WHAT DISCOURSE GOALS CAN BE ACCOMPLISHED BY THE USE OF HYPERBOLE?

ATTILA L. NEMESI

Abstract

Although hyperbole is a ubiquitous means of discourse, its role in interpersonal rhetoric has been examined to a much lesser extent than that of metaphor or irony. This paper investigates what discourse goals can be fulfilled by hyperbole, using conversations from some classic Hungarian films as the data. The reason why film conversations were selected is that the knowledge of the story and the transparency of the characters' intentions make the understanding of communicative motives easy. Besides, the situations in feature films are very similar to spontaneous everyday interactions. Analyses demonstrate that hyperbolic utterances convey the speakers' attitudes, either real or only presented, towards the topic of conversation. According to the social psychological laws of public behaviour, the expression of emotional relation or attitude is mostly subordinated to the speaker's attempt to construct an intended impression on conversational partners. Thus, the use of hyperbole has two main goals: to express emotions and to reach a desired self-presentation.

1. Introduction

From ancient rhetoric to present-day study of language use and comprehension, **hyperbole** (also called **overstatement** or **exaggeration**) has been seen as one of the most prominent figures of speech. Since it is a frequent phenomenon not only in oratorical or artistic texts but in familiar conversation as well, and its usage (that is, the augmentation of the intensity of real state of affairs to extremity) differs from the communication of literal meanings, it also falls within the competence of pragmatics. Grice's classic (1975) article posited that figures such as hyperbole, irony, metaphor, and meiosis (or litotes) are cases of flouting the Maxim of Quality: the hearer can restore the meaning of the literally false proposition by calculating an appropriate implicature. It is not obvious, however, what kind(s) of social goals underlie the generation of such implicatures for it can be supposed that the shift from maximally effective, direct broadcast of meaning is explained by some kind(s) of interactional intentions.

In the present paper, I aim to account for the role of hyperbole in discourse combining the insights of the Gricean theory of conversational implicature and the theory of impression management developed in social psychology. I assume that the conversational partner, facing an exaggeration, does not only recognize the violation of the Maxim of Quality but he/she also conveys certain facets of the speaker's face (see Goffman 1955; Brown–Levinson 1978; 1987; Tracy 1990; Mao 1994) and his/her relation to the topic of conversation. In other words, the speaker chooses hyperbolic statements to form a desired impression of his/her face and his/her attitude towards the topic of speech in the hearer.

Both traditional rhetoric, stylistics, and the much younger empirical psycholinguistics and pragmatics, have greatly contributed to reveal the background of the usage of hyperbole. As basic preliminaries, these contributions will be detailed in section **2**. Then, in section **3**, I will demonstrate that the role of hyperbole in discourse can be successfully investigated only by means of an analysis that takes into consideration the context in which the hyperbolic utterance occurs. In section **4**, I will introduce the notion of self-implicature as the cornerstone of a complex model I will elaborate on within the field of social psychological pragmatics (see Muntigl–Turnbull 1998, 226). This model will be tested by further examples in section **5**.

2. A review of literature

2.1. Figurative language and interpersonal rhetoric

The strict separation of linguistic tools employed for literary expression or public persuasion and those used in casual conversation cannot be held any more, as some of the figures of speech that have been traditionally classified within the scope of rhetoric appear frequently in the situations of everyday communication. Their pervasiveness in such contexts also indicates that the need for efficiency can be recognized not only in consciously rhetorized texts but in interpersonal rhetoric as well (Leech 1983, 15). The recognition of this fact is by no means new in linguistics. In the early 20th century, Charles Bally (1913, 32) portrayed language as an arm: the speaker utilizes it in order to force his/her own thoughts upon the conversational partner. Thus, the language of communication is driven by an instinctive rhetoric, which makes its own use of strategies of eloquence; or rather, it is eloquence that once borrowed

them from conversation. There is no absolute consensus about the exact number of (and clear-cut distinction concerning) these strategies within the literature. But it is agreed that at least metaphors (*My office was a bedlam today*), irony (*Thanks for your help!* — when a meddlesome neighbour breaks the speaker's precious Chinese vase while packing), hyperbole (*I have a million duties before noon*), litotes (*Punctuality is not your best virtue* — when the partner arrives too late to the meeting again), simile (*This plum is as sweet as honey*) and rhetorical question (*Who do you think you are?*) have as important a role in ordinary conversation as in public and literary registers (see, e.g., Szathmári 1958; Lausberg 1960/1998; Grice 1975; Leech 1983; Brown–Levinson 1978; 1987; Fogelin 1988; Sperber–Wilson 1990; Kreuz–Roberts 1993; Gibbs 1994; Fónagy 2001).

Kreuz et al. (1996) assessed the relative frequency of these forms of nonliteral language in a randomly selected, 96-page corpus of contemporary American short stories, containing about 38,000 words. They found that hyperbole (accounting for 27% of the forms of figurative language in the corpus) was a close second after the first ranked metaphor (29%), highly surpassing the rate of its logical opposite, litotes (3%), for example. Although it can be suspected that these statistics are not universal but dependent on language and genre, the authors rightly mention that the phenomenon of such a frequent occurrence of hyperbole should have attracted more attention than it is suggested by the low number of relevant publications and relatively few theoretical developments.

2.2. Describing the phenomenon of hyperbole

At the level of literal meaning the hyperbolic linguistic expression either makes the sentence unequivocally false (e.g., *There were countless applicants for the job* — since the applicants could have been counted) or difficult to decide its truth value because of the additional emotive content (e.g., *Your performance was frenetic* — for there is no objective scale in this respect, other judges can have different opinion of that). The quantitative augmentation of real states of affairs (unfortunately, hyperbole is not defined more exactly in the literature) makes big things bigger, and small things smaller. Thus, diminution is also a kind of hyperbole (e.g., *There's absolutely nothing on the telly this evening*), although some scholars discuss it separately from augmentation (cf. Szathmári 1958, 148). The saliency and evocative effect of hyperbole make

our attention focus on the manner of the linguistic performance and are the source of its expressivity (see Bally 1913, 26–8; Péter 1984, 231–3; Péter 1991, 40–4). As a word figure, universal quantifiers (*always*, *every*, *nobody*, etc.), superlatives of adjectives or adverbs, repetition (*a long long way*, *very-very difficult*, etc.), (usually round) numerals and evaluative-qualifying lexemes (*abominable*, *brilliant*, *milksop*, *stony-hearted*, etc.) offer a possibility of 'lying', claiming literally implausible extremities (Lausberg 1960/1998, 263–4, 410–1; Fónagy 1975, 481–2; Péter 1991, 65–70). As a thought figure, the structure of words, the whole sentence, or more than one sentence can express such vertical gradations (e.g., *The man who will make me gobble up mushrooms is not yet born*—quoted by Fónagy 2001, 219 from the film *Buffet froid* by Bertrand Blier, 1979). Another peculiar aspect of hyperbole is that it tends to co-occur with other forms of figurative language (cf. Szathmári 1958, 146; Lausberg 1960/1998, 263–4, 410–1; Kreuz–Roberts 1995; Kreuz et al. 1996, 92; Kreuz et al. 1998, 93; Colston–Keller 1998), usually with simile, as in (1a), metaphors, as in (1b), irony, as in (1c), and idioms, as in (1d):

(1)　(a)　You have as many nice clothes as stars in the sky. Let us not buy another one.

　　(b)　You are my sunshine.

　　(c)　Wonderful! … — says a disappointed supporter when his favourite team, which is in disadvantage, gets another humiliating goal.

　　(d)　His eyes nearly popped out of his head.

Szathmári (1958, 146) explains the stylistic effect of hyperbole in the following way: every overstatement is accompanied by the recognition that there is another linguistic sign for expressing the exaggerated concept, which is more adequate concerning its reflection to reality, but the speaker wants to communicate more than that just for the effect. The question remains what can be understood as 'effect' in stylistic studies. Referring to the results of Sandig (1986), Tolcsvai Nagy (1996, 89, 265) defines it as an emotional and/or sensory response generated in the hearer, which derives from the recognition of the relation created by the unification of expectations, comparing with style types and style attribution. In what follows, I will attempt to systematically investigate for what kind(s) of (social psychological) pragmatic effects the speaker prefers a hyperbolic expression to other linguistic means which reflect reality more adequately.

2.3. The role of hyperbole in speech

Building on Lausberg's (1960/1998, 263–4, 410–1) standard work as well as other sources, Fónagy's (1975, 482–4) painstaking dictionary entry focuses on literary/rhetoric rather than everyday uses of hyperbole. However, his observations are really valuable for the present argumentation. First, according to Fónagy, hyperbole is one of the characteristics of excited mental state: it can reflect anxiety or strong emotion resulting from losing self-control. Second, similarly to such emotional agitation, the long-lasting thrill of love (which deserves separate mention) makes the speaker distort the perspective. Third, the consistent use of hyperbole renders speech dramatic, solemn, and thus idealizing, making the style too lofty for ordinary use. Fourth, the overuse of dramatic hyperbole and the contrast of a petty topic with a solemn form can turn the emphatic effect backwards (see the genre of comic epic). Fifth, the desire to faithfully present the original event and to be expressive can stimulate the speaker to augment the intensity of words. Sixth, rhetorical hyperbole serves the goal of persuading the audience: the rhetor, on the one hand, can impede the potential objections by exaggerating the phenomena, and, on the other, hyperbolic polite forms help to get positive feedback by dispraising the speaker and praising the hearer. Seventh, the demonstrative overstatement of politeness and homage verges upon irony: it can express sarcasm, antipathy, or scorn just like dramatic style. Finally, as a feature of style, hyperbole can characterize dramatic persons. For instance, Molière wittily parodies the female speech of the 17th century, especially the language of French salons in his *Learned Ladies* with giddy hyperboles spoken by his characters (*Pleasure will kill me*, *You can feel a thousand sweet thrills while listening*, etc.). Finally, Fónagy (1975, 484; 2001, 219) does not fail to note that some performances of hyperbole are genre-specific: it is a compulsory stylistic means of naive epic and folk-tale among literary genres, and it is common in popular speech, generally. Other examples from contemporary media culture can be easily added to this brief list (e.g., the language of advertisements, sports broadcasts, or TV shows).

Since the understanding of nonliteral meanings is closely related to the recognition of the speakers' intention, psycholinguistic research has also been conducted in order to examine the discourse goals or goal taxonomies that underlie the usage of figuration. Roberts and Kreuz (1994) asked American college students to provide reasons why an individual

might employ a particular figure of speech on the basis of a definition and 10 examples. Based on the 134 acceptable responses, the hypothetical goals were classified according to 19 easily identifiable categories, out of which hyperbole was mostly mapped to "clarifying" (!), "emphasizing", "being humorous", and "adding interest" (of course, other figures of speech were associated with other constellations of communicative goals). The most frequently mentioned goal "to clarify" is somewhat surprising given the "reduced truth value" of hyperbole (Fónagy 2001, 218). As Roberts and Kreuz do not provide us with the list of their examples, we are left to rely on the comments of Kreuz et al. (1998, 94): the feelings or attitudes of the speaker and his/her relation to the information communicated may be clarified by using exaggeration. The utterance in (2), for example, informs us about a certain event (the national team lost a match), but the speaker's emotional reaction to the event (disgust or disillusionment) is also made clear enough, owing to the hyperbole:

(2)   I've just watched the Hungarian football team lose for the thousandth time!

Hyperbolic speech may have other functions in specific contexts. Sell et al. (1997) videotaped conversations between preschool children and their parents in free-play situations. They found that the parents used dozens of hyperboles (more than metaphors but less than rhetorical questions or idioms). As it was expected, adults mostly used this linguistic means to encourage children in their play activities (e.g., *We can fix anything, can't we?*) and to express positive evaluation (*Wow, that was perfect!*, *The tallest bunny I've ever seen*, etc.).

Colston and Keller (1998) and Colston (1997) concentrate on unexpected social episodes when overstatement, understatement, and irony express surprise (e.g., *There is not a single person in line here*—when two women walk into a theatre known for very long queues, but as they enter, they see only two people queuing up). Being psycholinguists, Colston and Keller are primarily interested in which figure is the most effective and how people comprehend them. Hence their written scenarios contain pre-constructed (supposedly fictitious) examples, out of which for our purposes it is worth noting the bare fact that hyperbole sometimes is a verbal reflection of surprise when events do not turn out as previously expected.

2.4. The pragmatic perspective

Following Grice's (1975, 53) theory of conversational postulates and implicatures, mainstream pragmatics has concerned hyperbole and other common figures of speech as a flout exploiting the first maxim of Quality ('Do not say what you believe to be false'). Exploitation means that the speaker deliberately does not observe a maxim, without wanting to suspend cooperation or to mislead the hearer. Instead, he/she wishes to communicate something that is not included in the literal meaning of the utterance but can be inferred from the conventional meaning, assuming the obviously cooperative attitude of the speaker, and using information from the (not expounded) context or background knowledge. Still, if, according to the aim of the present paper, we want to know what kind(s) of implicit information (implicatures) can be inferred from exaggerations, Grice's own example, in (3), does not serve as a good starting point for want of explanatory glossing:

(3)   Every nice girl loves a sailor.

Since we do not know the context in which utterance (3) is (or can be) said, the content of the implicature is not obvious at all (it may not be by chance that Grice, untypically, failed to detail it). For instance, one might argue that *every* should be simply replaced by *many*, and the implicature is worked out. But let us consider another real-life context: if the speaker is a sailor and the hearer is a nice girl, then (3) can also implicate that the girl should like the speaker. This is the indirect message that seems to be the intended one.

Leech (1983) goes one step further when he posits maxims of politeness, whose clash with the Gricean maxims may lead to the modification of direct strategies, as long as it does not require too much effort from the partner. When discussing the interpersonal rhetorical role of hyperbole, Leech, on the one hand, mentions the enhancement of politeness (e.g., *What a marvellous meal you cooked!* — attributed to his Approbation Maxim, favoured in praising others), and, on the other hand, he introduces a new principle, the Interest Principle, assuming that idiomatic hyperboles that occur frequently in ordinary conversation and the preference of extremities on a scale of news value can and should be derived from it (Leech 1983, 145–7):

(4)   Say what is unpredictable, and hence interesting.

The Interest Principle encapsulates the common experience that people prefer interesting conversations with some novelty to boring interchanges, monotonous in both style and content. Nevertheless, exaggeration used for creating interest has its limitations as well. In this way, the Maxim of Quality and the Interest Principle are in conflict all the time: sometimes the former, sometimes the latter wins their perpetual tug-of-war, but it is the Maxim of Quality as a keystone of rational behaviour and communicative ethic that is a wider social expectation.

Perhaps more influential than Leech's, Brown and Levinson's politeness theory (1978, 222–5; 1987, 217–20) quite irregularly categorizes hyperbole and litotes as flouts of not the Quality but the Quantity maxim ('Do not make your contribution either more or less informative than is required'): the former is too informative while the latter is not informative enough compared to the real state of affairs. There is no need to accept unconditionally this view (at least for hyperbole) in order to recognize the politeness of derived implicatures (or rather, the face-saving intention; see below):

(5) (a) There were a million people in the Co-op tonight!

  (b) I tried to call a hundred times, but there was never any answer.

Exaggerating the overwhelming circumstances, (5a) is an excuse offered as an explanation for being late, whereas (5b) could function as an apology or decline of responsibility for not getting in touch, indicating that the speaker tried hard not to hurt the partner. According to Brown and Levinson, overstatement as a strategy of politeness tends to manifest itself when the risk of face loss is relatively high; that is, what is to be said is opposed to the public self-image of the partners and their expectations originating from their face-wants, therefore it is worth leaving an 'out' (a defensible interpretation) for mitigating the offence. The offence is the fact of being late in (5a) and the omitted phone call in (5b).

However, hyperbole is such a flexible figure of speech that we cannot be satisfied with the above classification of functions, even within the realm of discourse politeness. In the strategy network of Brown and Levinson's theory, there is a branch which ends in the exaggerative presentation of interest, approval, or sympathy, fulfilling the partner's desire that his/her favoured thoughts, acts, possessions should be admitted by the others (1978, 109–11; 1987, 104–6):

(6) What a fantastic garden you have!

Since Brown and Levinson proposed the flouting of the Maxim of Quantity instead of the Maxim of Quality, let us add that Grice's categories of Relation ('Be relevant') and Manner ('Be perspicuous: Avoid obscurity, ambiguity, etc.') are also capable of being exploited by hyperbolic utterances, although the literature seems to disregard these eventualities:

(7) (a) A: Mrs. X is an old bag.

        B: ((after a moment of appalled silence))[1] The weather has been quite delightful this summer, hasn't it?

   (b) It is awfully nice of you to take care of me all the time.

Example (7a), again, is taken from Grice (1975, 54) and illustrates the shift of topic, resulting from the recognition of a conversational inaptitude (flouting of the Maxim of Relation). But here the contribution of the hyperbole to the violation of relevance maxim seems to be negligible. By contrast, (7b) is ambiguous due to the 'frightening' exaggeration *per se* for the hearer as long as he/she cannot decide whether the communicator speaks seriously or ironically. If this ambiguity is generated on purpose, an implicature of Manner arises.

3. The concept of self-presentation

Considering the several approaches applied in previous literature, and keeping in mind the multiple face of conversational exaggeration as an interpersonal rhetorical figure of speech, it may seem that a theoretical framework making the identification of communicative goals of hyperbole simpler and more elegant can hardly be developed. However, it is a fact that the problem can be ascribed, at least partly, to the isolation of the—quite often invented—examples and the narrowing of context, drawing conclusions either from the opinions of informants as Roberts and Kreuz (1994) or from particular utterances as Grice (1975), Leech (1983), and Brown–Levinson (1978; 1987).

---

[1] The transcript symbols used throughout this paper are common in conversation analysis research (cf. Atkinson–Heritage 1984, ix–xvi). Double parentheses enclose certain meaningful (mostly nonverbal) details of the scene, intervals in the stream of talk are timed in tenths of a second and inserted within parentheses, a colon indicates an extension of the sound or syllable it follows (more colons prolong the stretch), and emphasis is marked by underlining.

Therefore, in this section, I will turn to a controllable linguistic example for methodological reasons, to a scene from the first widely known product of the Hungarian feature film industry, *Hyppolit, a lakáj* (Hyppolit, the butler) made in 1931. Since the story is well-known, the investigation of the context and the social motives of the characters do not cause any trouble when interpreting the conversation (and the italicized idiomatic hyperbole) in (8). Clearly, the following part of a dialogue is not spontaneous. However, it is very similar to real-life exchanges, thus making it possible to be investigated, just like sequences of natural conversation, from various aspects mentioned in the literature review:

(8) MR. SCHNEIDER: Te, mama, ki ez a (.2) Hyppolit?
                 'Hey, Mum, who is this (.2) Hyppolit?'

MRS. SCHNEIDER: Hh el is felejtettem neked mondani, hogy felvettem egy inast...
                 'Hh I forgot to tell you that I hired a butler...' (.8)

MR. SCHNEIDER: ((astonished)) Inast?
                 'A butler?'

MRS. SCHNEIDER: Hh i:gen... Meg akartalak lepni vele...
                 'Hh ye:s... I wanted to surprise you...'

MR. SCHNEIDER: ((angrily)) Sikerült!
                 'You succeeded in that.'

MRS. SCHNEIDER: Remélem, papa, nem haragszol.
                 'I hope, Dad, that you are not angry.'

MR. SCHNEIDER: ((ironically)) De::hogy haragszom. Mért haragudjak? Csak
                 úgy kirúgom, hogy a... a lába nem éri a földet!
                 'I am no::t angry at all. Why should I be angry? *I will just
                 kick him out such that his feet will not touch the ground!*'

MRS. SCHNEIDER: De:hogy rúgod. Szépen fölveszed a kabátodat, mert ingujjban
                 nem fogadhatod. Huszonhét évig szolgált egy grófi háznál.
                 'You wo:n't. You will put on your coat because you cannot
                 receive him in a shirt. He worked for a count for 27 years.'

MR. SCHNEIDER: Hát nálunk nem fog olyan sokáig szolgálni.
                 'He will not work for us for that long.'

MRS. SCHNEIDER: De papa...
                 'But Dad...'

MR. SCHNEIDER: Csak bízd rám!
                 'Just leave it to me!'

Gloss: Mr. Schneider is a petty bourgeois turned transport entrepreneur. His wife, a woman with an air of snobbery, persuaded by the employment agent and without asking Schneider, tries to transmute her household

into something more distinguished than it actually is by hiring Hyppolit, formerly a butler with the family of a count. The exchange cited in (8) occurs at the dinner table just before Hyppolit's entry. We see that Schneider does not want to hear about the idea: he insists on the old way of life that he is accustomed to, and, in a firm tone of voice he tells his defensive wife about his dislike of her plan because of the offence on his authority (his wife hired Hyppolit without his consent). Some moments later, when the elegant Hyppolit, with an excellent style, enters personally, Schneider turns into a timid petty burgeois, his behaviour changes dramatically: forgetting his former vigour, he tries to accommodate to the expectations of the aristocratic butler, and finally, he accepts his hiring, giving in to his wife's will.

What does Schneider communicate when he says he "will kick him out such that his feet will not touch the ground"? Since in Hungarian this is an exaggerative idiom (cf. (1d)) that states a literally impossible act (we think this on the basis of our world and linguistic knowledge), at first, we have to find another version of this expression which is more adequate in its relation to reality (cf. Szathmári 1958, 146), for example: he will sack Hyppolit, he will not employ him. However, the informational content of the utterance is not yet totally exploited. The next step is the emotional load (discussed in Lausberg 1960/1998; Fónagy 1975; Fussell–Moss 1998; etc.)—recall that it was a concomitant of the hyperbole seen in (2), too—: Schneider is annoyed by the snobbery of his wife and by Hyppolit's unexpected appearance. That is why he overdoes the way he will treat Hyppolit. The manifestation of an emotionally accentuated, vigorous attitude is at the same time a defensive effort to repair the challenge of the role 'master of the house' on the level of self-presentation.

This essential self-presentational layer of meaning generation demands a social psychological extension of the traditional linguistic perspective while examining the inferential content of an utterance in its entirety. Thus, before proceeding any further with the discussion, we need to shed light on what is included in the concept of self-presentation in order to integrate it into a complex social psychological pragmatic model.

Self-presentation is the pervasive attempt to control self-relevant images that are projected in social interactions (Schlenker 1980, 6; Tedeschi 1981, 3; Leary 1995, 2). While some authors use the terms *self-presentation* and *impression management* interchangeably (Leary–Kowalski 1990; Leary 1993; 1995), others make a distinction between them, emphasizing that impression management involves the goal-directed control of the

outer image of not only the actor but that of other persons, associations, entities, and ideologies as well; hence, impression management is a broader and more encompassing notion than self-presentation (Schlenker 1980; Schneider 1981). A third technical term also frequently employed for the description of approximately the same social phenomena is *face-work*, which represents all kinds of behaviour consistent to either the speaker's or the hearer's face (Goffman 1955; Brown–Levinson 1978; 1987; Penman 1990; Tracy 1990; Nwaye 1992; Mao 1994; Wood–Kroger 1994; Muntigl–Turnbull 1998).

The first seminal promoter of research on self-presentation, Goffman (1955; 1959)follows the spiritual heritage of sociologically anchored symbolic interactionism when he gives a purely external characterization of the self as a set of faces or images originating not from personal traits but the ritual order of public encounters. For him, faces are positive social values or approved social attributes a person effectively claims for himself/herself by the line others assume he/she has taken during a particular contact (1955, 213). However, in the flow of symbolic communication participants have to constantly confront the danger of being in the wrong face, being out of face, or losing face. To prevent these embarrassing situations, every community develops a set of face-saving acts, which, as mentioned earlier, is interpreted by Brown and Levinson (1978; 1987) as the repertoire of (linguistic) politeness. An important difference is that Goffman concentrates on the performance of the actor, whereas politeness theory focuses primarily on the face wants of the hearer (Penman 1990; Tracy 1990; Wood–Kroger 1994). In addition, Brown and Levinson (1978, 66–9; 1987, 61–4) give some individualistic content to the Goffmanian dramaturgical self, which does not meet the values of every culture (Nwaye 1992; Mao 1994). In contrast with this, current research into self-presentation (1) regards facework not only as a defensive action directed towards the face needs of the hearer (Arkin 1981; Tedeschi–Norman 1985; Penman 1990); (2) stresses the interplay of private self-processes and interpersonal determinants in impression management (Schlenker 1985; Baumeister 1986; Leary–Kowalski 1990; Leary 1993); and (3), besides the institutionalized roles traced back to the closeness of the social structure and the rituality of interaction, allows for constructing individual faces or self-identification, which involves all the processes, means, or results of showing oneself to be a particular type of person, thereby specifying one's identity (Schlenker 1986, 23).

Adopting Leary's (1993; 1995; Leary–Kowalski 1990) in-depth conceptualization, self-presentation can be seen as the consequence of three discrete psychological processes that include impression monitoring, impression motivation, and impression construction. Impression monitoring is largely determined by the state of self-awareness: the more aware people are of their outer social image in a given situation, the more probable they will consider the self-presentational implications of their actions. The high or low level of average self-consciousness has a bearing upon personal characteristics as well. Among situational components, derailed interactions immediately draw attention to the face of the actor. Jones and Pittman (1982, 234) discuss some of the settings in which impression monitoring (and, therefore, self-presentation) is absent or minimal: (1) high task involvement, physical or intellectual challenge, (2) purely expressive behaviour (expression of anger, joy, enthusiasm, etc.), (3) a large class of overlearned, habitual social interchanges, and (4) authentic self-disclosures (e.g., therapy sessions, encounter groups, and intimate relationships). We have to say, then, that when one of the above settings forms the backbone of the context, the use of hyperbole does not necessarily represent an intention of self-presentation (albeit a non-intended secondary impression can be evoked in the hearer), but in every other case the possibility of strategic facework is maintained.

Impression motivation is strongly but not directly connected to impression monitoring. In Leary's view, it depends on three factors, namely the perceived goal-relevance of impressions, the value of the person's desired goals, and the potential discrepancy between desired and current images. For instance, Schneider is likely to be oriented to use a vigorous tone of voice in (8) because of the third motive: he feels that his face is threatened before his wife's eyes, who shows less respect to him than he would desire as her husband.

Impression construction that calculates what kind of impression could elicit the desired feedback from the partners is subsumed by five antecedents. Self-concept and desired identity images represent the considerations of our private self: people prefer suggesting impressions which match how they see themselves, and generally, it is easier and more rational to act in this manner than showing something different than what we really are or want to be like. The remaining determinants of impression construction (role and normative constraints, target values, and current or potential social image) are interpersonal in nature: expectations of peers and the structure of society give content to face, just like internal

features do. Of course, the face that Schneider tries to construct and assure for himself in his wife's eyes is composed of these factors, too.

4. Self-implicatures: a complex social psychological pragmatic approach

In a previous paper, referring to other relevant works, I argued that within the multiple message of linguistic communication not only factive or objective but subjective or self-content should be observed as well (Nemesi 2000, 434–5; see also Németh T. 2003; 2004 about rational and interpersonal principles of the communicative use of language for a similar reasoning). Hence, conversation includes information about the topic of speech on the one hand, and information about the selves of the communicators on the other. The exchange of information about the topic of speech is regulated by maxims of rationality (à la Grice 1975) as opposed to symbolic signs concerning the selves of the interactants, whose main motive is what I call the strategy of linguistic self-presentation: in verbal interactions, normally, people try to present themselves in such a way that they would like to be seen (Nemesi 2000, 426).

As for implicatures, Grice does not mention self-implicatures: only objective implicatures occur in his *Logic and conversation.* Consider, for example, the following:

(9)　　A: Smith doesn't seem to have a girlfriend these days.

　　　　B: He has been paying a lot of visits to New York lately.

In (9), according to Grice (1975, 51), B implicates that Smith has, or may have, a girlfriend in New York, that is why he often goes there. (It is interesting that Grice does not allow for other potential implicatures— for instance that Smith works a lot, and has to perform professional tasks in New York, and therefore he does not have enough time to maintain a relationship.) Three full stops in writing or intonation and additional nonverbal cues in speech can mark the presence of the unsaid thought, but without these it may be the case that B does not implicate anything, he/she only continues the conversation. Anyhow, it is not questionable that the interpretation preferred by Grice covers an objective implicature: the conversation is about Smith's private life, and B's indirect allusion adds something to this topic. A self-implicature would be found if we could suppose (knowing A, B, and the context of the exchange more

deeply) that B represents his/her initiation with the implicature or tries to establish intimacy by virtue of a gossip, or rather, that he/she wants to make the conversation (and thus, himself/herself) more interesting, etc.

In fact, self-implicatures were discovered by politeness theorists, even if the term is not used by them. While Leech (1983, 131–51) describes, among other directions of interpersonal rhetoric, the minimization of benefit and praise of self, and also the mitigation of antipathy and disagreement towards the partner in his maxims, Brown and Levinson (1978; 1987) see politeness as saving of faces; thus, any politeness implicature can be construed as a face-saving implicature. Self, face, and impression management (or self-presentation), nonetheless, are social psychological concepts; linguistics does not have to account for them, just like social psychology does not examine the layers of linguistic meaning because it can borrow models from semantics or pragmatics. It is obvious that while analyzing the hyperbolic utterance in (8), a self-implicature was pointed out: though the emotional relation and attitude towards the topic of speech represents a specific intermediate type between objective and self-implicatures (it informs about both the topic and the speaker), the aspect of self-presentation has led our investigation into the area of social psychology. Neither the linguistic facets of politeness nor the role of hyperbole in discourse can be described within the frames of only pragmatics or only social psychology. The cooperation and attachment of the two disciplines can yield a more detailed explanation of the phenomena covered by interpersonal rhetoric.

To recapitulate, the Gricean umbrella has proven to be steady theoretical ground: concerning its literal meaning, hyperbole really is a partial lie, that is, it has a reduced truth value or extremely subjective connotation, and this fact is mutually unequivocal for the conversational participants. The speaker, therefore, cannot mean to mislead his/her partner; rather, to utilize its expressivity in the representation of the emotional relation and attitude towards the topic of conversation, and—through increasing expressivity—to construct, maintain, or repair his/her own face desired in social contact, or to serve the faces of others. At the other side, the hearers recognize the violation of the Maxim of Quality, they reconstruct the truth value of the proposition while some kind of hypothesis is created about the implicit message of the exaggeration. If the emotional load of the hyperbolic utterance is not credible, the endeavour to manage the self (which the speaker, naturally, does not want to make visible) may be discovered.

If we are on the right track in analyzing overstatements, then steps followed in the case of the example taken from the film *Hyppolit, a lakáj* (Hyppolit, the butler) can be generalized (cf. Grice 1975, 49–50) as shown in (10):

(10) (a) The speaker has said that p;

(b) according to the linguistic, metacognitive, and world knowledge of every competent language user, p is an exaggerative proposition; the speaker obviously violated the Maxim of Quality with its use;

(c) there is no reason to suppose that the speaker is not observing the Gricean maxims, or at least the Cooperative Principle, thus he/she does not want to mislead anybody but rather to exploit the maxim;

(d) hence, first, supposition q is needed, which is a more adequate version of p concerning its relation to the real state of affairs (in a diachronic perspective, q may become lexicalized—but even so, the original semantic contrast between p and q more or less remains);

second, supposition r is needed for identifying the speaker's emotional and evaluative attitude towards the topic of conversation on the basis of the hyperbole (r can also be conventionalized, at least partly; however, the stylistic value of the expression holds the subjective overtones);

and third, insofar as the context and supposition r jointly support such an additive inference, supposition s is needed as well, which is a self-implicature on the self-presentational role of p manifested through r;

(e) the speaker knows (and knows that the participants know that he/she knows) that it is within their competence to work out, or grasp intuitively, that q and r (and s) are required, surpassing the literal meaning of p;

(f) the speaker has done nothing to stop his/her partners thinking q and r (and s);

(g) that is, he/she intends the hearers to think, or is at least willing to allow them to think that q and r (and s); so he/she has implicated q and r (and s).

Some readers may think at this point that the pattern proposed in (10) deals with literal meaning as if it was a unique concept without any problem and the reaching of at least q and r from the literal meaning of p should be imagined in such a way that the hearer always understands the literal meaning at first, and then, if (b) and (c) are valid, he/she goes on with interpreting the indirect emotional and social meanings. Actually, one of the most vigorous lines of critique of Grice's theory has been questioning the psychological reality of this two-levelled (sentence-meaning vs. utterance-meaning) model (see, e.g., Rumelhart 1979; Gibbs 1984; 1994; 2002; Recanati 1995; Ariel 2002; Giora 2002). Aside from the fact

that the intermediate level of utterance-type-meaning with a host of default inferences or generalized conversational implicatures seems to be ignored in the literal meaning debate (see Levinson 2000, 21–7), what I am inclined to think is that the widespread rejection of Grice is based on a disputable view of his goals by taking him to be engaged in the same project that his opponents (mostly, relevance theorists and cognitive psycholinguists) are: making sense of the psychological processes by which the audience interpret utterances (Saul 2002). No doubt, Grice's characterization of conversational implicature—and the present application of his steps for describing the full message of a hyperbole in (10)—would be very poorly suited to offering an accurate theory of the interpretation process itself. But the Gricean approach has a different subject matter: neither the speaker's nor the audience's perspective is stated to be favoured; instead, it provides a scheme of how interactants cooperate in talk exchanges by conveying explicit and implicit information. We never know what the real intention of the speaker was and what interpretation the hearer actually arrived at; however, we can take the position of a keen observer, inferring independently what was said and implicated by the use of a given linguistic expression at a given setting. The reader is kindly asked to test this fallible intuition.

As far as the notion of literal meaning is concerned, I agree with Dascal (1987, 264) that it plays a role in understanding figurative language (which does not mean that the complete literal meaning of the utterance must be analyzed), but only if the frequent use of a phrase has not already led to total (or a high degree of) conventionalization, a historical development which gives quasi-literal status to originally figurative meanings in people's mental lexicon from time to time. Like metaphors that have been commonly characterized as existing on a continuum of conventionality, ranging from dead (or frozen) to living (or novel), hyperboles also involve many frozen forms which are not implicatures in nature any more, thus their meaning cannot be regarded synchronically as figurative. I suspect that if researchers systematically separated diachronic and synchronic figurativeness, in so far as it is technically possible in case of a continuum, the notion of literal or, more precisely, conventional meaning would regain some of its explanatory power. In sum, at a lower level of conventionality, it can be safely hypothesized that people, consciously or unconsciously, compare what was said by the speaker with the real state of affairs, and when a blatant exaggeration is disclosed, they try to assess the implicit content of the overstatement.

5. The complex approach at work:
Analyzing further hyperbolic utterances

To ascertain whether or not the pattern given in (10) is tenable, further analyses of hyperbolic discourses are required. For the sake of vividness and advantages indicated in connection with the *Hyppolit*-example (controllability, the transparency of the characters' social motives, and the similarity between conversational situations depicted and everyday interaction), let us continue with some more Hungarian feature films from the 1930s, beginning with one part of *Ida regénye* (My wife the miss — The story of Ida, 1934):

(11) ELLA: ((stirring the goulash)) Megvagyunk mi Julis nélkül is. Ilyen bográcsgulyást még az öregapjuk sem evett. Igaz-e, Bogár úr?

'We can do without Julis as well. Even your grandfathers did not eat such a goulash, did they, Mr. Bogár?'

BOGÁR: ((looking at his plate with a long face)) Hát az igaz. Ilyet nemigen ettek. (1.0) Tessék énnekem megmondani, de őszintén: mit tetszett ebbe beletenni, hogy olyan (.4) *i:stentelenül finom*?

'That is true. They did not eat such a goulash. (1.0) Please tell me sincerely: what did you put into this that makes it so (.4) *te:rribly tasty?*'

ELLA: Saját receptem. Akar még egy porciót?

'It is my own recipe. Do you want some more?'

BOGÁR: ((with a refusing gesture)) Köszönöm, ippen elég volt. Jaj nekem. *De jó* volt...

'No more, thank you. Oh dear. It was *so good...*'

Gloss: Mr. Bogár, a winetaster, works for Péter Ó, a winetrader in Eger. Péter Ó lost his wife a long time ago. Then he lived a debauched life, but now he remarries: he chooses Ella, an actress from a local theatre with a questionable past. The new husband has an adolescent daughter from his first marriage, Ida, who is expelled from the convent because she admits to writing a love letter for another girl. The young couple is disturbed by her unexpected arrival, therefore they quickly marry her off through a personals ad. They send even Julis, the cook, with Ida to the new flat in Pest, but this way there is no one to cook for them at home. In the beginning, Ella tries to do all the household chores (some time later her enthusiasm subsides, as we see). In (11) she praises one of her first meals to Mr. Bogár, who sits at the table with a sour face and who does not dare to tell her directly that the goulash tastes bad,

instead, he asks an ambiguous and ironic question (cf. (7b)). Ella does not recognize the irony behind his words, she tries to offer the meal to him again, which reflects her unrefined character.

According to the symbols introduced in (10), p_1: the goulash is terribly tasty and p_2: it was so good to eat; p_1 and p_2 are ironic hyperboles or hyperbolic ironies (cf. (1c)), therefore q_1: the goulash is not good and q_2: it was bad to eat; r_1 and r_2: Bogár dislikes the fact that the goulash is not good but he must eat it; s_1 and s_2: Bogár does express his real opinion, at least indirectly, but he applies a face-saving form using disguised irony—thus, he does not risk seriously his subordinated state (his job) towards Ella. Note that here only the audience works out these implicatures. The addressee herself cannot catch the hints: she thinks that Mr. Bogár is flattering on her. Therefore, if we adopt Ella's point of view, irony is out of the question, and what remain are bare hyperboles with the opposite (non-ironic) meaning.

The next example comes from the comedy *Három sárkány* (Three spinsters, 1936) featuring typical Hungarian landless gentry:

(12) CSAHOLYI: Most arról van szó, Jóska, hogy téged akarnak felküldeni Pestre az ügyet elintézni. ((eagerly)) Nézd, Jóska, én kilenc éve nem voltam Pesten. *Én már elepedek, én már elsorvadok, engem már ellep a gaz, szívemet benövi a bojtorján* itt, a kávási határban. ((begging)) Jóska! Csináld meg, hogy én menjek föl Pestre!

'Now, Jóska, they want you to go to Pest to clear up this case. Look, Jóska, I have not been to Pest for nine years. *I'm desolate, I'm wasting away, I will be covered with weed, my heart will be overgrown with burdock* here in the Kávás fields. Jóska! Please convince them that I should go to Pest!'

KEMPELEN: ((hesitating)) Nézd, lelkem, ez nagy felelősség...

'Look, my dear, it is a great responsibility...'

CSAHOLYI: Jóska, ki tudja, hogy meddig élek én még... És, hát így haljak meg én, Csaholyi Balázs, volt hetes huszárkapitány, hogy legalább egy-két szép napom ne legyen azon a gyö:nyörű Pesten?...

'Jóska, who knows how long more I will live... And should I, Balázs Csaholyi, ex-captain of hussars, die without having some days in that beau:tiful Pest?'

KEMPELEN: Borzasztó, hogy mindig leveszel a lábamról. Tavaly is így vettél ki tőlem 175 pengő és valami 60 fillért.

'It is terrible that you always get me to do what you want. Last year you got 175 pengo and some 60 fillér out of me in this way.'

Gloss: The happy-go-lucky Balázs Csaholyi lives under the guardianship of his sisters, the three spinsters, at their property in Kávás. He tries

to exploit every rare occasion to leave his isolation in the country, thus he tries to profit from the 8000 pengő debt of his son, a law student at Pest, who—just like his father—is careless, too. He gets Kempelen, the lawyer of the family, to persuade his sisters that he (Csaholyi) should go to Pest to clear up this case. In (12) he is trying to convince Kempelen that he would like to see Pest once again, free from the protection of his sisters. As can be seen, he accumulates the hyperbolic sighs recalling the images of the Hungarian 'wasteland'. The hesitating Kempelen is not able to refuse the cunning demand, even though he suspects that he will have some problems caused by this trip.

p_1–p_4: Csaholyi is desolate, wasting away, will be covered with weed, his heart will be overgrown with burdock in Kávás; p_1–p_4 are metaphoric hyperboles (cf. (1b)), therefore q_1–q_4: he begins to lose his vitality in Kávás; r_1–r_4: he finds it hard to bear his fate; s_1–s_4: as a man, he is worthy of compassion, his situation is unbearable, his sisters treat him unjustly, the partner (Kempelen) must feel pity for him. As to impression motivation, Csaholyi's strategic goal (getting to travel to Pest) makes the image of a pitiful ex-cavalier sentenced to exile in the country relevant, which is constructed in Kempelen, who is in an intermediary position between Csaholyi and his sisters, and the goal itself is worth anything for him—these motives start him on the self-presentation according to s_1–s_4.

Let us look at an example of hyperbole with a finer emotional tone (*Lovagias ügy* (An affair of honour), 1936):

(13) BABA: ((arrives home excited)) Kez' csókolom! Szervusz, apu.
    'Good afternoon! Hi, Dad.'

MRS. VIRÁG: Hol voltál ilyen sokáig?
    'Where have you been so long?'

BABA: Jaj, anyu, ne kérdezz most semmit, mert én mondok egy fantasztikusat: a Réz Pali kivitt az autójával a jégre, és megbeszéltük, hogy tanul nálam angolul, és <u>öt</u> pengő <u>öt</u>venet fizet <u>ó</u>ránként!
    'Oh Mum, don't ask anything now because I tell you something fantastic: Pali Réz took me to the ice with his car, and we agreed that I would teach him English, and he will pay 5 pengő 50 an hour!'

MR. VIRÁG: Addig csinálod ezt a szélhámosságot evvel az angollal, míg egyszer, majd meglátod, lecsuknak (.4) Márianosztróra.
    'You will do this mischief with your English until the day you'll be jailed in (.4) Márianosztró, you'll see.'

MRS. VIRÁG: Öt pengő ötvenet fizet egy órára?
    '5 pengő 50 for an hour?'

Baba: <u>Kereken</u>. Jaj, anyukám, adj egy kis levest, mer' *ré:misztően éhes vagyok*!

'<u>Ex</u>actly. Oh Mum, give me a little soup cause I am *a:wfully hungry!*'

Gloss: Mr. Virág, chief accountant with the Milkó tinned food factory, has an argument one day with Pál Milkó, who is kept in his job by the director, his uncle. Milkó slaps the elderly man on the face, and the latter, deeply offended, quits his job but hides this from his family. Milkó would like to repair his wrongdoing. He writes a letter of apology (which the grandmother takes for a bill from the tailor and puts it into her pocket), and later, because his letter is not answered, becomes the renter of their spare room under the alias Pál Réz in order to give them financial support. Mrs. Virág comes to like him because of his kindness, and he falls in love with Baba, the daughter of the Virágs at first sight. Baba, who does not speak English well, would like to help her parents: she wants to earn money to perfect her own English by teaching the boy next door and Pali 'Réz', who speaks English perfectly, but asks Baba to teach him English with the intention of courting her. Her excitement in (13) is caused more by the new lover than by the new student. Baba recognizes that the wealthy tenant likes her and she returns his feelings. Her 'awful' hunger must be analysed in the light of these: it latently expresses the happy emotion of a new love (the significative mimics of Mrs. Virág shows that she notices this, too), there is no rhetorical awareness behind it (cf. situation (2) of Jones–Pittman (1982, 234), characterized by the low level of impression monitoring).

p: Baba is awfully hungry; p contains an exaggerative adverb, therefore q: Baba is very hungry; r: she admits a positive attitude towards eating; s: not present or uncertain—perhaps change of topic, prevention of other parental questions concerning the afternoon spent with Pali Réz, strengthening the face of a 'responsible, clever young girl' (with a good sense for business) rather than the face of a 'flirting girl'. As I referred to this before, the absence of an intended self-implicature or the difficulty of its detection do not mean that the observers (here, mainly, Mrs. Virág) cannot have some kind of impression of the speaker on the basis of her verbal and nonverbal behaviour.

Our fourth excerpt in this section is taken from the comedy *Az én lányom nem olyan* (My daughter is different, 1937):

(14) KALOCSAY: Ide figyeljen, én segíteni fogok magának. Maga viszont segítségemre lesz nekem. Rendben van?

'Look, I will help you. But you will also help me. All right?'

GITTA: Milyen ügyben?

'In what kind of case?'

KALOCSAY: Annie tante ugyanis megígérte, hogy kifizeti az összes adósságaimat, ha szakítok a lump élettel, és megházasodom. (.4) Magát szemelte ki erre a célra...

'Aunt Annie promised that she will pay back all my debts if I break with reveller life and get married. (.4) She has chosen you for this purpose.'

GITTA: ((laughing)) S maga megígérte, hogy elvesz?

'And have you promised that you will marry me?'

KALOCSAY: Meg. (.6) Neki. ((impudently)) Magának viszont ünnepélyesen megígérem az ellenkezőjét.

'I did. (.6) To her. To you, I solemnly promise the opposite.'

GITTA: ((offended)) Nagyon kedves...

'Very kind of you...'

KALOCSAY: Én ugyanis megmagyaráztam Annie néninek, hogy a maga meghódításához nekem másfél évre van szükségem... hát, őszintén szólva, ezt most már nem hiszem...

'You see, I explained to aunt Annie that I will need one and a half year to conquer you... But now, to tell you the truth, I don't think so...'

GITTA: Pedig nyugodtan elhiheti.

'But you can safely assume that.'

KALOCSAY: ((courting)) Igazán? Gondolja, hogy ennyi idő alatt sikerülne?

'Really? Do you think I would succeed within this time?'

GITTA: Nem, nem sikerülne. *Magának ehhez ezer esztendő se lenne elég.*

'No, you wouldn't. You would not succeed *even within a thousand years.*'

KALOCSAY: ((looks at his watch, joking)) Hát, annyi időm nincs...

'Well, I don't have that much time...'

Gloss: Gitta Hubay is 20 years old, a girl with modern attitudes, who is courted by Feri Fekete. Not particularly liked by Gitta's parents, especially her old-fashioned father, Fekete dates Gitta in secret. When he calls her to his flat pretending to be ill, Gitta becomes disappointed in him and breaks with him. The highly respected aunt Annie, who wants to marry Gitta off, would like to introduce the girl to her husband's nephew, Sándor Kalocsay, not suspecting that they know each other through Feri, and they like each other, too. After aunt Annie tells Kalocsay who she

would like to introduce to him, he goes to Gitta's house. He asks to leave the rich old lady in her belief that they would meet for the first time at the party. At this time, Kalocsay does not know whether Gitta really loves Feri Fekete, thus, he tries to find out about the girl's feelings by behaving in an arrogant and scornful way. Gitta's hyperbolic utterance in (14) is an answer to Kalocsay's egoistic, almost disrespectful manner: she does not know whether the young man is joking or speaking seriously, however, she expresses the offendedness of a young lady in a symbolic way and refuses the impudence. Kalocsay's joke at the end of the conversation convinces her that the young man is teasing her because he actually wants to court her.

p: Gitta says that Kalocsay would not conquer her even within a thousand years; p contains an extreme attribute of quantity, therefore q: according to Gitta, Kalocsay could not or would not conquer her; r: she categorically refuses the thought of Kalocsay's courting; s: Gitta is a moral young lady, who is not so easy to conquer as Kalocsay thinks. The message of self-implicature s can be traced back to Gitta's self-concept, her positive and negative identity images, and the social expectations towards an ideal woman.

The last selected passage is one of the love duets in *Halálos tavasz* (Deadly spring, 1937):

(15) EGRY: ((grasps Edit's arm, intimately)) Ide hallgass! Tegnap Budán sétáltam egy álomszerű, elhagyott kis utcán. Ág utca. Láttam egy házat, ki volt rá írva: kiadó. Bementem. Csak egy szoba volt benne. Egy. (1.0) Kivettem az egész házat kerttel együtt hat hónapra.
'Listen to me! Yesterday I was walking in Buda in a dreamlike abandoned little street. Ág Street. I saw a house, it was to rent. I went in. There was only one room in it. Only one. (1.0) I have rented the whole house with the garden for six months.'

EDIT: Te el akarsz menni ebből a házból?
'Do you want to leave this house?'

EGRY: Dehogy. De ott nem zavarnának bennünket.
'Not at all. But there, we would not be disturbed.'

EDIT: *Őrült!*
'You're *crazy!*'

EGRY: Miért? Anyád előtt már a menyasszonyom vagy.
'Why? In your mother's eyes you are already my fiancée.'

EDIT: Nem, nem. Semmi szín alatt.
'No, no. Not by any means.'

EGRY: Nézd... ((change of scene, they are walking in Buda))
'Look...'

Gloss: Dr. Iván Egry, a landowner from the country, gets a job in Buda-pest. He first meets Edit, the daughter of the ex-minister Ralben, in a staircase. He tries to call her on the phone, he sends a message to her on a gramophone disk, then with the help of a friend, he gets himself invited to the Ralbens' party. Edit is now Count Ahrenberg's fiancée, but she accepts Egry's heated courting. Egry becomes a daily visitor at the Ralbens'. Edit's mother seems to dislike their relation, however, she promises them her support, while Mr. Ralben does not even recognize the presence of a new suitor, nevertheless, he and his mysterious wife disturb the privacy of the young couple at every turn. Egry proposes au-daciously in (15) to spend the afternoons in a rented house in Buda. Edit is surprised by the tempting offer, which overtly ignores the conventions of courting, and she calls the passionate man crazy. In this context, this hyperbole is a reaction to the challenge of the socially expected role of a young woman. Its credibility is somehow weakened by Edit's nonverbal signs, which suggest uncertainty and secret thoughts. Indeed, she later agrees to the dates in Buda at Egry's insistence.

p: Edit calls Egry crazy; p is literally an exaggeration, therefore q: Egry is too audacious and passionate; r: Edit is frightened by Egry's impudently sincere proposal and passionate behaviour, which she con-demns (or, at least, does not regard as usual); s: Edit is an honest girl, who knows what is acceptable by the etiquette, and she does not want to do anything that is opposed to it. Similarly to the previous exam-ple, the content of the self-implicature is constructed by the relation of the heroine's self-concept, positive and negative identity images, and the ideal role of a woman.

6. Conclusion

All in all, three important conclusions can be made on the basis of the analyses. The first is a methodological one: the place of the relevant linguistic data in discourse, the situation of speech in its entirety, and the appropriate knowledge of the participants' interactional motives can illuminate certain pieces of information which may remain hidden if we tried to analyze the pragmatic or rhetorical function of figuration without any context. However, the incidental circumstances do not exclude at all the possibility of generalization. The second conclusion is that every hyperbole conveys the speaker's (real or merely presented) relation or attitudes towards the topic of communication. Further, the expression of

emotional relation and attitude tends to be subordinated to the speaker's attempt (according to the social psychological laws of interaction) to create an intended ideal impression on the partners — this is the third main conclusion.

Public acts inevitably create impressions on the observers. Since the possible implications of this simple fact can be too important for anyone not to affect behaviour, no wonder that, as Goffman (1959, 4) put it, "[w]hen an individual appears in the presence of others, there will usually be some reason for him to mobilize his activity so that it will convey an impression to others which is in his interest to convey." Thus, it must be natural that the use of exaggeration is not an exception to this many-sided tendency in behaviour, albeit the rhetorical awareness of the speaker may be at a preattentive level, and the stylistic value of the linguistic expression can lose its genuineness, becoming conventionalized by frequent use.

The other means of interpersonal rhetoric (metaphor, irony, litotes, etc.) have been mentioned here only briefly. I suppose that the complex social psychological pragmatic approach applied in this paper can be fruitful in investigating their discourse goals as well (which are surely different from the ones of hyperbole). But, as for hyperbole, what is also needed is the quantitative and genre-related extension of the linguistic database in order to be able to draw more refined conclusions about the nature of self-implicature.

References

Ariel, Mira 2002. The demise of a unique concept of literal meaning. In: Journal of Pragmatics 34 : 361–402.

Arkin, Robert M. 1981. Self-presentation styles. In: Tedeschi (1981, 311–33).

Atkinson, J. Maxwell – John Heritage (eds) 1984. Structures of social action: studies in conversation analysis. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Bally, Charles 1913. Le langage et la vie. Édition Atar & Librairie Fischbacher, Genève & Paris.

Baumeister, Roy F. (ed.) 1986. Public self and private self. Springer-Verlag, New York.

Brown, Penelope – Stephen C. Levinson 1978. Universals in language usage: politeness phenomena. In: Esther N. Goody (ed.): Questions and politeness: strategies in social interaction, 56–289. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Brown, Penelope – Stephen C. Levinson 1987. Politeness: some universals in language usage. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Colston, Herbert L. 1997. I've never seen anything like it: overstatement, understatement, and irony. In: Metaphor and Symbol 12 : 43–58.

Colston, Herbert L. – Shauna B. Keller 1998. You'll never believe this: irony and hyperbole in expressing surprise. In: Journal of Psycholinguistic Research 27 : 499–513.

Dascal, Marcelo 1987. Defending literal meaning. In: Cognitive Science 11 : 259–81.

Fogelin, Robert J. 1988. Figuratively speaking. Yale University Press, New Haven.

Fussell, Susan R. – Roger J. Kreuz (eds) 1998. Social and cognitive approaches to interpersonal communication. Lawrence Erlbaum, Mahwah NJ.

Fussell, Susan R. – Mallie M. Moss 1998. Figurative language in emotional communication. In: Fussell – Kreuz (1998, 113–41).

Fónagy, Iván 1975. [A] hiperbola [Hyperbole]. In: István Király (ed.): Világirodalmi lexikon 4 [An encyclopaedia of world literature, vol. 4], 480–6. Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest.

Fónagy, Iván 2001. Languages within language: an evolutive approach. John Benjamins, Amsterdam.

Gibbs, Raymond W. 1984. Literal meaning and psychological theory. In: Cognitive Science 8 : 575–604.

Gibbs, Raymond W. 1994. The poetics of mind: Figurative thought, language, and understanding. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Gibbs, Raymond W. 2002. A new look at literal meaning in understanding what is said and implicated. In: Journal of Pragmatics 34 : 457–86.

Giora, Rachel 2002. Literal vs. figurative language: Different or equal? In: Journal of Pragmatics 34 : 487–506.

Goffman, Erving 1955. On face-work: an analysis of ritual elements in social interaction. In: Psychiatry 18 : 213–31.

Goffman, Erving 1959. The presentation of self in everyday life. Doubleday Anchor, Garden City.

Grice, H. Paul 1975. Logic and conversation. In: Peter Cole – Jerry L. Morgan (eds): Syntax and semantics, vol. 3: Speech acts, 41–58. Academic Press, New York.

Jones, Edward E. – Thane S. Pittman 1982. Toward a general theory of strategic self-presentation. In: Jerry Suls (ed.): Psychological perspectives on the self, vol. 1., 231–62. Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale NJ.

Kreuz, Roger J. – Max A. Kassler – Lori Coppenrath 1998. The use of exaggeration in discourse: cognitive and social facets. In: Fussell – Kreuz (1998, 91–111).

Kreuz, Roger J. – Richard M. Roberts 1993. The empirical study of figurative language in literature. In: Poetics 22 : 151–69.

Kreuz, Roger J. – Richard M. Roberts 1995. Two cues for verbal irony: hyperbole and the ironic tone of voice. In: Metaphor and Symbolic Activity 10 : 21–31.

Kreuz, Roger J. – Richard M. Roberts – Brenda K. Johnson – Eugenie L. Bertus 1996. Figurative language occurrence and co-occurrence in contemporary literature. In: Roger J. Kreuz – Mary Sue MacNealy (eds): Empirical approaches to literature and aesthetics, 83–97. Ablex, Norwood NJ.

Lausberg, Heinrich 1960/1998. Handbook of literary rhetoric: a foundation for literary study. Brill, Leiden.

Leary, Mark R. 1993. The interplay of private self-processes and interpersonal factors in self-presentation. In: Jerry Suls (ed.): Psychological perspectives on the self, vol. 4., 127–55. Lawrence Erlbaum, Hillsdale NJ.

Leary, Mark R. 1995. Self-presentation: impression management and interpersonal behavior. Brown & Benchmark, Madison WI.

Leary, Mark R. – Robin M. Kowalski 1990. Impression management: a literature review and two-component model. In: Psychological Bulletin 107 : 34–47.

Leech, Geoffrey N. 1983. Principles of pragmatics. Longman, Harlow.

Levinson, Stephen C. 2000. Presumptive meanings: The theory of generalized conversational implicature. MIT Press, Cambridge MA.

Mao, LuMing R. 1994. Beyond politeness theory: 'face' revisited and renewed. In: Journal of Pragmatics 21 : 451–86.

Muntigl, Peter – William Turnbull 1998. Conversational structure and facework in arguing. In: Journal of Pragmatics 29 : 225–56.

Nemesi, Attila László 2000. Benyomáskeltési stratégiák a társalgásban [Strategies of impression management in conversation]. In: Magyar Nyelv 96 : 418–36.

Németh T., Enikő 2003. A kommunikatív nyelvhasználat elvei [The principles of communicative language use]. In: Általános Nyelvészeti Tanulmányok 20 : 221–54.

Németh T., Enikő 2004. The principles of communicative language use. In: Acta Linguistica Hungarica 51 : 379–418.

Nwaye, Onnigbo G. 1992. Linguistic politeness and sociocultural variation of the notion of face. In: Journal of Pragmatics 18 : 309–28.

Penman, Robyn 1990. Facework and politeness: multiple goals in courtroom discourse. In: Journal of Language and Social Psychology 9 : 15–38.

Péter, Mihály 1984. Érzelemkifejezés, stílusérték és expresszivitás a nyelvben [Emotivity, stylistic value, and expressivity in language]. In: Általános Nyelvészeti Tanulmányok 15 : 219–35.

Péter, Mihály 1991. A nyelvi érzelemkifejezés eszközei és módjai [Means and devices of the expression of emotions in language]. Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest.

Recanati, François 1995. On the alleged priority of literal interpretation. In: Cognitive Science 19 : 207–22.

Roberts, Richard M. – Roger J. Kreuz 1994. Why do people use figurative language? In: Psychological Science 5 : 159–63.

Rumelhart, David E. 1979. Some problems with the notion of literal meanings. In: Andrew Ortony (ed.): Metaphor and thought, 78–90. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Sandig, Barbara 1986. Stilistik der deutschen Sprache. Walter de Gruyter, Berlin & New York.

Saul, Jennifer M. 2002. What is said and psychological reality: Grice's project and relevance theorists' criticisms. In: Linguistics and Philosophy 25 : 347–72.

Schlenker, Barry R. 1980. Impression management: the self-concept, social identity, and interpersonal relations. Brooks/Cole, Monterey CA.

Schlenker, Barry R. (ed.) 1985. The self and social life. McGraw-Hill, New York.

Schlenker, Barry R. 1986. Self-identification: toward an integration of the private and public self. In: Baumeister (1986, 21–62).

Schneider, David J. 1981. Tactical self-presentations: toward a broader conception. In: Tedeschi (1981, 23–40).

Sell, Marie A. – Roger J. Kreuz – Lori Coppenrath 1997. Parents' use of nonliteral language with preschool children. In: Discourse Processes 23 : 99–118.

Sperber, Dan – Deirdre Wilson 1990. Rhetoric and relevance. In: John Bender – David Wellbery (eds): The ends of rhetoric: history, theory, practice, 140–56. Stanford University Press, Stanford CA.

Szathmári, István 1958. A szó jelentésének stilisztikai vizsgálata [The stylistic investigation of word meaning]. In: Ferenc Terestyéni (ed.): A magyar stilisztika vázlata [An outline of Hungarian stylistics], 65–148. Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest.

Tedeschi, James T. (ed.) 1981. Impression management theory and social psychological research. Academic Press, New York.

Tedeschi, James T. – Nancy Norman 1985. Social power, self-presentation, and the self. In: Schlenker (1985, 293–322).

Tolcsvai Nagy, Gábor 1996. A magyar nyelv stilisztikája [A stylistics of Hungarian]. Nemzeti Tankönyvkiadó, Budapest.

Tracy, Karen 1990. The many faces of facework. In: Howard Giles – W. Peter Robinson (eds): Handbook of language and social psychology, 209–26. Wiley, Chichester.

Wood, Linda A. – Rolf O. Kroger 1994. The analysis of facework in discourse: review and proposal. In: Journal of Language and Social Psychology 13 : 248–77.

Address of the author: Attila L. Nemesi
                        Institute of Communication
                        Pázmány Péter Catholic University
                        Egyetem utca 1.
                        H–2087 Piliscsaba
                        Hungary
                        nemesi@btk.ppke.hu