthwhile. They write, “The fact that communication is so pervasive despite this risk [of being misinformed] suggests that

people are able to calibrate their trust well enough to make it advantageous on average to both communicator and audience” (Sperber *et al.* 2010:360). They go on to say, “Vigilance (unlike distrust) is not the opposite of trust; it is the opposite of blind trust” (2010:363). Thus, a hearer trusts a speaker when he believes that he has good reasons to trust her, such as on the basis of his prior experiences with her, his estimation of her motives, the nature of the communication, etc. Trusting reduces the effort required to process an utterance. Likewise, the hearer is skeptical when he believes that he has good reasons to be skeptical. The main areas of trust toward which a hearer exercises heightened epistemic vigilance are the honesty of the source, the competence of the source, the logical accuracy of the arguments, and the empirical truth of the content.

In the case of the Hearing, the concept of epistemic vigilance is highly relevant. While Sperber and his collaborators coined “epistemic vigilance” mainly to describe how an individual is careful to avoid accepting false assumptions for himself, the Hearing illustrates that the interlocutors were vigilant in preventing their target audiences from accepting “false”⁹ assumptions. Acting on behalf of their primary audiences, the interlocutors battled with each other to prevent “false” assumptions from entering the mutual cognitive environment, lest their primary target audiences be led astray. Similar to how one is skeptical of untrustworthy people or false content for oneself, so one can discredit a proposed assumption on behalf of another individual by discrediting the source of that assumption (competence or honesty of the speaker who supports it) or the logic or empirical truth of the assumption itself.

⁹ By “false,” I am referring to any assumption that would go against the speaker’s intentions for his primary audience, which is independent of the actual truth or falsity of the assumption in the speaker’s mind or in the real world. For example, a “false” assumption for the CEOs would be any assumption that would make their banks appear weak to their shareholders.

In addition, the concept of epistemic vigilance ties in with the cognitive principle of relevance to explain why the lack of trust reduces the efficiency of communication. Communicators who do not trust each other exert significant amounts of processing effort just to assess the veracity of an assumption. In the Hearing, the Representatives and the CEOs did not cooperate with each other because they recognized that they had different goals¹⁰ that were not only different but also opposed to each other. For their own parts, the CEOs and Representatives had their own beliefs and motivations so deeply entrenched that they were unlikely to persuade or convince each other to change positions on the issues. Therefore, the CEOs and Representatives exerted their processing effort not to assess the veracity of assumptions for their own consideration but rather to constrain what their primary audiences accepted as true.

Another important application of epistemic vigilance is the notion that in order to calibrate trust efficiently, hearers learn to have a generally trusting attitude toward some speakers whom they have consistently found to be trustworthy, and vice versa. This has interesting implications for the importance of a speaker's reputation (Sperber *et al.* 2010:370):

If we continually interact with the same people, misinforming them when it is to our own immediate advantage may damage our reputation and end up being costly in the long run. Conversely, doing our best to be systematically trustworthy may sometimes be costly in the short run, but may be beneficial in the long run. The tradeoff between the short term cost and long term benefits of a policy of

¹⁰ I am speaking specifically of their goals with regard to framing the CPP as a bailout or not. Granted, some of their other goals may be similar, different but not opposed to each other, or different and opposed to each other. But the other goals are not a topic for this research.

trustworthiness may differ from person to person, depending, for instance, on the way they discount time.

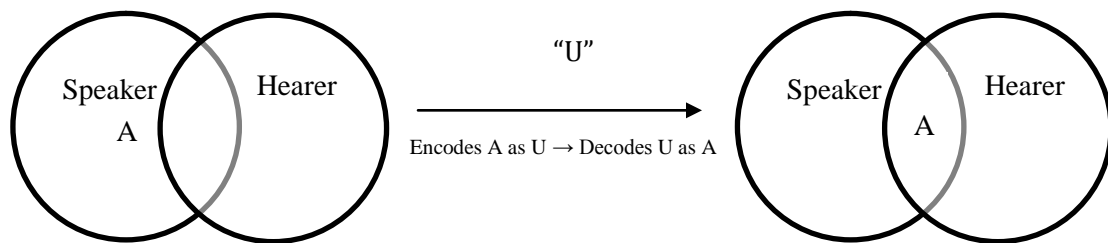
For the most part, the CEOs behaved professionally. They avoided many behaviors that many of the Representatives engaged in shamelessly: accusation, name-calling, and trickery. After all, the CEOs had to maintain the reputation of their institutions, for which consistent faithfulness is more important than a quick rise and then a fall. The Representatives, on the other hand, did not face quite as much immediate pressure; their re-election attempts were nearly twenty-one months away. Furthermore, the Representatives knew that the public was angry both at the banking industry and at the government. As a result, the Representatives were willing to engage in blame-shifting tactics to villainize the CEOs. On the other hand, the CEOs did not have a need to blame the Representatives. As long as they could deflect blame off their particular institutions, they did not particularly care about where the blame landed. Interpreted through the framework of epistemic vigilance, these actions illustrate that the CEOs valued a consistent reputation of truthfulness whereas the politicians valued short-term gains.

So far in Chapter 4 I have presented some theoretical claims about how communication works across multiple audiences. In this section in particular, I have introduced the Relevance Theoretic concept of epistemic vigilance to illustrate the role of trust in the comprehension process of accepting an assumption as true. The framework of epistemic vigilance will continue to be useful as I proceed to distinguish among informing, persuading, and manipulating. In Section 4.4, I will elaborate on both the theory behind information transmission and the process of informing someone of something. I will then use this model of informing to develop further models of persuasion and manipulation.

4.4 Informing

In speaking of “information transmission,” I have already introduced a common fallacy about information: that it is possible to transmit or copy information from one person’s mind to another. Such a view could be represented by the following diagram (U = Utterance of Speaker; A = Assumption, Circle = Cognitive Environment; Overlapped Circles = Mutual Cognitive Environment):

Figure 8. Information Transmission (Code Model)

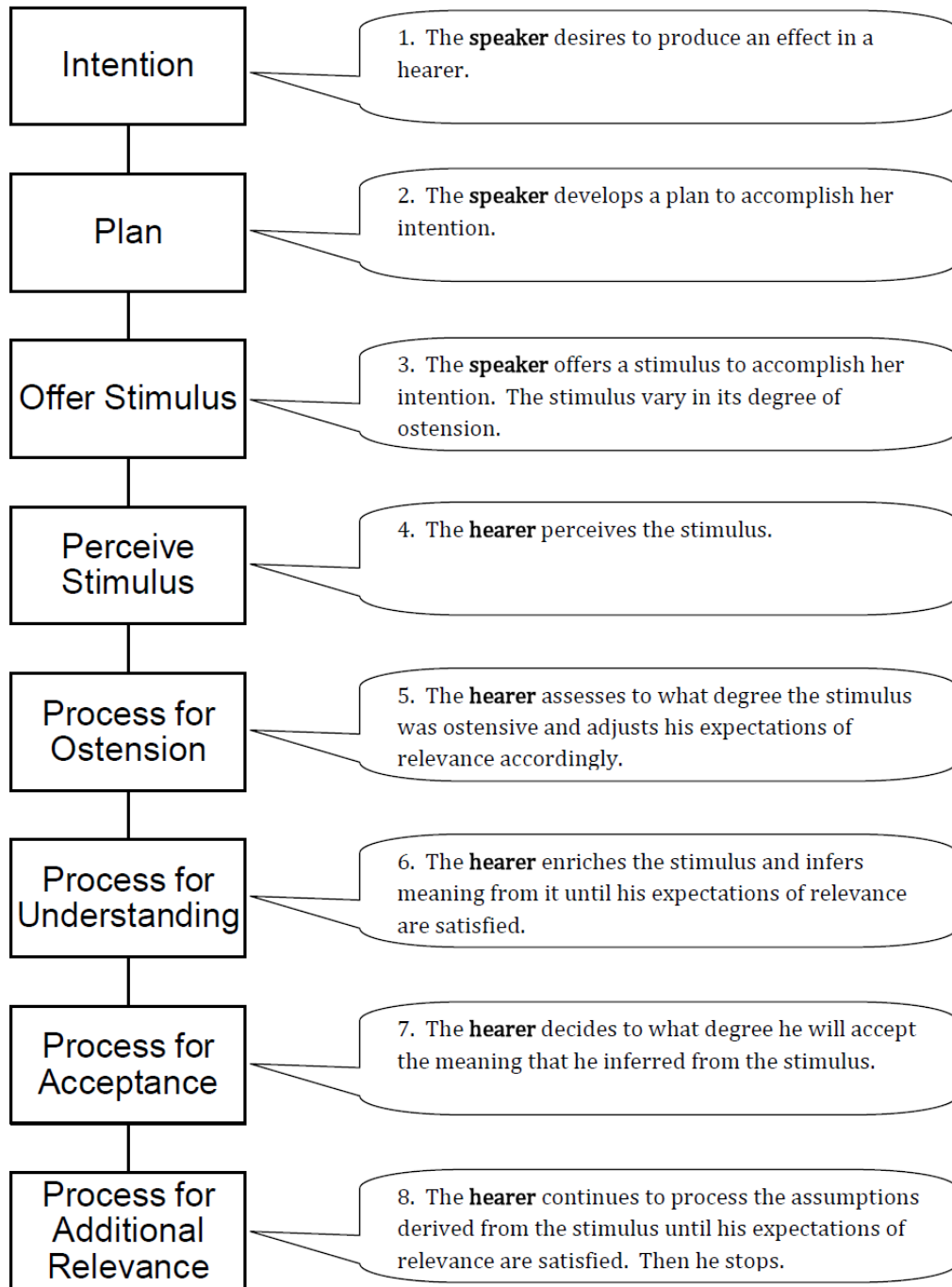


In the diagram above, the speaker begins with an assumption in her cognitive environment that is not in the hearer’s cognitive environment. After making an utterance, the assumption becomes shared information. This diagram is one way to define informing, but it is lacking in many respects. To begin, the utterance is not a code for an assumption in the speaker’s mind. The assumption is a thought in the speaker’s mind, while the utterance is a stimulus to help the hearer uncover her thought. The assumption(s) that the hearer recovers after processing the utterance will not be identical to the thought in the speaker’s mind. Rather, if the communication was successful, it will be a close resemblance to the assumption of the speaker. In addition, any assumption that the hearer recovers will go through further processing (provided that it was relevant to the hearer) to produce contextual implications, contradict a prior assumption, or strengthen a prior assumption. Thus, even if the speaker’s assumption (A) were transplanted directly into the hearer’s mind, would we then say that the speaker informed the hearer only of (A), or also the further assumptions that the speaker could have intended the hearer to make after

processing (A), or all of the assumptions that the hearer actually made regardless of whether or not the speaker intended such assumptions to be made. To model informing as the transmission of determinate assumptions quickly becomes an absurd and impossible model to sustain.

Rather than viewing communication as the transfer of information, Relevance Theory views the communication process as an ostensive-inferential process. The speaker provides an ostensive stimulus from which she expects the hearer to be able to infer relevant information. As noted in Section 4.2, I have extended Relevance Theory to cover communicative situations that are not fully ostensive. In Figure 9 (below) I have provided a diagram of the communicative process. I will proceed to link each section of the diagram with the Relevance Theoretic framework to illustrate holistically how communication works. Then, in Sections 4.5 and 4.6, I will use this model to describe persuasive and manipulative utterances.

Figure 9. Relevance Theory Communication Process¹¹



¹¹ Of course, the linear nature of Figure 9 is a useful lie; human communication is an interactive process that is influenced in real time as the various items in Figure 9 influence each other and are themselves influenced by other stimuli. This model simply provides a heuristic to look at the sub-processes involved in communication.

4.4.1 The Intention

As noted in Figure 9, the whole communicative process begins with the desire of a speaker to produce an effect in her audience. This corresponds to the motivation of the speaker for entering into a communicative process. In Table 2 (Page 39) I discussed three intentions: the ostensive intention, the communicative intention, and the informative intention. However, both the ostensive intention and the communicative intentions are themselves higher-order informative intentions: the intentions to (1) inform one's audience of the degree to which she presumes her stimulus to be relevant and (2) to inform one's audience of her informative intention (for the purpose of understanding the speaker's meaning; the actual informative intention is for accepting the speaker's meaning). Based on these definitions, all communication has its roots in the desire to inform someone of something.¹²

4.4.2 The Plan

The speaker who desires to produce an effect in her audience tries to choose the most efficient and effective way to achieve her goal, balanced, of course, by the constraints of other intentions that she values more highly. If the speaker estimates that producing an effect in her audience would either be impossible or not worth the effort, then she will abandon her plan and not proceed to the next stage of producing a stimulus. In the planning stage, the speaker considers the mutual cognitive environment that she shares with the audience to estimate how her audience will process possible stimuli that she might offer them. She also considers the many constraints that limit the stimuli that she could offer, constraints such as her reputation, her moral convictions, or her other goals. Remarkably, the speaker rarely has to consider the planning process consciously. Only when the

¹² Carey's contrast between communication as transmission and communication as ritual falls outside my scope. According to Carey's classification, my analysis focuses on communication as transmission rather than communication as ritual (2002).

expected benefits are worth the high processing cost will the speaker spend much effort on the planning phase. Most everyday speech is processed without the speaker's awareness of her desired effect in her audience or her plan to produce that effect.

From the speaker's point of view, the main potential for failed communication in the planning phase is by a misjudgment of the mutual cognitive environment. In addition to producing a less than ideal stimulus, the misjudgment of the mutual cognitive environment could cause a speaker to abandon a plan if she misjudges the cost or possibility of success. While the speaker has an idea of how a hearer could process her stimulus, she cannot know for sure because no two people share identical cognitive environments.

4.4.3 The Stimulus Offered

After creating a plan to accomplish her intentions, the speaker proceeds to carry out her plan by offering a stimulus to the hearer. In the planning phase, the speaker has already determined how ostensive she wants to make the stimulus. Her offering of the stimulus could fail as a result of poor execution, such as when a speaker does not enunciate well enough for the hearer to perceive the stimulus as intended.

4.4.4 The Stimulus Perceived

Whereas the speaker offers the stimulus, the hearer perceives and processes it. Of course, the linear nature of my model (Figure 9) is an over-simplification of the process. For instance, the hearer begins to perceive and process the stimulus before the speaker has finished offering it. In fact, before the speaker has finished her utterance, the hearer may have already anticipated the remainder of the utterance, processed it until his expectations of relevance were met, and prepared his own reply. Thus, the linear nature of this model (Figure 9) is simply to provide a heuristic of the various sub-processes involved in the process of communication.

At the stage of the hearer's perceiving the stimulus, the communication could fail if the hearer either misperceives the stimulus, such as when background noise prohibits the accurate perception of an utterance. Or, perhaps the hearer's perceptive abilities are impaired in a way that is not manifest to the speaker. In the case of a covert or only partially ostensive stimulus, the hearer might not even recognize the stimulus or might not find it as relevant even if recognized, thus leading to communication failure.

4.4.5 Processing for Ostension

To help the hearer form his expectations of relevance, he will assess how ostensively—if at all—the stimulus was communicated to him. The hearer perceives that a speaker presumes her utterance (or other stimulus) to be relevant to him to the degree that she ostensifies her communicative intention. If he concludes that the stimulus was not ostensively communicated to him, then he will continue to process the stimulus only if he independently finds it worth processing further. As soon as he stops deriving contextual effects, he stops.

A communication could fail (at least partially) if the hearer does not perceive the same level of ostension that the speaker presumed to have offered. This would be the result of a mismatch in their mutual cognitive environments.

When assessing a stimulus for scalar ostension—especially a stimulus that is intended for multiple audiences—the hearer considers both direct evidence (such as the fact that the speaker is addressing the hearer directly) and indirect evidence (such as the fact that the speaker's utterance does not achieve much relevance for the hearer but achieves a lot of relevance for another audience member). This corresponds to the concept of scalar ostension that I presented in Section 4.2.

4.4.6 Processing for Understanding

As part of the inference process, the hearer also tries to understand the speaker's intended meaning. The hearer follows the path of least effort in computing cognitive effects until his expectations have been satisfied or abandoned. In the case of a non-ostensive stimulus, the hearer takes responsibility for his own presumption of relevance.

4.4.7 Processing for Acceptance

As the hearer infers meaning from the stimulus, he decides to what degree he will accept the inferred meaning as true. This depends on his trust in the source's honesty and competence, his trust in the logic of any arguments, or his trust in the empirical truth of the content. In the case of non-ostensive communication, the hearer assesses his trust in his own observational skills (the empirical truth of the content), reasoning abilities, motives, and competence.

4.4.8 Processing for Additional Relevance

The hearer continues to process a stimulus until he no longer receives adequate cognitive effects for his processing effort. In other words, each newly derived assumption will itself be a stimulus available to the hearer for additional processing. If the hearer finds the newly derived assumption more relevant than other stimuli, he will continue to process it as long as he perceives it to be the most relevant stimulus to process at the time. If there are other stimuli that are immediately available but would be lost forever if not processed immediately, a hearer might postpone the processing of such a stimulus and resume processing it later on when the stimulus resumes its status as the stimulus in which the hearer has the highest expectations of relevance.

4.5 Persuading

In Section 4.4 I described the Relevance Theoretic account of informing someone of something. Based on the model in Figure 9 (Page 48), this begins as an intention in the

speaker's mind to produce a desired effect in the hearer. To what extent, if at all, is informing different from persuading? In terms of the communication model, there is no difference. After all, in persuading, one also wants to produce a desired effect in the hearer. Thus, within the Relevance Theoretic framework there is no need to appeal to a special model for persuasive communication (for an alternative view, see Taillard 2000, 2002). In Relevance Theory, the fulfillment of the communicative intention results in understanding, while the fulfillment of the informative intention results in acceptance. To successfully persuade someone, then, is simply to have one's informative intention fulfilled. Any appeal to a persuasive intention is, then, just a nuanced version of the informative intention.

While there is no linguistic basis for a distinction between persuading and informing, the concept of epistemic vigilance helps to explain the nuanced difference between informing and persuading that we experience in everyday speech. Specifically, the difference between informing and persuading is in the expected or perceived degree of vigilance exercised by the hearer, from the speaker's and hearer's perspectives, respectively. The amount of vigilance, in turn, is dependent on the amount of trust in the source or the content.

Figure 10. Distinction between Informing and Persuading



Accordingly, the less vigilance expected (by the speaker) or exerted (by the hearer), the more a communicative exchange resembles mere informing. Conversely, the more vigilance expected (by the speaker) or exerted (by the hearer), the more a communicative exchange

resembles persuasion. In this nuanced definition, the degree to which a stimulus is deemed to be persuasive is decided independently by the speaker and the hearer. The Relevance Theory communication model in Figure 9 (Page 48) fully accounts for the impact of trust on communication by considering the epistemic vigilance of the hearer. The speaker takes the hearer's epistemic vigilance into account during her planning phase, while the hearer exercises epistemic vigilance throughout his processing sub-tasks.

Because my definition of persuasion is linked to the concept of trust, I take for granted that most of the utterances from the Hearing were of a persuasive nature because of the lack of trust among the direct and indirect participants. I will now turn to an example of persuasive tactics from the Hearing. In this example, Rep. Cleaver employs a clever use of direct quotations to insult the CEOs without claiming responsibility for the legitimacy of the opinions expressed. I have divided his comment below into seven sections (18a-g), the first and last of which (18a,g) are bookends that explain the direct quotations from his constituents in (18b-f) (Hearing:76-77):

18. (a) I have about seven pages of questions that were sent to me from my districts. I represent Kansas City, Missouri, and Independence, Missouri.
- (b) "How dare you!"—Judy from Kansas City.
- (c) "Why are you squeezing us dry with fees and increasing credit card rates but lining your own pockets?"—Alice from Raymore.
- (d) "Since you are the experts with the big pay, why did you screw up?"—Ben.
- (e) "How big is your yacht?"—Michelle.
- (f) "Do you really believe that you are that smart?"
- (g) I read these only because I think everybody conveyed to you that people are angry.

After declaring that he had seven pages of questions from his constituents, Rep. Cleaver chose five comments (18b-f) as being particularly relevant to the conversation. Thus, he claims responsibility for presuming that these comments would be of some relevance to his various audiences. However, by directly quoting others, he does not claim responsibility for the truth of what his constituents expressed. After quoting them, he even explains that he has read these comments to reinforce the fact that his constituents are angry at the CEOs.

In terms of the external (direct/“showing”) evidence of Rep. Cleaver’s ostension, Rep. Cleaver gives direct evidence to the CEOs that he is talking to them by addressing them directly. Even some internal (indirect/“telling”) evidence reveals that he has an informative intention. Specifically, he states in (18g) that he expects his utterances (18b-f) to achieve relevance by informing the CEOs that people are angry at them. In regard to the presumption of relevance, however, the internal evidence suggests that Rep. Cleaver likely presumes his utterance to communicate only *some*, but not *optimal*, relevance to the CEOs. To begin, the fact that the public was angry at the CEOs was already manifest to the CEOs. This fact did not need more reinforcement at this point in the Hearing, which was about three-fourths of the way through the daylong Hearing during which the CEOs were constantly reminded of the anger of the American people. Further, Rep. Cleaver could not have expected to convince the CEOs of the veracity of his constituents’ insults. Surely, he realized that these insults would come up against beliefs that the CEOs held more strongly, resulting in the dismissal of the propositions expressed in the insults in (18b-f).

While the anger of Rep. Cleaver’s constituents was not highly relevant to the CEOs, Rep. Cleaver’s comments were highly relevant to his constituents. Indeed, Rep. Cleaver quoted his constituents to let them know that he had been listening to them, that he found their comments important, and that he was being a faithful Representative by voicing their

concerns. In addition, their direct quotations supplied additional support to his argument that the CEOs were not trustworthy.

The CEOs, however, were aware that this was a public hearing and that the Representatives had split intentions. Therefore, the CEOs undoubtedly realized that Rep. Cleaver had intended his comments to be relevant primarily to his constituents. After making this realization, they would have abandoned further pursuits of finding much relevance for themselves.

Below I have included an abbreviated form of the Relevance Theory communication model that I presented in Figure 9, Page 48.

Table 3. Rep. Cleaver’s Utterance to Multiple Audiences¹³

Process	CEOs	Constituents
Intention	Rep. Cleaver desires the CEOs to accept as true the fact that his constituents are angry with them.	Rep. Cleaver desires his constituents to accept as true the fact that he is a good Representative.
Develop Plan	Rep. Cleaver plans to quote some of the comments from his constituents.	
Offer Stimulus	Rep. Cleaver recites the direct quotations from his constituents.	
Perceive Stimulus	CEOs perceive the utterances.	Constituents perceive the utterances.
Infer Meaning	CEOs infer that Rep. Cleaver wants them to know that his constituents are angry with them. (This assumption was obvious to them before Rep. Cleaver’s utterance.) CEOs infer that Rep. Cleaver must have intended his comments to be relevant primarily to his constituents.	The constituents infer that Rep. Cleaver is voicing their concerns and is therefore a good Representative. The constituents infer that there are a lot of good reasons to be angry with the CEOs and to blame them for the financial crisis. The constituents find Rep. Cleaver’s utterance highly relevant.

Table 3 (above) illustrates that Rep. Cleaver was able to accomplish multiple intentions with a single utterance. By being at least somewhat relevant to multiple audiences, Rep.

¹³ Of course, this is all based on my analysis of the text and may not reflect the speaker’s actual intentions or the hearers’ inferred meaning.

Cleaver left his precise intentions inexplicit and allowed the various audiences to read as much or as little as they wanted to into his intentions. This allows him to be persuasive without proof of his intentions. If he were accused of insulting the CEOs, he could deny it, stating that he was simply passing along comments from his constituents. If he were accused of false flattery toward his constituents, he could deny that as well, stating that he was simply trying to convey their anger to the CEOs so that they would behave better. Generally speaking, the presence of multiple audiences makes it harder to prove a speaker's intentions than if the speaker were speaking to only a single hearer. As a result, it also makes it easier for a speaker to deny that she even had a particular intention.

My goal is not to come up with a fully classificatory definition of persuasion or to review various theories of persuasion. Rather, my goal is to provide a Relevance-Theoretic account of persuasion to illustrate that the intuitive notions about the difference between informing and persuading are best explained by an appeal to epistemic vigilance, which is essentially an appeal to trust. Because Relevance Theory accounts for the role of epistemic vigilance in communication, it is an ideal model to analyze intuitively persuasive communicative exchanges across multiple audiences. In Section 4.6, I will proceed to provide a Relevance Theoretic account of manipulation.

4.6 Manipulating

Similar to my conclusions on persuasion, I also contend that manipulation does not constitute a linguistically distinct type of communication. Rather than being a linguistic distinction, the intuitive notions of manipulation actually depend on the correlation between speaker belief and speaker meaning, which is a consideration of a fact in the world that is independent of the linguistic form of the utterance.¹⁴ From the perspective of a

¹⁴ Here I am dealing specifically with deception, which is a clear case of manipulation. It is also possible to consider manipulation apart from deception, such as when one manipulates by means

speaker, her communicated stimulus is manipulative to the extent that she intends the hearer to accept assumptions as true that she herself believes to be false.¹⁵ From the perspective of the hearer, a perceived stimulus is manipulative to the extent that the hearer believes that the speaker intends him to believe something that the speaker herself does not believe. The following remark by Wells Fargo CEO John Stumpf, quoted earlier as Example (11), helps to illustrate this point:

11. Mr. Stumpf: “We are Americans first, and we are bankers second.”

19. Mr. Stumpf’s intentions in uttering (11): to inform the audiences that the CEOs have the best interests of the country as a higher ranked priority than their own banks’ profitability; to inform the audiences that the CEOs would not take advantage of the American people.

It is possible that Mr. Stumpf sincerely believes the message that he is trying to communicate to his various audiences. It is also possible that he does not believe the assumptions that he is trying to communicate. To the extent that he does not believe what he intended his audiences to believe, his utterance could be considered manipulative. Each individual can have a different perception of the degree to which a stimulus is manipulative. For example, Mr. Stumpf might personally believe that which he intended his audience to

of power but does not need to conceal the manipulation. In any event, whether manipulation involves deception or not, the manipulative speech does not constitute a linguistically distinct type of communication.

¹⁵ I have worded my definition of manipulation carefully to avoid any correlation to actual truth. For instance, Gibbs and Bryant (2008) found that people tend to give rounded answers when asked for the time in order to optimize relevance for the hearer. Telling someone that the time is noon when it is 11:58 a.m. would not be manipulation by my definition unless the speaker expected the hearer to believe that the time was exactly noon.

believe. Yet the Representatives might believe that he is merely purporting to believe it even though he probably does not. In such a case, Mr. Stumpf would view his utterance as non-manipulative, while the Representatives would view it as (at least somewhat) manipulative.

As another important consideration, a manipulative stimulus might be offered either ostensibly or non-ostensively (covertly). For example, a lie that is ostensibly and intentionally communicated to someone would be manipulation. In covert communication, part of the speaker's intended meaning is that the hearer would detect a level of ostension different from what the speaker knows to be true. By my definition of manipulation, therefore, intentional covert communication is always manipulative.

Further, my definition of manipulation states nothing about the ethics of manipulation. For example, a teacher might give her student a hint to a test problem but not want the student to realize that he received a hint, preferring that the student thinks he came up with the clue on his own. Because the teacher's ostensive intention was different from what she wanted her student to infer, she manipulated him; but that does not make her behavior unethical. Indeed, it is not my goal to comment on the ethics of communication. Rather, I simply desire to show that the manipulative nature of a communication (according to my definition) does not impact the cognitive processes involved in producing or understanding a stimulus. It very well may affect the results of the communication process, but the utterance itself is still processed using the same process as any utterance. Therefore, the same Relevance Theory model that I presented in Chapter 3 and Section 4.4 applies to manipulative just as well as to non-manipulative communicative exchanges.

This chapter has been mostly the presentation of theories about how communication works, with a particular emphasis on how it works across multiple audiences. In the next chapter (Chapter 5), I will use the theories laid out so far to analyze how the CEOs and

Representatives tried to persuade their audiences concerning the nature of the Capital Purchase Plan (CPP): Was it a bailout or not?

Chapter 5

LEXICAL CHOICES: WAS IT A BAILOUT?

As stated in Section 4.1, the CEOs and Representatives altered their speech in consideration of the other audiences who had access to their utterances. Because there were multiple audiences involved, the Representatives and CEOs had split intentions. One of the central claims of this paper is that the Relevance Theoretic notion of the presumption of optimal relevance should be reformulated to account for such split intentions toward multiple audiences. I addressed this issue by positing the notion of scalar ostension (Section 4.2), which states that an audience considers both external (manner of delivery) and internal (content of the utterance) evidence in determining the degree to which the speaker presumes her utterance to be optimally relevant. The consideration of how an utterance is relevant to another audience is a key consideration in determining how much relevance a hearer expects to find for himself.

In this chapter, I will turn my attention to the lexical choices of the interlocutors. The CEOs, for their part, remained steadfast in their use of terms that constrained their audiences to view them in a positive way. The Representatives, on the other hand, consistently used terminology that carried negative implicatures regarding the CEOs. The same Relevance Theoretic concepts of communication that apply to understanding the meaning of an utterance also apply to understanding the meaning of a word. The word choice patterns of the interlocutors reveal their intentions regarding what they want their audiences to believe with regard to this central question: Was the CPP a bailout or not? This question could be stated another way: Are the banks to blame for the financial crisis?

One subtle persuasive device that both interlocutors wielded was their terminology in referring to the CPP. On a technical note, the CPP was structured as an investment by the US government in various banks. The banks who received investments were required to pay dividends to the government (similar to the interest payments on a loan); thus, the CPP investments were by no means free to the banks. In addition, the banks were expected to repurchase their investments from the government as soon as the financial system had stabilized. On another note, some of the banks who received investments under the CPP told the US government that they did not even want the government's money, yet they ended up accepting it anyway to show support for the government's efforts to stabilize the financial system.

While the fact that the CPP was structured as an investment was mutually manifest to both sets of interlocutors, the Representatives used a wide variety of terms to suggest that the CPP investment was more like a free government handout than the government was coerced into providing. The term *bailout*, for instance, is a metaphor with negative connotations toward the entity being bailed out. *Bailout* can refer to the process of removing water from a sinking ship. It can also refer to the posting of a payment on behalf of someone who has been accused of a wrongdoing so that he can be released from police custody until he stands trial. Granted, the term *bailout* has become so pervasive that it has become less like a creative metaphor and more like a conventionalized idiom (see Pilkington 2000:100-108). The dictionary publisher Merriam-Webster selected *bailout* (defined as "a rescue from financial distress") as its word of the year for 2008, citing that *bailout* "received the highest intensity of lookups on Merriam-Webster online over the shortest period of time."¹⁶ Regardless of the imagery that the term *bailout* evokes, it

¹⁶ Merriam-Webster Online. "Word of the Year 2008." <http://www.merriam-webster.com/info/08words.htm>. Last accessed on July 14, 2011.

definitely has negative connotations with regard to the entity being bailed out. Perhaps the best proof of this is the fact that the CEOs themselves refused to use the term *bailout*. The table below shows the use of the *bailout* terminology during the Hearing with reference to the CPP/TARP¹⁷:

Table 4. Bailout Terminology

#	Speaker	Utterance	Page
1	Rep. Barrett	[my constituents] are not getting bailed out [like you were]	7
2	Rep. Neugebauer	there has been a lot of focus on all the bailout activities	27
3	Rep. Hensarling	Many said that Congress would never bail them out	44
4	Rep. Hensarling	now we have bailed them out	44
5	Rep. Garrett	the federal government stepped in and helped bail out AIG	47
6	Rep. Garrett	what was the need of the [Federal Reserve] to step in at that point to bail them out?	48
7	Rep. McCotter	the reports about the failure of the Wall Street bailout to date has caused a lot of concern.	53
8	Rep. McCotter	It is so difficult for [my constituents] to get credit despite the Wall Street bailout that they were told would work.	53
9	Rep. Baca	How do you feel about the bailout?	63
10	Rep. Baca	Do you feel the bailout was necessary?	63
11	Rep. Baca	We [the federal government] are the ones who have to bail you out because of what you've done	64
12	Rep. Lynch	[My constituents] are being asked to bail the banks out, you folks out	68
13	Rep. Lynch	[Is there a way to avoid putting] all these bailouts on the backs of the American taxpayer?	68
14	Rep. Speier	the biggest financial institutions both in size and in their bailout receipts	93

¹⁷ The CPP was one program under the broader umbrella of TARP. In Table 4, I include uses of the term *bailout* for both CPP funds and other references to TARP. The interlocutors frequently interchanged the terms *TARP* and *CPP* even though the CPP was only one component of TARP.

Of the fourteen references to the TARP funds as a bailout, all of the speakers were Representatives. Indeed, the CEOs never used this term. To do so would have been to admit guilt. Rather, the CEOs preferred to refer to the TARP funds in more technical terminology. Table 5 (below) shows the various speakers who referred to TARP funds as a government investment in the banks. Referring to the TARP funds as an investment highlighted the mutual benefit of the deal: the US government earned returns on its investments in the banks, while the CEOs benefited from the ability to use the government's investment to earn an additional profit. Of particular note, all eight CEOs used this language.

Table 5. Investment Terminology

Key	Speaker	Utterance	Page
1	Rep. Frank	we need to get...the government investment out of the banks as soon as we can.	4
2	Rep. Neugebauer	the American people have invested in your entities	9
3	CEO Blankfein	receiving this investment under the Capital Purchase Program	9
4	CEO Blankfein	receiving the government's investment	10
5	CEO Blankfein	We look forward to paying back the government's investment	11
6	CEO Dimon	the investment the government made to us in TARP	11
7	CEO Kelly	in exchange for the [US Government's] \$3 investment	13
8	CEO Kelly	We also fully intend to deliver a very good return on investment to taxpayers.	14
9	CEO Lewis	investors, including taxpayers, can earn returns	14
10	CEO Lewis	generate returns for investors, now including US taxpayers	15
11	CEO Logue	the taxpayers' investment	15
12	CEO Logue	we are pleased to have an opportunity to describe our use of [the CPP] investment	15

Table 5. Investment Terminology (cont.)

Key	Speaker	Utterance	Page
13	CEO Logue	our \$2 billion investment from the Capital Purchase Program	16
14	CEO Mack	the TARP investment	17
15	CEO Mack	as a recipient of an investment from the US government...	17
16	CEO Pandit	[the American people] have a right to expect a return on this investment	18
17	CEO Pandit	we are committed to providing the American public a return on its investment	19
18	CEO Pandit	We will pay the US government \$3.4 billion in annual dividends on that investment.	19
19	CEO Pandit	our goal, my goal, is to make this a profitable investment for the American people	19
20	CEO Stumpf	the US Treasury invested in Wells Fargo	20
21	CEO Stumpf	the investment by the government	20
22	CEO Stumpf	we will use the investment by the government to help make more loans	20
23	CEO Stumpf	this taxpayer investment	20
24	CEO Stumpf	an investment in the future economic growth of our country	20
25	Rep. Bacchus	this is going to be one of [the taxpayers'] best investments	24
26	Rep. Bacchus	we are going to make money on that investment	24
27	Rep. Sherman	The first \$254 billion of TARP money was invested	49
28	Rep. Sherman	as much as the Treasury was investing	49
29	CEO Pandit	my goal is to make this an extremely profitable investment for the US government	50
30	CEO Pandit	we are paying \$3.4 billion annually as dividends on this investment	50

What is particularly interesting is that all of the CEOs consistently used *investment* terminology to the exclusion of *bailout* terminology, which was used exclusively by the Representatives. The *bailout* and *investment* terminologies were at odds with each other:

Figure 11. Bailout vs. Investment

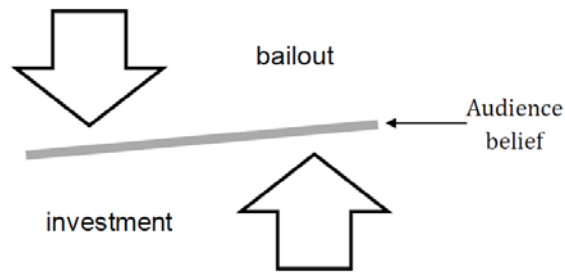


Figure 11 illustrates each speaker's desire to control how the CPP was conceptualized by the various audiences of the event: Was it a bailout or an investment?

Continuing in the review of lexical choices, I will focus on the use of SPEND.¹⁸ After reviewing three possible senses of SPEND, I will review the use of SPEND in the Hearing. Consider SPEND as used in the following sentences (20a-d) and corresponding to the senses defined in (21a-c):

20. (a) SPEND*: Thomas SPENT* \$10 on a pizza.
(b) SPEND**: Thomas SPENT** \$10 by loaning it to his brother, who will pay him back in three days.
(c) SPEND***: Thomas SPENT*** \$20 today: \$10 to buy a pizza for lunch and \$10 to loan to his brother.
(d) SPEND*,**,***: Thomas SPENT*/SPENT**/SPENT*** \$10 by loaning it to his brother.
21. (a) SPEND*: to pay out for an expense (no direct relation to an expectation of future cash inflows)

¹⁸ By placing a word in all capital letters, I am referring to the use of the word in the complete variety of acceptable uses within the word's semantic range of meaning. For a specific sense of the word, I will place a consistent number of asterisks after the word.

(b) SPEND^{**}: to pay out for an asset; to invest (a direct relation to an expectation of future cash inflows)

(c) SPEND^{***}: to pay out (for any purpose)

In Example (20a), the sense of SPEND^{*} is such that Thomas gives \$10 to someone in exchange for a pizza, and the person to whom he gives the \$10 will not give it back to him. The \$10 now belongs to the seller of the pizza, and in exchange for the \$10, Thomas has a pizza. In abstract terms, this could be considered an investment in the pizza, which will provide Thomas with energy that will help him to earn additional money. However, a crucial characteristic of SPEND^{*} is the short-term nature of the acquired benefit. While theoretically possible, it would sound awkward to say that Thomas *invested* \$10 in a pizza without changing the meaning of the sentence, for instance, to mean that Thomas intended to sell the slices of the pizza in exchange for a profit.

In the case of (20b), however, the sense of SPEND^{**} is such that it could be replaced by the word *invest*. The difference between SPEND^{*} and SPEND^{**} can be addressed easily by answering the following questions: Was it for a short-term benefit such as a meal (in accounting terminology, this would be labeled an *expense* and equate to SPEND^{*}), or was it expected to result in future cash inflows (which, in accounting terms, would be an *asset* and equate to SPEND^{**})? This distinction is noted well by Example (20d). Someone who knew that Thomas' brother had a history of not repaying loans could utter (20d, SPEND^{*}) to mean that Thomas will never see his \$10 again. In another instance, someone who expected Thomas' brother to repay the loan would utter (20d) in the sense of SPEND^{**}. Still, someone else could utter (20d) in the sense of SPEND^{***} without making any value judgment about whether or not Thomas' brother is likely to repay the loan.

It is worth asking how many possible senses of SPEND there are. Would it not be more accurate to consider all senses of SPEND to have the basic meaning of SPEND^{***}, which is

vague and could apply to all cases? In such a view, the subtle distinctions between SPEND* and SPEND** could be settled by contextual factors. While such a view is appealing in its simplicity and consistency, it fails to describe the cognitive processes that are involved in inferring meaning from words. As a brief explanation, just as an utterance is offered as a clue from which a hearer can infer the speaker’s meaning, so also a word is a clue from which the hearer can infer meaning that may be broader (SPEND*** as in to pay out for any purpose) or narrower (SPEND** as in to pay out for an asset; to invest) in a given context. While a word is partly a code, the actual meaning of a word is only partially encoded; the rest of the meaning is inferred from context. (For more on how the meaning of a word is fine-tuned in context, see the Relevance Theory literature on lexical pragmatics in Wilson 2003 and Wilson and Carston 2007.)

In the Hearing, there were four uses of SPEND that referred specifically to how the banks used the money that the government invested in them through the Capital Purchase Program. These uses are listed below:

Table 6. SPEND Terminology

Key	Speaker	Utterance	Page
1	Rep. Kanjorski	today we will learn how some of the richest and most powerful men in America are spending billions of dollars of taxpayer money	5
2	Rep. Barrett	you owe my constituents some explanation on...how you spent their money	6
3	Rep. Biggert	We don’t believe that taxpayer money has been spent wisely	7
4	Rep. Frank	if you think you are being ill-treated by our requests that you tell us how you spent it [CPP money], we will take it back	22

To no one’s surprise, only the Representatives used SPEND to describe how the banks put the government’s money to work. The CEOs would not use SPEND to describe how they used the CPP funds because of the possible ambiguity in how SPEND could be interpreted:

22. (a) SPEND*: The money was paid out, and now it is gone. The implication is that the banks are running out of money and will not be able to repay the taxpayers.
- (b) SPEND** : The money was invested; it is expected to be repaid. The implication is that the banks are being faithful managers of the taxpayers' money. The taxpayers will be repaid with interest.
- (c) SPEND***: The money was paid out. The implication is that the speaker is not making a value judgment on whether or not the money will be repaid.

Because the CEOs could use the term *invest* to constrain the implicatures to the favorable ones of SPEND** (22b) without the associated risks of the negative implicatures of SPEND* (22a), they avoided the use of SPEND altogether, preferring to use *investment* terminology instead. Further, the CEO's *investment* terminology emphasized that the taxpayers were likely to make a profit from their investment in the banks, thus implying that the taxpayers were beneficiaries rather than victims.

Overall, the Representatives exploited the multiple senses of SPEND to encourage audience members to view the CEOs as having SPENT* (paid out and used up) the CPP funds, which portrays them as being financially irresponsible and, therefore, worthy of blame for the state of the financial crisis. The stark contrast between the CEOs' and the Representatives' lexical choices supports my view that the CEOs used the more specific *investment* terminology to limit the implicatures of the various audiences, while the Representatives used the more negative *bailout* terminology and the ambiguous SPEND*/SPEND**/SPEND*** terminology because they intended their constituents to infer a range of possible meanings based on their varied expectations.

In this chapter I have reviewed the impact that multiple audiences have on a speaker's lexical choices. By using a word with multiple established senses, the Representatives gave

their hearers the option to infer a negative sense of the word SPEND* (the CEOs SPENT* the taxpayers' money, and now it is gone) while also allowing the more accurate sense SPEND** (the CEOs invested/SPENT** the taxpayers' money and intend to pay it back with interest). To the extent that the Representatives were trying to imply SPEND* when they actually believed SPEND**, they were also being manipulative according to my definition in Section 4.6.

Chapter 6

CONCLUSIONS

My analysis of persuasive and manipulative communication across multiple audiences has several implications for how to apply Relevance Theory to situations that are less than fully ostensive. To begin, in Section 4.1 I illustrated that the presences of multiple audiences results in the existence of multiple cognitive environments. To the extent that different assumptions are mutually manifest between a speaker and her various audiences, the speaker may intend her various audiences to infer different meanings from her utterance. When a communicator addresses multiple audiences simultaneously, she does not typically presume her utterance to be equally relevant to all of them. This presents a problem for the Relevance Theoretic notion of the presumption of optimal relevance.

To resolve this issue, I proposed the notion of scalar ostension in Section 4.2. The notion of scalar ostension posits that a speaker can communicate that she is offering less than optimal relevance to her various addressees. Further, in offering a scale of relevance to her audiences, the speaker uses both external (manner of delivery) and internal (content of the stimulus) clues to help her audiences detect the degree to which they should expect the stimulus to be relevant to them. The clarification of the different types of ostension (external and internal) resolves another problem with the presumption of optimal relevance, namely that the hearer assumes that the speaker is attempting to be optimally relevant before the hearer even begins to process the stimulus. In cases of multiple audiences, however, this presents a problem because the hearer does not always expect that the speaker is attempting to be optimally relevant specifically to him. In such

instances, the hearer expects that the speaker is attempting to offer him *some*, but not *optimal*, relevance. As a result, the hearer places some level of responsibility on the speaker and considers the speaker to be communicating poorly or deceptively if his expectations of relevance are not satisfied. However, because he recognizes that the speaker is offering him only *some* (not *optimal*) relevance, he takes responsibility for some of his own expectations of relevance.

Further, by appealing to the role of internal evidence, I emphasized that the hearer adjusts his expectations of relevance throughout his processing of the utterance. The hearer revises his expectation of relevance in real time along with his attempt at inferring meaning, adjusting both the expectation of relevance and the recovery of relevance until the hearer gains sufficient benefits and then stops processing.

In the remainder of Chapter 4, I offered a comprehensive model of the communicative process with an emphasis on persuasive and manipulative communication across multiple audiences. In Section 4.4 I provided a Relevance Theoretic account of informing someone of something that incorporates my notion of scalar ostension. Then, in Section 4.5 I proposed a Relevance Theoretic distinction between informing and persuading that is rooted in the notions of trust and epistemic vigilance (see also Section 4.3) and not based on any linguistic factor. I concluded Chapter 4 by providing a Relevance Theoretic account of manipulation (specifically deception) that is rooted in the correspondence between a speaker's implied meaning and a speaker's actual beliefs. Throughout Chapter 4 I applied my accounts of informing, persuading, and manipulating to communication that is aimed at multiple audiences.

Finally, in Chapter 5 I provided an extended example of how the presence of multiple audiences affects the speaker's word choice so that a speaker can intend a specific word to mean different things to different people.

My analysis has some profound applications for Relevance Theory. Specifically, by detangling the ostensive intention from the communicative intention (Table 2, Page 39), I have suggested a basis for expanding the domain of Relevance Theory to communicative situations that are only partially ostensive or that may not even be ostensive at all. To my knowledge, my work is unique in the way that I attempt to apply Relevance Theory to communication across multiple audiences. As a result, I am sure that the theories that I have proposed would benefit from additional research and refinement.

In addition to promoting additional applications to Relevance Theory, I have attempted to provide a model for analyzing communicative situations across multiple audiences. I intend for my descriptions of persuasion and manipulation to be of value to anyone who is studying how persuasion and manipulation function across multiple audiences.

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