

Are manipulative texts ‘coherent’?*

Manipulation, presuppositions and (in-)congruity

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1. Introduction

Like other contributions to this volume, the present paper reflects an early stage of a research project, and, as a consequence, is largely programmatic.

The question I address here and the hypotheses I put forth do not directly concern the *definition* of manipulation. Assuming the working definition of manipulation proposed by Rigotti (this volume)¹ I consider the application to the study of manipulation of an existing set of theoretical tools, provided by an approach to the semantics and the pragmatics of texts called Congruity Theory,² developed in Rigotti (1993), Rigotti (1994), Rigotti and Rocci (2001), Rocci (2005), Rigotti and Rocci (in press), which offers, among other things, an explanation of text coherence. In particular, the paper extends the analysis of nonsense and incongruity done in Rigotti and Rocci (2001) to manipulation.

Extending a theoretical framework to a new domain of application implies the risk of shaping the domain of study according to the tools. As A. Maslow (1966: 15–16) remarked, “it is tempting, if the only tool you have is a hammer, to treat everything as if it were a nail”. I have tried hard, however, not to reduce manipulation to something that I could hammer down with my discourse theoretical tool. In fact, the question about the coherence of manipulative texts I ask in the title is a genuine one. And, as it is often the case with this type of question, the answer I envisage in this paper is articulated and gives rise to an array of new questions.

The main idea behind the present paper is the following: manipulative texts represent an interesting testbed for theories of coherence. On the one

hand these textual productions, or at least the more successful ones, are indeed understood by their interpreters as unitary acts of communication and produce 'perlocutionary' effects as such, and on the other hand many texts that are considered manipulative show a number of semantic defects, in particular concerning presuppositional phenomena that would, in other contexts, lead to a perception of incoherence.

Should a theory of text coherence explain precisely in what sense certain manipulative texts are defective *and* at the same time why they are nevertheless interpreted and produce effects in their hearers? Perhaps this expectation places an excessively heavy burden of explanation on theories of text coherence, but it is nevertheless interesting to see what insights on the functioning of manipulation can be gained from a semantic-pragmatic theory of coherence like Congruity theory.

I adopt here the working hypothesis that a 'good' theory of coherence can be used to *detect* a number of semantic defects in manipulative texts as a basis for their critical evaluation and to *abstractly characterize* the type of process needed for the 'cover up' of these defects, with which manipulators manage to sin against coherence and get away with it. *Abstractly characterize* means that the theory of coherence needs to collaborate with other types of cognitive and social investigation, which are in any case needed to flesh out the concrete conditions and the dynamics of this 'cover up'.

2. What is coherence?

Coherence, as a technical term of discourse analysis, refers first of all to a certain set of *intuitions* people have about sequences of uttered sentences, or, better, language utterances containing multiple sentences. Some sequences seem to 'make sense together', to belong to a functional whole, while others seem to lack this quality.³ Let us consider the following examples:

- (1) a. No, my son does not drive. He's five!
b. No, my son does not drive. He is married.
- (2) a. John took a train from Paris to Istanbul. He has family there.
b. John took a train from Paris to Istanbul. He likes spinach.

People are willing to consider the sequences in (1a) and in (2a) (coherent) texts – or at least as possible parts of coherent texts – while the sequences in (1b) and (2b) will be considered just as successions of unrelated utterances.⁴

Nearly all researchers agree that intuitions of this type exist and that accounting for them is one of the goals of discourse analysis.

This being said, accounts of coherence diverge not only in the particular theoretical construct called forth to explain coherence but also in their basic understanding of the nature of the *explanandum*. Perhaps the two most important points of disagreement are the following:

1. Coherence can be seen as *an objective property of texts* (that was the hypothesis of various early text grammars in the 1970s), as *a principle guiding interpretation* (see for instance Giora 1997), or just as *a (possible) effect of the interpretation of utterances* as argued, for instance, by relevance theorists (Blass 1993; Reboul & Moeschler 1998).
2. The source of coherence can be located (at least in part) at a *syntactic level*, at a (truth-conditional) *semantic level* or at a *pragmatic (intentional, or illocutionary) level*, or identified with a mix of properties at the three levels. Classic text grammatical approaches treat coherence in terms of well-formedness with respect to some set of text grammatical rules, which are seen as part of linguistic competence proper. For other theories (Hobbs 1979; Kehler 2002) coherence has to do mainly with the referential world: a text is coherent because it describes a coherent state of affairs or a coherent sequence of events, while other theories, such as RST (Mann & Thompson 1987; Mann, Mathiessen, & Thompson 1992), relate coherence to communicative intentions (and intended effects) and generally to the structure of communicative action.⁵ Other theories, such as SDRT (Asher 1993; Asher & Lascarides 2003) adopt a rather sophisticated approach where truth-conditional considerations are coupled with a limited recourse to the speaker's intentions.

We cannot discuss here the merits of the various theories of coherence and the problems they face.⁶ We will therefore press on to present the approach based on congruity and to say why we think that it has something to say about manipulation.

3. Congruity Theory: Coherence as an aspect of semantic-pragmatic congruity

According to Congruity Theory, a text is coherent when it corresponds to an overall communicative intention and to the performing of a whole meaningful communicative action.⁷ Thus, ultimately the coherence of a text concerns what

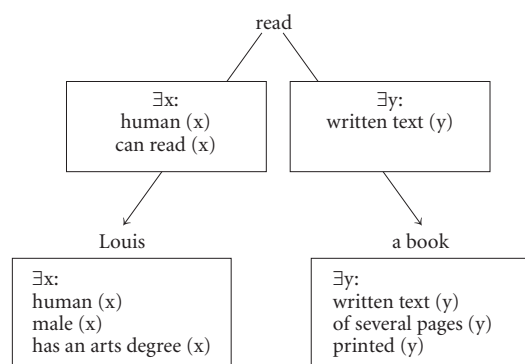


Figure 1. Predicate-argument structure

one may call the speech act or illocutionary level. Coherence is, in a sense, an objective property, *not* of the text as a linguistic object, but of the communicative action.⁸ At the same time, Congruity Theory sees *coherence* as an instance of the more general principle of *semantic congruity*, which consists in the respect of presuppositions imposed by predicates and operates at different levels in the semantic structure of utterances (Rigotti & Rocci 2001).

Before we come to the link between communicative action and congruity, let us detail the notion of *presuppositions imposed by predicates*. Rigotti (1993 and 1994a) suggested that the semantics of a text can be viewed as a network of arguments and predicates: a hierarchy of predicates governing arguments at various levels. One of the functions of syntax is to manifest directly a part (let us say the lower part) of that semantic hierarchy. So, a simple sentence like *Louis reads a book* considered as a fragment of a possible text, shows a predicate-argument structure that can be represented approximately by the diagram in Figure 1.

In this diagram, arrows represent the relation between the lexical binary predicate *to read* (x,y) and its arguments *Louis* and *a book*. This relatively simple logical-semantic structure is characterised by the requirement of *congruity* between predicate and arguments. The predicate imposes conditions (represented in the rectangular boxes placed over the arrows) that the argument must satisfy, or, in other words, it *predefines* the class of possible arguments. The conditions that appear in the boxes placed on the arrows are hyperonyms of the traits that appear in the boxes under the real arguments *Louis* and *a book*. It has to be emphasized that the content of the latter boxes, representing part

of the developing *common ground* of the utterance (cf. Stalnaker 1973, 2002; and Clark 1996), is not limited to the traits entailed by the lexical meaning of the arguments (a *book* is a written text, printed, consists of several pages) but includes all the information associated to the real referents in the communicative situation, and, if it is the case, in the course of an ongoing discourse (as, for instance, the existence of a certain Louis, known by the speaker and the hearer...). If there is an incompatibility between the conditions imposed by the predicate and the characteristics of the real arguments, the utterance becomes semantically incongruous, a nonsense, as in *The books read the newspaper* or *John reads the squirrel*.

In Congruity Theory, the conditions imposed by the predicates are treated as *presuppositions*. The presuppositional nature of the conditions that the predicates impose on arguments can be highlighted by the application of a variant of the usual test: the conditions remain if the utterance is negated, and examples which violate the condition remain unacceptable in the negative form.

For Congruity Theory, the idea that predicates impose presuppositions on argument places plays a major role. In fact, we make two hypotheses of quite general import. On the one hand, it is hypothesized that all nonsense, all *incongruity*, derives from the violation or contradiction of presuppositions at different levels. On the other hand, *all presuppositions* are treated in terms of congruity, as though imposed by a predicate on one of its argument places. The latter hypothesis, which has been defended extensively in Rigotti & Rocci (2001), had already been made independently by Seuren (1988, 2000).

Seuren, who speaks of the "structural source of presuppositions", sketches a semantics where two types of conditions are associated with predicates: "satisfaction conditions", which play a role analogous to truth conditions, and "preconditions": when a satisfaction condition is not fulfilled the result is falsity, whereas the failure of a precondition results in nonsense, or, as Seuren would put it, in "radical falsity". A Seuren-style semantics for the unary predicate *bald*, for example, can be given as follows (without pretensions of real lexicographical adequacy):

bald (x) = [preconditions: x exists, x belongs to a category whose members are normally covered with hair in prototypical places| satisfaction condition: the normal hair is absent from x]

If we now turn to the classic example of presupposition in the philosophical literature, that of the king of France:

- (3) The present king of France is bald.

We see that we can treat the failure of the existential presupposition associated with the denoting noun phrase *The present king of France* as the failure to respect the precondition *x exists* that the predicate *bald* imposes to its argument.

In fact, if we situate denoting noun phrases in different predicate-argument structures, we discover that the existential presupposition is not something that the denotative phrases have independently of the predicates of which they form the argument: *John repaints his house* presupposes that the house existed before the moment of utterance, whereas *John projects his house* does not have that presupposition. With the change of predicate, the presupposition of existence disappears. Clearly, that makes it plausible, or even necessary, to treat existential presuppositions in the framework of argument presuppositions.⁹

Seuren (2000) suggests that an account of presupposition based on the notion of satisfaction of preconditions imposed by predicates – based on *congruity* as we would say – may perhaps be extended to cover not only the existential presuppositions (*The king of France is bald*) and the category mismatches (*John reads the squirrel*; *That liquid crumbled to dust*) we examined above, but also “presuppositions induced by contrastive accent, and/or clefting, and presuppositions induced by focussing words like *only*, *even*, or *too*” (Seuren 2000: 279). In order to carry out such an extension all these presupposition inducing devices would need to be analysed as predicates at some “abstract level of analysis”. While Seuren (2000) does not go into any detail of such an extension, Rigotti and Rocci (2001) move along a similar path to a – perhaps even wider – generalization of the mechanism of congruity.

Let us move directly to the type of mechanisms hypothesised to account for the coherence of texts. Consider again the following two pairs of utterances (a) and (b):

- (4) a. U1: *My son doesn't drive the car.*
 U2: *He's five!*
 b. U1: *My son doesn't drive the car.*
 U2: *He's married.*

While (4a) is clearly comprehensible without any specified context, (4b) remains opaque unless we include into the context of utterance some very specific assumptions.¹⁰ The sequence *He is five!* in (a) is understood, very roughly in fact, as having the task of giving the reason of the first statement (U1). This task can be defined by a relational predicate *R* (U1, U2) taking the two utterances as arguments and imposing certain presuppositional constraints on them. This relational predicate is called *Connective Predicate*. The constraints imposed by

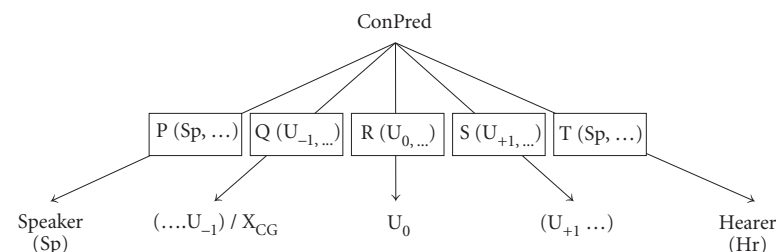


Figure 2. Connective predicates

the connective predicate have to be respected in order to ensure the congruity at the textual level, that is the coherence of the text.

In this respect, this approach belongs to a whole family of approaches to coherence that are based on relational predicates (which have gone under various names such as *discourse relations*, *coherence relations*, *rhetorical relations*, *rhetorical predicates*, etc.), which take text units as arguments imposing constraints on them.¹¹

One important feature of this approach, however, resides in the fact that the relations that ensure discourse coherence are ultimately defined at the level of communicative acts, analogous to the level of illocutionary acts of Speech acts theory. To put it bluntly, *the connective predicate says what the speaker does to the addressee with the utterance*.¹² In a multi-utterance text, each utterance represents a relatively autonomous stage in the accomplishment of the intended effect of the whole text, i.e., the change in the context in which the text is attempting to operate. The function therefore of Connective Predicates is to link directly or indirectly the utterance to the whole of the text, and thus to the change that it is supposed to produce.

Consequently, the Connective Predicate must have amongst its arguments also the speaker and the hearer, on whom it imposes *presuppositions* comparable to the felicity conditions imposed by Searlian illocutions (Searle 1969)¹³ which typically involve the speaker and hearer.¹⁴ Diagrammatically we can represent the general form of a Connective Predicate as shown in Figure 2.

The arguments of the connective predicate of a certain text utterance are the *Speaker*, the *Hearer*, the text utterance at issue (U_0), and if it is the case one or more other utterances of the co-text that are brought to bear on the function of U_0 anaphorically (U_{-1}) or – in some cases – cataphorically (U_{+1}). The formulae in the boxes on the arrows represent – again – the presuppositions that the connective predicate imposes on the arguments. It is worth noting that the

argument places occupied by the *co-textual utterances* (U_{-1} or U_{+1}) can be as well occupied by an implied *contextual proposition* X that is part of the common ground.¹⁵

4. Congruity in argumentative texts

Let us consider how the type of approach we have outlined so far can deal with argumentation. Consider the following example:

- (5) U_{-1} : I can't see Louis' car in the parking lot.
 U_0 : He must have already left the University.

In U_0 we find an argumentative connective predicate which is very partially signalled by non-univocal linguistic cues. In this case the epistemic use of the modal *must* marks the first of the two utterances as the *Conclusion* of a non-demonstrative inference by the speaker. With respect of U_0 the preceding utterance U_{-1} is naturally understood as providing a premise for this conclusion. However U_{-1} is not sufficient to account for the inferential process involved. According to the classical view on the reconstruction of enthymematic arguments, we need to supply a second unstated premise in order to have the conclusion follow. For example *Louis always drives to the University and parks his car in the University parking lot*. As a consequence, our argumentative connective predicate will have three argument places occupied by the two premises – one at the level of explicature, the other at the level of implicature – and the conclusion, in addition to the argument places for the speaker and the hearer:

Conclude $_{U_0}$ (*Speaker, Hearer, Major Premise $_X$, Minor Premise $_{U_{-1}}$, Conclusion $_{U_0}$*)

The argumentative connective predicate *Conclude $_{U_0}$* imposes a number of presuppositions to its arguments. From the viewpoint of the interpreter, this means that if we chose a certain interpretation for our text sequence, a number of restrictions apply to the common ground of the interlocutors. From the viewpoint of the arguer, it means that performing a certain act of argumentation is subject to a certain number of felicity conditions.

Let us examine some of the presuppositions that the connective predicate imposes on its arguments: the *Conclusion* U_0 is presupposed not to be known, or yet accepted by the *Hearer*, while on the *Minor premise* the connective imposes a presupposition of factuality, and of acceptability for the *Hearer* (and for the *Speaker*). Finally, the *Major premise* – apart from being accept-

able for both the *Speaker* and *Hearer* – should indicate some link between the truth of the (propositional content of the) *Minor premise* and the truth of the (propositional content of the) *Conclusion*.

The link between the propositional content of U_{-1} and the propositional content of U_0 can be represented by an inference scheme, either deductive, such as *modus ponens* and *modus tollens* in propositional logic and the valid figures of the syllogism in property predicate logic, or non-deductive, such as the argument schemes for presumptive reasoning discussed by Walton (1996), for example. The requirements of the particular inference scheme employed are part of the presuppositions of the specific connective predicates at issue. According to the inference scheme employed, these presuppositions may include various referential, *content-level* relations, holding in the world between the propositional contents of the utterances.

In this case, the argumentation is *an argument from sign*, according to Walton's terminology:

Event B is generally true, when its sign A is true in the situation
A is true in this situation,
B is true in the situation.

Here the link is provided by a factual relation of concomitance. If the hearer supplies a premise such as *Louis always drives to the University and parks his car in the University parking lot* she will have satisfied, together with a series of standard assumptions, the requirement of concomitance, and by doing so the general presupposition of a link between the truth of U_{-1} and that of U_0 .¹⁶

Two distinctive features of the approach to discourse relations proposed by Congruity Theory are apparent here. The first concerns the level of granularity adopted in the description of connective predicates: Congruity theory is not chiefly concerned with delimiting a small inventory of speech act types or discourse relations defined by some very general conditions, but rather strives to describe the communicative actions performed by people communicating through texts in the richest possible detail.¹⁷

The second feature concerns the distinction made by several authors between *content level* relations and *pragmatic/rhetorical* relations. Rather than seeing coherence as a *mix* of content- level relations and pragmatic relations holding between text spans, Congruity Theory situates the coherence of the text at the pragmatic level – connective predicates are always pragmatic relations – and subsumes content level relations as *presupposed* by the specific connective predicate involved.¹⁸

5. Manipulation, presuppositions and (in-)congruity

After having presented the notion of congruity in general and in particular at the textual level we can now rephrase our initial question (*are manipulative texts coherent?*) as *are manipulative texts congruous?*

The answer, as we anticipated, is not a straightforward *yes* or *no*. There is no doubt that there are texts that are incontestably manipulative and at the same time can be perfectly congruous: simple lies or insincere promises are a case in point.¹⁹ There are however various forms of manipulation that imply the violation of presuppositions at some level in the semantic structure of the text. Sometimes, this happens at a lower level, and sometimes directly at the level of connective predicates, as in many fallacious arguments that imply a violation of the presuppositions of the purported argumentative connective predicate.²⁰ Whether a given type of manipulation entails an incongruity is something that has to be decided on a case by case basis. A full investigation of the issue can be done in the framework of a comprehensive typology of manipulative behaviour – and such a typology has still to be compiled (see Rigotti, this volume, for a first attempt).

My claim, however, is that we already know enough about the relationship between manipulation and (in-)congruity to conclude that a theory of text congruity is a very useful means for the analysis and the critical evaluation of texts with respect to ideological manipulation. In order to show this, I will refine here the notion of incongruity and its relation to ideology.

The introduction of falsity in the presuppositions of the utterance in order to escape the critical awareness of the addressee and limit his/her possibilities of criticism in a dialogue, had been already noticed by Gottlob Frege (1892) who commented on the dubious denotation of the noun phrase *Der Wille des Volkes*. Since then, many authors have commented on the ideological loadness and manipulative potential of various presuppositional structures.²¹ Presuppositions can be manipulative when the 'presupposed' material is not actually agreed with or even known by the hearer ahead of time. It is a way of sneaking in 'extra' propositions, or of imposing the speaker's viewpoint on the hearer.

It is however necessary to distinguish between the ideological nature of presuppositions and their manipulateness. For example Sbisà (1999), observing the ideological nature of many linguistically marked presuppositions in Italian political discourse, examines the following interesting passage from a speech of Umberto Bossi, the leader of the Italian Northern League:

- (6) These are times when there is a reorganization going on, a contraposition between those who want to keep Rome as the centre of gravity for the exploitation of Padania and Padania's patriots.²²

(Il Corriere della Sera 4/9/1997, p. 11)

which is analysed as having the following presuppositions:

1. *Some people want to keep Rome as the centre of gravity for the exploitation of Padania.*
2. *Rome is the centre of gravity for the exploitation of Padania.*
3. *Padania is being exploited.*
4. *Padania exists.*
5. *Padania's patriots exist.*
6. *Padania is a fatherland.*

Sbisà says these presuppositions correspond to *ideological* propositions. By this, she means – I assume – that these propositions are, in fact, part of the political standpoint and agenda of the Northern League and are not uncontroversial for the general Italian public. But, is this a clear case of manipulation?

Irrespectively of our antipathy or sympathy for the political agenda of the Italian Northern League, we cannot evaluate this move without considering the addressee and the actual common ground of the text: if Bossi was addressing militants of his party, all these propositions were probably well established in the common ground.

Common grounds often contain a great deal of ideological information. And a text can be perceived as congruous relatively to a certain common ground because this common ground contains certain ideological propositions. These propositions may well be false or morally dubious, but this does not concern directly the critical evaluation of the text but the factual evaluation of the ideology. This happens also with the presuppositions of discourse relations.

Van Dijk (1998) observes that the *perception of coherence* is ideologically influenced:

Thus sequences of sentences (or rather, of propositions) constitute discourses if they satisfy a number of *coherence* conditions, such as (a) *conditional* relations between the facts denoted by these sentences, or (b) *functional* relations (such as generalization, specification, contrast) among propositions. Such coherence is based on the interpretation of events as represented in the mental models of the language users, and may therefore also be ideologically influenced. Whether language users see a social event as a cause or not of an-

other social event may thus have an effect on the coherence of their discourse. In other words coherence is both contextually and socially relative, and depends on our ideologically controlled interpretation of the world.

(van Dijk 1998:206)

Let us consider a simple example that illustrates the phenomenon pointed out by van Dijk:

- (7) A: A burglar broke into Aunt Julie's house.
 B: That's hardly surprising. Haven't you seen all those coloured people hanging around lately?

Certainly, prejudice and ideology can influence the degree of perceived congruity of the argumentative connective predicate in B's utterance. Let us suppose that the ideologically influenced common ground contains the proposition *Most dark skinned people are thieves*: B will be understood as making a very strong case! At first glance, this seems to seriously limit the interest and usefulness of a congruity theoretic analysis of manipulation, while it is not the case.

In principle, we can maintain that even if a text is perceived as congruous because its presuppositions are satisfied in the common ground, it can be judged incongruous in some absolute sense because its presuppositions are false.

But there is more. While the idea that perceived coherence is ideologically influenced is certainly very sensible, there are three aspects that I think important for a theory of manipulation, which do not emerge from van Dijk's discussion of this point.

Firstly, if we do not place some sort of *constraint* on the ideological variation of mental models, any discourse, no matter how strange, ends up being coherent with respect to some ideology providing the model for it. I make the realistic hypothesis that these constraints exist and are to identify with the basic experience of the world and basic needs of a human being.

Secondly, we might suggest that certain ideologies, in order to be maintained, need precisely to circumvent or somehow overcome these constraints, and that manipulation has to do exactly with this type of process.

Finally, ideological discourses do not always preach to the choir: we have to explain how they succeed in convincing people.

When an ideology is at variance with the basic experience of the world, or with the basic needs, desires and moral values of people, the need for manipulation arises. Ancient rhetoric teaches us that, in order to persuade, one has

to start from what is accepted and bring to the belief what is not yet accepted. And, in order to persuade, an ideology has to start from what is accepted, to show that the tenets of the ideology follow from the values and experience of the world of the manipulated or, at least, are not in full contradiction of it, while promoting ideas that, in fact, are. Then the manipulator makes the manipulated entertain ultimately inconsistent beliefs.²³

We come then to an interesting conclusion. Even if it is true that (perceived) coherence is ideology-dependent in the sense that a text can be judged congruous or incongruous according to different ideological common grounds, there are texts that are incongruous in a stronger sense:

In fact, *a text (or an utterance) that presupposes contradictory propositions is incongruous with respect to any consistent common ground.*

With the introduction of the notion of incongruity with respect of any consistent common ground – let us call it *logical incongruity* – we have introduced an important refinement in the tools for the evaluation of the argumentative texts and the detection of manipulation. I take the intentional and systematic presence of logical incongruity as a crucial stigma of manipulative texts.

Of course, texts that perpetrate this kind of obfuscation may as well contain logical contradictions, viz. straightforward inconsistencies in the asserted content, maybe as blatant as those of the well known Orwellian slogans from 1984: *War is Peace, Freedom is slavery*.²⁴

Certainly, such contradictions can have, under certain conditions, a wicked manipulative power of their own.²⁵ I believe, however, that incongruities at the level of deep-seated presuppositions, and in particular at the level of connective predicates play a more strategic role in overcoming, undetected, the resistance of the manipulated. This kind of move, involving absolute incongruity, has been hyperbolically satirised again by Orwell in his *Animal Farm*:

- (8) All animals are equal but some animals are *more* equal than others.

Here Napoleon and the pigs go beyond simple contradiction (which would have looked like *All animals are equal but some animals are better than others*) and plunge their victims into the incongruity generated by the application of *more* – which requires a gradable predicate as argument – to the predicate *equal*.

In conclusion, an analysis of congruity can be useful at two different levels. First, it can be used to make explicit the common ground that a text needs in order to be perceived as congruous. In this case, the evaluation of the truthfulness of the text – while greatly helped by the explication – remains external to the analysis. Second, it can fully evaluate cases of logical incongruity.

It is now time to move to the analysis of a concrete example: an excerpt of one of Mussolini's speeches, where I believe one can make a strong case for incongruity at the level of argumentative connective predicates. The analysis of the passage will allow us to introduce further refinements in our tools and to address briefly an issue mentioned at the beginning of the paper, namely how successful manipulative texts manage to appear coherent despite their incongruity.

6. Analysis of an excerpt of Mussolini (Trieste, September 18, 1938)

Let us consider the following passage taken from a speech made in Trieste on 18 September 1938, a speech which coincides with the introduction of racial laws in Italy (Mussolini 1938:66–67):

With respect to internal politics, the problem of burning current concern is the racial one. Also in this field we will adopt the necessary solutions. Those who pretend we have obeyed to imitations, or worse to suggestions, are poor cretins, to whom we don't know whether we should address our contempt or our compassion.

The racial problem did not explode suddenly, as thought by those who are accustomed to sudden awakenings because they are accustomed to long lazy sleep. It is in relation to the conquest of the Empire, because history teaches us that empires are conquered by arms but are maintained by prestige. And for prestige a clear, austere, racial consciousness is needed, which should establish not only differences, but also very clear-cut superiorities. The Jewish problem is but one aspect of this phenomenon. Our position has been determined by these incontestable factual data.

World Jewry has been for sixteen years, in spite of our policy, an irreconcilable enemy of Fascism. In Italy our policy has determined, in the Semitic elements, what can be now called, what we could then call, a true rush to board the ship (it. *una corsa vera e propria all' arrembaggio* = lit. a true rush to boarding). However, the Jews with Italian citizenship, who have incontestable merits towards Italy and towards the Regime will find understanding and justice. With respect to the others, a policy of separation will be followed.

In the end, the world will perhaps have to wonder at our generosity rather than at our rigour, unless the Semites from abroad and those inside, and above all their improvised and unexpected friends, who defend them from too many chairs, oblige us to change our path radically.

The central move in Mussolini's argumentation is the following general justification of racism:

- (9) It [= the racial problem] is in relation to the conquest of the Empire, because history teaches us that empires are conquered by arms but are maintained by prestige. And for prestige a clear, austere, racial consciousness is needed, which should establish not only differences, but also very clear-cut superiorities.

from which the legitimacy of anti-Semitism is derived:

- (10) The Jewish problem is but one aspect of this phenomenon.

If we move now to a finer-grained analysis trying to make explicit the pre-supposition complexes of the argumentative connective predicates involved we find something interesting. We have already seen how specific *argument schemes* are evoked as presuppositions by the speaker's act of arguing and that these inferential patterns presuppose, in turn, specific content level relations between the truth values of the propositional contents. Two premises of Mussolini's argument can be safely reconstructed as follows:

- (11) a. In order to maintain empires prestige is needed.
b. In order to enjoy prestige clear-cut racial superiorities need to be established.

But what is the conclusion? The conclusion of the argument is not explicitly stated, it has to be inferred by the hearer. That the conclusion of an argument remains implicit is not uncommon and it is not necessarily a sign of manipulation. The problem is the nature of the intended conclusion that the hearer is led to infer. I propose that the conclusion that the hearer is brought to infer in this passage is something like the following:

- (12) So, necessarily there are clear-cut racial superiorities.

If this is in fact the conclusion, the problem with Mussolini's argument is an illegitimate passage from the deontic-practical necessity "what is necessary in order to maintain an empire" to the epistemic modality "what is necessarily a fact, in view of the evidence" (cf. Kratzer 1981). His argumentation can be compared to the following one:

- (13) We want to maintain our Empire.
In order to maintain empires, a strong army is needed.
In order to have a strong army, it is necessary to maintain a big military budget.
So, necessarily, there is a big military budget.

If my reconstruction is correct Mussolini here evokes the deductively valid inference scheme of *practical reasoning* but misuses it committing the fallacy known as *argumentum ad consequentiam*. The practical reasoning scheme requires that the conclusion be a proposition indicating a special kind of deontic necessity, and not a fact or an epistemic necessity (= known fact).

But how do we know that Mussolini was not merely arguing for the *expediency* of racism and apartheid in order to maintain an empire? That would have been a perfectly congruous use of the *practical reasoning* inferential scheme. In this case my reconstruction would have been just a pragmatically unwarranted misrepresentation.

What we have here is an instance of what Hamblin (1970) called "the problem of nailing a fallacy". This problem derives from the striking fact that connective predicates are usually not manifested linguistically (or are very partially manifested by various types of discourse markers) and some of their arguments (either premises or conclusions) can be implicit as well. We are here attempting to show that a certain implicit argument is incongruous with respect to some equally implicit relational predicate. The fact that connective predicates are, so to say, "invisible presupposition triggers" that are normally inferred by abduction²⁶ from the presence of utterances that would be congruous with respect to them, makes accusations of incongruity particularly difficult.

Hamblin (1970: 224) observes that in many cases perpetrators of fallacies have an easy – if extreme – retreat: "In many cases of supposed fallacy it is possible for the alleged perpetrator to protest, with an innocent face, that he cannot be convinced because he was not been arguing at all". Hamblin considers the following example:

- (14) A says: "S"
 B says: "It was C who told you that S and I happen to know that his mother-in-law is living in sin with a Russian"
 A: "The falsity of S does not follow from any facts about the morals of C's mother-in-law: that is an *argumentum ad hominem*"
 B: "I did not claim that it followed. I simply made a remark about incidents of the statement's history. Draw what conclusions you like. If the cap fits. . ."

However, in order to be successful, manipulators need to be perceived as arguing. They have to make the addressee infer connective predicates *even if* their utterances do not make congruous arguments for them. In order to achieve that they have to resort to strategies that induce some coarse perception of co-

herence at the global level. The systematic study of these strategies makes an important chapter in the analysis of manipulation, and one which is largely still to be written. Certainly one important strategy involves an increased overt linguistic marking of the function of utterances and the connections between them, which is achieved through the use of discourse markers (see Moeschler 1994 on a related issue), and other more complex means such as metatextual statements and predication over various anaphorically derived second order entities.²⁷

Well, like in good detective stories there is no perfect murder. Mussolini did in fact adopt one of these strategies, and in doing so he left traces of his fallacy in the immediately following passage:

- (15) The Jewish problem is but one aspect of this *phenomenon*. Our position has been determined by these *incontestable factual data*.

The fact that the (unstated) conclusion of the above argument is anaphorically referred to as a *phenomenon* and as *factual data* is evidence that Mussolini *did* in fact intend to argue for the factual existence of racial differences and not only for the political expedience of drawing them.

Probably an important role in guiding the hearer towards the intended interpretation of the implicit conclusion without revealing the fallacy is also played, in the immediately preceding context, by the verb *stabilire* ('to establish'), which like its English cognate is ambiguous between two alternative readings, which impose very different presuppositions to the second argument of the verb.²⁸ Under the first reading *stabilire* means roughly 'to institute' and refers to the establishment of a social convention or institution by an authorized social agent, while under the second reading it means 'to find out', 'to ascertain', to establish that something is the case. The second reading of *stabilire* imposes a presupposition of factuality on the second argument – like predicates such as *to know*. The first reading, on the contrary, presupposes the non-factuality of the social reality prior to the act of establishing it.

In our passage, the first reading of *stabilire* is consistent with the non-fallacious interpretation of the argument (sound practical reasoning), but is incompatible with the anaphors *this phenomenon* and *these incontestable factual data*. Here the second reading of the verb comes in handy as a *phenomenon* can be a legitimate argument of *stabilire* in the second sense. It is reasonable to hypothesise that here the use of *equivocation* is instrumental to inducing a perception of coherence and making the *ad consequentiam* fallacy pass undetected.²⁹

7. Perceived coherence

In our analysis of the incongruity of the passage of the excerpt, we have touched the problem of the perceived coherence of incongruous manipulative texts. How is it achieved? What we can give here is only a partial answer.

We mentioned above the importance of linguistic strategies of increased explicit connection marking. In order to achieve their effect these strategies need, however, to be complemented by another resource: the exploitation of the *accommodation* of (linguistically triggered) presuppositions. Accommodation is still a poorly understood phenomenon. As it is well known, the phenomenon of *presupposition accommodation* has been defined by Lewis (1979/1991: 421) as follows:

If at time *t* something is said that requires presupposition *P* to be acceptable, and if *P* is not presupposed just before *t*, then – *ceteris paribus* and within certain limits – presupposition *P* comes into existence at *t*.

According to this basic account, when Mussolini says

- (16) World Jewry has been for sixteen years, in spite of our policy, an irreconcilable enemy of Fascism.

The hearer derives the following presuppositions, inferring them, directly or indirectly, from various linguistic sources:

- (17) Mussolini's policy has been 'favourable' to Jews,³⁰
 "World Jewry" exists as a subject capable of a unitary political standpoint;
 World Jewry has always been hostile to Fascism;
 Mussolini has tried to appease World Jewry in the past.

If these presupposed propositions are not yet part of the common ground, they are added to it on the spot. However, this account is more an abstract characterisation rather than an explanation of the inner workings of accommodation.

There are various aspects of accommodation that need to be elucidated. Consider, first of all, that *to accommodate* does not mean automatically *to believe* or *to accept*. A sceptical addressee can always accommodate presuppositions for the sake of text understanding, without actually believing them. Additional factors must be at work in securing the success of manipulation.

One of them could be the *vagueness* of the presuppositions imposed by the predicates and the relative *coarseness of the accommodated material*.³¹ Striking coarseness in the accommodated material can arise from a phenomenon described by Herbert Clark in his more psychologically oriented account of

common ground. Clark (1996: 101) distinguishes between *inside information*, that is *particular information* that members of a community mutually assume as mutually shared, and *outside information*, that is *types of information* that outsiders assume is inside information for that community. For example, in a conversation between a layman and a medical doctor (or a nuclear physicist, etc.) the common ground is characterised by a number of *types of information* (anatomy, physiology, etc.) that the layman believes the doctor has access to without knowing the propositions that make up the information in question. Under certain conditions, these *types of information* can operate as black boxes in the common ground so that presuppositions that can be ascribed to any such type of information can be 'quasi-satisfied' – rather than accommodated – but in a very coarse and generic way.³²

One should also consider the role played by the *relevance* of the information being accommodated for the addressee.

- (18) Tomorrow I'll fly home with my wife and my daughter.

Consider two situations where the addressee of (18) does not know that the speaker is married and has a daughter, but in the first situation the addressee is a new acquaintance (a colleague met at a conference) and in the second the addressee is the mother or father of the speaker, who doesn't see her-his son since he left for that visiting scholar position in the USA.³³

Psychological considerations on the *processing effort* of the hearer, in Sperber and Wilson's (1995[1986]) sense, are also likely to play a role in explaining the success of manipulation. In order to maintain a common ground 'for the sake of understanding' the sceptical addressee needs to keep in middle-term memory a representation of the ways in which this common ground differs from his/her real beliefs. Note that this extra mnemonic effort is similar in nature to the one which is necessary to the liar in order to lie consistently.

Coming back to Mussolini's speech, we can finally consider a number of other *external factors* that favour a trusting and rather coarse accommodation of presuppositions which guarantees the perception of coherence. In the concrete situation of the speech, we can tentatively hypothesise that the following factors have contributed to the acceptance (cf. Dogliani 1999: 271–283):

1. The re-use of discourse concerning the apartheid policy Fascism was trying to impose in the Italian colonies (where *austere racial consciousness* and separation from the African population were associated with the need to maintain the *prestige* and the *moral profile* of the colonisers) contributed to the impression that nothing really new was being done.

2. The recent publication of *Fascism and the problems of the race* a.k.a. "The Manifesto of the Racist Scientists" (July, 14 1938), the first of a series of official documents and 'scientific' publications, probably contributed to the *black box* effect discussed above.
3. The fact that Jews in Italy were considered a numerically small minority may have contributed in lowering the perceived relevance of the information.

8. Conclusion

Let us summarise, in closing, some results of our discussion and some interesting problems that remain open:

- The defectiveness (and potential deceptiveness) of a given utterance depends on the particular type of communicative action which is being performed, that is to say, on the exact function – in the sense of argument role – assigned to this utterance by a connective predicate, which is often implicit. This is neatly exemplified by Hamblin's problem of *naïling fallacies*.
- In order to evaluate manipulative moves in argumentative texts, one has to richly characterise the presuppositions of argumentative connective predicates at different levels: both at the level of referential world connections between propositional contents, and at the illocutionary-intentional level. *Argument schemes* from argumentation theory seem at least in part to do this job.
- In manipulative discourse, the mechanisms for inferring the global coherence of discourse and the appropriate Connective Predicates at various levels seem to be, at least in part, disconnected from the fine-grained congruity checking of the presuppositions of the connective predicates. Hearers seem to infer coherence at a global level and to accommodate in the common ground coarse and opaque chunks of material in order to satisfy only the most strategic connective predicates. In this case, at least, interpretation models such as Hobbs et al. (1990), where interpreters reason abductively to *prove* coherence, do not seem to apply fully.

Congruity Theory does not make direct claims concerning the actual cognitive modelling of discourse understanding: it couples an approach to the ontology of communicative action with a method for laying out the semantic-pragmatic results of interpretation, in a way which is systematic enough to support evalu-

ation of the adequacy of the text to the communicative goal, and in the specific case, the evaluation of its *argumentative quality*. The notion of sense that it tries to tackle is necessarily open ended, as is the evaluation it supports.³⁴

Notes

* Many thanks to Eddo Rigotti for his great support and helpful advice. I also want to thank the anonymous reviewers whose remarks helped to improve both the content and the style of the paper. Remaining errors are mine.

1. Rigotti offers the following general definition of manipulation: "A message is manipulative if it twists the vision of the world (physical as well as social – or human – actual as well as virtual) in the mind of the addressee so that he/she is prevented from an healthy attitude toward decision (i.e., An attitude responding to his/her very interests), and pursues the manipulator's goal in the illusion of pursuing her/his own goal".

2. Our Congruity Theory bears no direct relation to the psychological hypothesis of the same name that was proposed in the 1950s. Cf. Osgood and Tannenbaum (1955). That Congruity Theory is one of several models of attitude formation and change based on the idea that persons seek to maximize the internal consistency of their cognitions and strive to avoid cognitive inconsistency.

3. Mann, Matthiessen and Thompson (1992:40–41) characterize coherence as follows: "Certain kinds of presentation, texts, have a kind of wholeness or integrity that others lack. We recognize that they 'hang together' and are understandable as single objects. They are coherent. Every element has some role in the whole text; otherwise the text contains a non-sequitur. This is in the sense in which we see magazine articles as texts, but magazines, news broadcasts, and some dialogues as structured collections of texts."

4. The fact that one can easily imagine a context that renders the sequences in (b) intelligible as coherent wholes does not represent an argument against coherence intuitions; rather it is evidence for the human need/tendency of establishing coherence among sequences of utterances. For a discussion of this point see Kehler (2002:3).

5. For Mann, Matthiessen and Thompson (1992:43), all the parts of a coherent text "are seen as contributing to a single purpose of the writer, i.e., as created to achieve a single effect".

6. A discussion of these problems can be found in Rocci (2003).

7. Obviously, this 'functional' definition of coherence in terms of "meaningful communicative action" raises the question of *what* exactly qualifies as a meaningful communicative action. We need, in other words, some sort of 'structural' specification of communicative action. Otherwise we have little more than two different names for the same intuition. The mechanisms of Congruity theory discussed below are part of this specification. On the distinction between 'functional' and 'structural' definitions of *text* see Rocci (2003).

8. Coherence requirements for communicative action are "objective" – constitutive – much in the same sense as the door being closed is an objective requirement for the action of opening a door.

9. For a complete discussion of the classic example of the king of France see Seuren (1988 and 2000). Note that the presupposition of existence imposed by *bald* to its argument is relative to a reference world w_r , which is identified by default with the actual world. There are, however, contexts – such as fictional discourse – where w_r is not the actual world. Predicates such as *imaginary* (x) or *build* (x, y), which do not presuppose the existence of certain arguments in w_r . They presuppose, however, their existence in special sub-worlds or "discourse domains" (see Seuren 2000 for the notion of discourse domain).

10. For instance, something like 'The son of the speaker belongs to a sect in which married people are barred from driving vehicles' will do. Here we see that coherence is relative to the set of assumptions we are willing to include in the common ground of the interaction. This basic fact has important consequences for the relationships between coherence and ideology, which will be discussed below.

11. See Bateman and Rondhuis (1997) for a survey and comparison of various approaches to discourse relations.

12. This approach has some important similarities with another theory of text coherence, the Rhetorical Structure Theory developed by Mann and Thompson from the late '80s. In RST *rhetorical relations* are defined both in terms of the constraints they pose on their textual argument and in terms of the effect the speaker intends to achieve in the addressee by establishing a particular relation.

13. A partial identification of speech acts and discourse relations is suggested also in the current version of the SDRT developed by Asher and Lascarides (2003): "Searle and more recent AI work [...] typically take speech acts to be a property of an individual utterance. In contrast, SDRT shows that many types of speech acts must be understood relationally, because successfully performing the speech act is logically dependent on the content of an antecedent utterance. So technically speaking, the type must be (at least) a two place relation [...]. For example if one uses an utterance to conclude something, then that conclusion must be antecedent to hypothesis or argument. And this is relational because successfully performing this speech act is dependent on the content of the antecedent" (p. 305).

14. Consider, for instance, the preparatory conditions of the assertion as formulated by Searle (1969). One of them states that 'It is not obvious to the *Speaker* that the *Hearer* knows (does not need to be reminded of) p '. This type of condition is treated as a (relational) presupposition imposed by any 'assertive' connective predicate on the argument places characterized by the roles of the *Speaker*, the *Hearer* and the asserted proposition.

15. The diagram offers a synthetic representation of the predicate-argument structure of the connective predicate which is only partially satisfactory. For instance the fact that utterances rather than propositional contents appear as the arguments of the connective predicate needs further specifications. Firstly, it should be noted that the symbol U does not refer to the utterance considered as an illocutionary act, but more generically as a speech event. The connective predicate, taking a U as argument can impose constraints on various aspects of it, for example on its truth-conditional content. Utterances are thus somewhat similar

to the 'speech act discourse referents' π_n that make-up the arguments of discourse relations in SDRT, which are not defined at the illocutionary level (cf. Asher, Busquets, & Le Draoulec 2001:221–222). A difference should be made, however, between the argument U_0 and the other anaphoric (or cataphoric) arguments. The connective predicates defines the (relational) illocution of U_0 , stating, for example, that U_0 is a conclusion drawn from such and such premises according to a certain inference schema. The fact that U_0 also fulfills the condition of an assertion is included in the content of the connective predicate – it is entailed by it, because the conditions for assertion are a subset of the conditions imposed by the connective predicate on U_0 . In this perspective the notion of assertion can be viewed as a supercategory of connective predicates, consisting of the predicates that impose the conditions of assertion on their U_0 . As regards the other arguments, partially different considerations are necessary: a connective predicate can define the function of a U_0 with respect to *any aspect* of previous utterances (or planned ones): be it their propositional content, their pragmatic function, their linguistic or phonetic form. So the constraints that the connective predicate impose on the other U s can be quite varied and concern also the function played by these utterances as the U_0 of other connective predicates (cf., for instance, *Are you hungry?* _{U_1} *Because there is some chicken in the fridge* _{U_0}).

16. For a fuller analysis of argumentative connective predicates, employing a more explicit notation, see Rigotti and Rocci (in press b).

17. According to a view held by many scholars, in order to have predictive power, a theory of discourse structure should be based on a well-constrained, smallest possible, set of coherence relations. See, for instance, Kehler (2002:11–34), who takes a rather extreme position in this respect. In this perspective a largely open-ended approach like Congruity theory is likely to be considered devoid of theoretical significance. A discussion of this objection must be left for another occasion. However, I want to hint at two types of consideration that motivate the liberal approach followed here. The first is that the conditions associated with broad coherence relations such as the ones proposed in Kehler (2002) do not fully support the kind of semantic analysis that is needed in order to characterize properly the 'logical form' as well as the pragmatic aspects of argumentative discourse, in order to evaluate them. The understanding of argumentation requires the establishment of richer relations, such as the ones outlined above. Secondly, recent work on discourse connectives, such as Jayez and Rossari (1998) and Rossari (2000), showed that these lexical items can be seen as predicates which impose a wide variety of finely grained constraints on their arguments, and their role cannot be limited to that of linguistic cues of certain broad types of relations. It is then legitimate to ask why our intuitions of coherence should depend only on the establishing of very broad relation types, which do not constitute a full interpretation of the discourse and are even less specific than the relations needed in order to interpret discourse connectives. See Redeker (2000) for complementary considerations in the same direction.

18. This view is in accordance with the approach to argumentative discourse relations adopted by Snoek Henkemans (2001) in the framework of the pragma-dialectical theory of argumentation: while at the *pragmatic level* an argument is a relational speech act (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1984) where an utterance 1 is presented as a means of rendering another utterance 2 acceptable, at the *propositional level* the contents are related by some referential relation (*causality*, *concomitance* or *resemblance*). Snoek Henkemans (2001:235–

238) rightly criticizes various theories of discourse relations that consider content level relations and pragmatic relations on the same level and as potentially alternative. In this way the issue of the "illocutionary purpose, or interactional goal" of content level relations is not addressed, and – we would add – the content level presuppositions of pragmatic relations are not accounted for.

19. While this conclusion is rather intuitive it is, on the technical level, less trivial than it seems, since it requires a fine-grained distinction in the felicity conditions of speech acts between *preparatory* and *propositional content* conditions on the one hand and *sincerity* and *essential* conditions on the other. The former are presuppositional in nature, while the latter are concomitant or brought about by the speech act. The distinction mirrors Seuren's distinction between *preconditions* and *update conditions* in the semantics of (lower level) predicates.

20. Note that the incongruities at the lower levels are – except under special conditions – projected at the higher levels and entail the incongruity of the text also at a pragmatic level: I cannot, for instance, felicitously promise to draw the square circle because this is an impossible action, and this is an impossible action because the *the square circle* is an impossible entity. The incongruity in the argument noun phrase is projected, so to say, two levels above.

21. See, for instance, Walton (1999) on presupposition and the fallacy of "many questions".

22. All translations are mine.

23. It is necessary to distinguish here between what is in fact contradictory with the basic human experience of the world, what is just unexpected – a lot of good ideas might seem strange at a first glance – or even seem contradictory but can be reconciled with experience through reasonable inference. For the purposes of this paper, I maintain that a similar distinction can be made in the sphere of desires, interests and values without entering in the discussion of the kind of conception of ethics that is needed to support such a distinction.

24. In these cases, the human tendency to search for relevance may come to the assistance of the manipulator. If the expectation of relevance is sufficiently high, the interpreter will not stop her/his search at the apparent contradiction looking for deeper, hidden meanings to be discovered behind the oxymoronic wording. On this search for relevance, its eventual frustration, and the consequences thereof see Saussure (this volume).

25. Technically, the difference between *logical incongruity* and *contradiction* can be formulated as follows: a logically incongruous text or utterance presupposes an inconsistent common ground, a contradictory text or utterance cannot update the common ground without making it inconsistent.

26. On the abduction of discourse relations cf. Hobbs, Stickel, Appelt and Martin (1990: 35–41).

27. On the anaphora of second order entities (or abstract objects) see Asher (1993) and Conte (1999).

28. This analysis of the verb *stabilire* was, in part, suggested by the comments of an anonymous reviewer, whom I wish to thank here.

29. Traditionally, *equivocation* is listed among fallacies. Some modern theorists, such as Hamblin (1970), objected to this classification. In fact, saying that in the passage Mussolini

committed the two fallacies of *equivocation* and *ad consequentiam* is not particularly illuminating. One would rather say that *equivocation* was instrumental in perpetrating the *ad consequentiam*. The analysis of Mussolini's speech suggests that *equivocation* and *ad consequentiam* belong to different levels of analysis, both relevant for the understanding of manipulative discourse.

30. Here "favourable" is likely to be interpreted by the hearer as "not harsh to the extent it should have, with regard to the Jews's inferiority" when the information derived from the linguistic presupposition trigger in the utterance is combined with the statement of the racial inferiority of the Jews from the preceding context.

31. Omitted indefinite complements, for instance, are presuppositions of the lexical predicates that are accommodated, giving rise to extremely vague representations in the common ground, a situation that favours manipulation. Consider, for instance: *In Italia la nostra politica ha determinato, negli elementi semiti, quella che si può oggi chiamare, si poteva chiamare, una corsa vera e propria all'arrembaggio*. The use of the event noun *arrembaggio* (Engl. 'boarding', but only in the hostile sense of a naval combat or piracy) presupposes that there is something like a ship which is boarded. But in this metaphorical context, it is extremely difficult to say what exactly has been the object of an hostile occupation by the 'Semite elements' according to Mussolini: the State? the economy? the Fascist Party? Italy altogether? On the role of implicit indefinite complements see also Danler (this volume).

32. Mann (2002:5), discussing the sources of dialogue coherence, makes the following interesting remark: "For example, a medical interview, from the patient's point of view can be incoherent. The physician may be considering two or three diseases as potentially being the diagnosis of the patient's condition. At the same time, the patient may not know what diseases are being considered, why certain questions are asked, and what context of judgment of the meaning of the questions is relevant. Another physician, seeing the dialogue or the transcript, may understand the physician's intentions completely and regard the interview as coherent. But the patient does not know those intentions and can ascribe only apparent medical relevance to them, based on the situation. Such ascriptions are 100% assumption, not derived from the specific text".

33. On this aspect of accommodation see also Greco (2003).

34. Congruity theory, equating the establishment of coherence with the open ended process of recognizing the congruity of a text, does not make the hypothesis of a shallower notion of coherence, as Asher and Lascarides (2003) do, but may well admit that a shallower processing can influence the way people makes sense of a text.

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Manipulation and cognitive pragmatics

Preliminary hypotheses

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1. Introduction¹

The paper presents a set of pragmatic hypotheses on the topic of manipulative and ideological discourse; these hypotheses, which are to be further explored and empirically validated, aim at grounding a research project. The general framework of this research is a mechanistic and naturalistic cognitive theory of human communication, Sperber and Wilson's Relevance theory (Sperber & Wilson 1995).²

In this introduction, after briefly defending the legitimacy of a cognitive pragmatic approach of manipulation, I consider the main contributions to the problem in that framework.

In Section 2, I propose a working definition for *manipulative discourse*, where manipulative discourse is *truth-conditionally / truth-functionally defective, doubtful* (when the propositions conveyed are about a state of affairs), or *unacceptable within a given culture* (when the propositions conveyed are about moral issues). Section 3 discusses the typology of strategies involved in discursive manipulation, and notes a commonality between all the strategies; they lead the hearer to problems of understanding, i.e., problems in the process of retrieving a clear informative intention on the part of the speaker. In Section 4, I suggest that a central mechanism of manipulation through discursive strategies is organised in a twofold process, managed by the speaker: causing trouble in the hearer's understanding procedure and offering ready-made resolutions of that trouble. I call that mechanism the *trouble-and-resolution* device. This device disturbs the normal processing of intention recovery, permitting to ob-