

Victor J. Boucher & Chantal Perron (2005)

On the measurable linguistic correlates of deceit in recounting passed events

Abstract

Deceit has been defined as a deliberate attempt to create by a communicative act, and without forewarning, a belief that is untrue or inaccurate. This presentation deals with deceit in a situation where speakers recount passed events that cannot be immediately verified. In this context, a number of linguistic variables can serve to reveal a speaker's intention to deceive, thereby establishing the need for investigators to verify recounted events. A comprehensive bibliography will be made available on 41 variables that have been proposed. Of these, only 13 linguistic variables present acceptable degrees of reliability and do not require acoustic analyses beyond phonetic transcription.

Considering these variables, an experiment was performed with the purpose of isolating the specific aspects that can discriminate deceitful from truthful discourse across speakers and "themes". Twenty university students were asked to recount, in turn, events that took place and that did not take place in five different places (in a hospital, at school, in a bar, on vacation, and at work). The recorded speech provided a corpus of 200 three-to-five minute discourses varying in theme, with half representing truthful and half inaccurate or untrue accounts. Currently, 50% of the recorded samples representing ten subjects have been transcribed in ASCII format using particular coding. Descriptive statistics were derived by applying routines of an available freeware program. Paired t-tests for the analysed samples show significant differences on given variables such as hesitation, lexical repetition (type/token) and utterance length. A multivariate discriminant analysis will be applied to determine the successfulness of linear combinations of variables in correctly classifying deceitful discourse. This analysis will also determine how classification rates vary with individuals and themes. The discussion will stress the advantage of speech over written testimony as a means of soliciting variations in the particular variables that can reveal deceit.