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LANGUAGE AND MANIPULATION: EXPLORING GASLIGHTING VIA SPEECH ACT THEORY

Abstract

Gaslighting, a form of psychological manipulation wherein individuals or groups are led into doubting their perception, memory, or sanity, constitutes a complex discourse with profound pragmatic implications. However, it is seldom explored within the realm of linguistic research. The paper discusses pragmatic aspects of gaslighting from the standpoint of speech act theory proposed by Austin (1962) and Searle (1979).

The empirical data comprise excerpts of conversations drawn from the adaptations of the 1938 play "Gas Light" by P. Hamilton, namely, "Gaslight" (1940) by T. Dickinson and "Gaslight" (1944) by G. Cukor.

The study has shown that verbal manipulation within gaslighting relies predominantly on assertive speech acts. Through empirical analysis, three types of assertives prevalent in gaslighting discourse have been identified: explicit assertives, where the encoded message aligns with the literal illocutionary act; covert assertives, where an assertive speech act is conveyed through a different illocutionary act; and inclusive assertives, which convey an encoded message within an assertive speech act through a different illocutionary act, such as a directive or a commissive. Furthermore, in gaslighting scenarios, assertive speech acts acquire a double direction of fit, a characteristic typically not associated with assertives.

The paper serves as a complementary resource to the existing knowledge on gaslighting, paving the way for further research into the linguistic pragmatics of the phenomenon in question.

KEYWORDS: Assertives, Direction of fit, Felicity, Gaslighting, Illocution, Perlocution, Speech acts

1. Introduction

The interconnection between language and consciousness has occupied the minds of the greatest thinkers for centuries, as language serves as a primary means for expressing our thoughts. Language not only reflects consciousness but also influences it profoundly. (Ottenheimer, 2009, pp. 33-34) Simultaneously, our consciousness forms our linguistic behavior, as it determines our word choices and the meanings we attribute to the utterances we produce.

However, being the fundamental medium of human interaction, language transcends mere communication; it holds the power to influence and control. (Fowler & Hodge, 1979) This tendency for language to serve as a weapon extends beyond individual interactions and spreads over societal structures, imposing influence on collective behavior and public opinions.

In recent decades, there has been a considerable shift in focus within the linguistic paradigm, with cognitive approaches gaining prominence (Chomsky, 1959; Lakoff & Johnson, 1980; Lakoff, 1990; Peeters, 1998; Lakoff & Johnson, 1999; Peeters, 2001; Gavins & Steen, 2003; Croft & Cruse, 2004; Gibbs, 2013; Berwick & Chomsky, 2015) alongside the increasing interest towards cognitive psychology due to its significant progress. (Temple, 1990; Greenwood, 1999; Mandler, 2002; Beck et al. 2004; Reif, 2008; Anderson, 2010; Fontaine, 2012; Barkley et al., 2015) The new perspectives in both disciplines have revived interest in understanding the relationship between language and consciousness. In addition, the availability of information today, in the age of Internet technologies, has made psychoanalytic insights readily accessible. This widespread availability of psychological knowledge has brought public attention to the tactics of verbal manipulation, as individuals strive to look into the complexities of human communication and protect their psychological well-being. However, what often receives insufficient attention from researchers, is the pragmatic aspect of the problem at hand: what are the linguistic characteristics of manipulative communication? What exactly do manipulators *do with words* that produce such a devastating effect on the hearer?

This paper attempts to analyze one of the most destructive types of psychological manipulation, gaslighting, within the scope of personal relationships from the standpoint of speech act theory (Austin, 1962; Searle, 1979) and to offer insights into the pragmatic aspects of its linguistic realization.

The empirical data comprise excerpts of conversations drawn from the eponymous adaptations of the 1938's play "Gas Light" by Patrick Hamilton, namely, "Gaslight" (1940) directed by Thorold Dickinson and "Gaslight" (1944) directed by George Cukor. As is known, the very term gaslighting was coined based on the title of the play to denote the special type of sophisticated manipulation technique presented in the narrative.

Observations have shown that within the context of gaslighting, as a particular type of discourse, what occurs on a pragmatic level is a specified use and modification of particular speech acts by the speaker

(manipulator, gaslighter) with the intention to alter the hearer's (victim's) perception of reality, a theme to be explored further in this paper.

2. Towards the Definition of Gaslighting

Nowadays, the term *gaslighting*, also referred to simply as *gaslight*, used interchangeably as both, a verb and a noun, appears to be widely recognized by those familiar with phenomena such as narcissistic abuse or psychological manipulation. However, interpretations of the term might vary among its users, which often results in ambiguity surrounding the concept, as people tend to interpret the term *gaslighting* in accordance with their own experiences in various contexts.

The Merriam-Webster dictionary, for instance, defines the term as “psychological manipulation of a person usually over an extended period of time that causes the victim to question the validity of their own thoughts, perception of reality, or memories and typically leads to confusion, loss of confidence and self-esteem, uncertainty of one's emotional or mental stability, and a dependency on the perpetrator.” (Merriam-Webster, n.d.)

The American Psychological Association provides the following definition of the verb *gaslight*: “to manipulate another person into doubting their perceptions, experiences, or understanding of events.” (American Psychological Association, n.d.)

The Encyclopedia Britannica suggests the following interpretation of the concept: “gaslighting is an elaborate and insidious technique of deception and psychological manipulation, usually practiced by a single deceiver, or “gaslighter,” on a single victim over an extended period.” (Duignan, 2017)

Thus, the main characteristics of gaslighting that can be inferred from the definitions above should be listed as follows:

1. Gaslighting is a form of psychological manipulation.
2. Gaslighting aims to alter the victim's perception of reality.
3. Gaslighting is a type of behavior specific to human beings.

Indeed, it is questionable whether one can gaslight a cat into doubting its sanity, whereas other manipulative techniques are effective¹ on animals, as studies reveal (Skinner, 1951), such as *intermittent reinforcement* (Birch, 2015), for instance, infamous for being one of the most dangerous manipulation tactics, frequently used by abusive personalities.

Interestingly, when searching for *gaslighting* on Google, no definition explicitly emphasizes it as primarily a *verbal* manipulation technique, namely, implying the use of speech – a key characteristic of the phenomenon, allowing us to perceive it as a special form of discourse. This is noteworthy, as other non-verbal manipulative techniques, such as the *silent treatment*, for example, involve deliberate avoidance of

¹ I regard any experimentation involving animals as inhumane.

any verbal or written communication by the manipulator, which entails no use of language at all. (Booth, 2017) Gaslighting, on the other hand, primarily depends on particular patterns of language usage in interpersonal communication, by which one influences the victim's cognition. To summarize all stated above, the concept in question can be defined as follows: *gaslighting is a form of verbal, cognitively oriented psychological manipulation.*

3. Gaslighting and Speech Act Theory

3.1. Illocutionary Point

As is known, speech act theory, a branch of linguistic pragmatics, studies how language is used not solely to convey information but also to perform actions. For instance, when someone says, "*I promise to help you,*" the speaker is not merely conveying information about his/her willingness to assist but also committing himself/herself to future action. Similarly, when a judge declares "*I hereby sentence you to ten years in prison,*" the speaker is not only delivering a message but carrying out a legal action with significant consequences.

Initially introduced by an Oxford philosopher, J.L. Austin in his work "*How to Do Things With Words*" (1962), the speech act theory was later expanded by an American philosopher, J.R. Searle. According to Austin, every utterance (*locution*) performs an *illocutionary act*, representing the function the speaker intends to accomplish by producing that particular utterance, and a *perlocutionary effect*, signifying its influence on the recipient (Huang, 2014, p. 128). In his influential work "*Expression and Meaning*" (1979), Searle expands upon this idea by identifying twelve dimensions along which illocutionary acts may vary, paying particular attention to the *illocutionary point*, which refers to the intended purpose of the speech act and the *direction of fit*, which shows how the speech act corresponds to reality (Searle, 1979, p. 5). The *illocutionary point*, thus, stands for the communicative intention behind an utterance. (Searle, 1979, p. 3).

In the overall context of *gaslighting*, the communicative intention behind the speaker's utterances remains consistent: to manipulate the recipient's cognition and induce doubt. Therefore, despite the potential variety of speech acts performed by the gaslighter — ranging from denial to lying — the underlying illocutionary point must remain uniform: to oppose the hearer's standpoint and to undermine his/her confidence in the adequacy of his/her perception of reality.

To illustrate this, let us consider the following hypothetical conversations (1 and 2).

Speaker 1: "I've been feeling a bit overwhelmed lately. The week has been really busy."

Speaker 2: "Oh, come on, it's not that bad. You're usually so good at handling things."

Speaker 1: "I know, but it's been tough keeping up with everything."

Speaker 2: "You're probably just tired. Maybe you need to take a break."

Speaker 1: "I've been thinking about it. It's just hard to find the time."

Speaker 2: "See, you're always putting too much pressure on yourself. You should learn to relax more."

Speaker 1: "I guess you're right. I'll try to take it easy."

Speaker 2: "That's the spirit. You'll feel better once you stop stressing so much." (1)²

In conversation 1, Speaker 2 consistently invalidates Speaker 1's emotions and experiences. Instead of acknowledging Speaker 1's feelings of being overwhelmed and demonstrating sympathy, Speaker 2 diminishes them by suggesting he/she is simply tired. Speaker 2 also implies that Speaker 1 is responsible for his/her own stress by suggesting he/she should learn to relax more.

Now, let us observe an alternative version of this conversation by slightly modifying the language used by Speaker 2, making it less categorical in tone:

Speaker 1: "I've been feeling really anxious lately. I think it's because of all the stress at work."

Speaker 2: "Anxious? I haven't noticed anything different about you. Are you sure it's not just in your head?"

Speaker 1: "No, it's definitely been affecting me. I've been having trouble sleeping and concentrating."

Speaker 2: "Hmm, interesting. Do you think maybe you're just overthinking things? You know, sometimes it's all about perspective."

Speaker 1: "I don't think it's just in my head. I've been feeling really overwhelmed."

Speaker 2: "But have you considered that maybe you're just not managing your time well? I've seen you handle stress before."

Speaker 1: "I know, but this feels different. It's like I can't shake off this feeling of dread."

Speaker 2: "Well, I'm not sure what to tell you. It seems like you're making a big deal out of nothing. Maybe you just need to relax and stop overreacting." (2)³

In this exchange, Speaker 2 repeatedly questions Speaker 1's propositions and feelings, subtly implying that he/she is exaggerating or imagining his/her anxiety. Speaker 2 undermines Speaker 1's perception of reality by suggesting alternative explanations and devaluing the intensity of his/her emotions, which is a classic gaslighting tactic. Thus, despite the fact that in conversation 1 Speaker 2 is not as

² Generated by Artificial Intelligence, following comprehensive instructions provided by the author and under her meticulous supervision. OpenAI. (2024). ChatGPT (3.5) [Large language model]. <https://chat.openai.com>.

³ Generated by Artificial Intelligence, following comprehensive instructions provided by the author and under her meticulous supervision. OpenAI. (2024). ChatGPT (3.5) [Large language model]. <https://chat.openai.com>

straightforward in opposing Speaker 1's viewpoint as he/she appears in conversation 1, the overall meaning of the conversation remains unchanged.

It follows that the illocutionary point of the utterances produced in the context of gaslighting, irrespective of the linguistic devices employed by the speaker, remains constant and produces roughly the same perlocutionary effect on the hearer.

3.2. Perlocutionary Effect and the Direction of Fit

As is known, Searle's classification of speech acts includes five main categories, or five illocutionary points standing behind an utterance, namely *assertives*, aiming to reflect a current state of affairs (statements, descriptions, assertions); *directives*, aiming to induce the hearer to perform actions (commands, requests, invitations); *commissives*, speech acts that commit the speaker to certain future actions (promises, oaths, pledges); *expressives*, expressing the speaker's psychological state (apologies, congratulations, condolences) and *declarations*, which cause changes in the external world simply by the act of being uttered, such as pronouncing someone married or declaring war. (Vanderveken & Kubo, 2002).

Another important category underlying speech acts, as mentioned earlier, is the *direction of fit*, which refers to the relation of a speech act to reality. According to Searle, speech acts correlate with reality according to the following three directions of fit. These are *word-to-world fit*, where the utterance is meant to accurately describe or correspond to reality, as in the case of assertives; *world-to-word fit* where the world is expected to conform to the utterance (directives, commissives) and the so-called *double direction of fit*. The latter refers to a unique characteristic of certain speech acts, particularly declaratives. In the case of these speech acts, utterances describe the existing state of affairs ("word-to-world" fit) and bring about a change in that state by simply being pronounced ("world-to-word" fit). (Felipe Barrero, 2023)

As stated above, the intended perlocutionary effect of utterances produced by the gaslighter remains consistent regardless of the linguistic strategies employed by the speaker. It follows that, in the context of gaslighting, every utterance intended to alter the victim's perception of reality, irrespective of the type of speech act it represents must contain an encoded element of assertion.⁴ Thus, Speaker 2's utterances in hypothetical conversation 2, such as "*Are you sure it's not just in your head?*" or "*Do you think maybe you're just overthinking things?*," which represent *interrogative directives* and follow the world-to-word direction of fit, are meant to produce the same perlocutionary effect as corresponding assertives (*It's just in your head.; You must be overthinking it.*) would have.

In the meantime, in conversation 1 Speaker 2 uses explicit assertives, such as "*Oh, come on, it's not that bad*", or "*You're probably just tired*", overtly neglecting Speaker 1's assertions concerning his/her emotional condition. Therefore, it must be justified to presume that in the discourse of gaslighting the diverse

⁴ Aligned with Searle's ideas concerning indirect speech acts. (Searle, 1975).

speech acts employed by the manipulator function as Trojan horses and represent either *explicit* (literal) or *covert* (indirect) *assertives*, which are supposed to affect the victim's perception of reality by imposing a perspective opposite to the one of the hearer.

However, as is fairly noted by A. Felipe Barrero (2023), the perlocutionary effect does not depend on the intention of the speaker, as one cannot declare "*I hereby scare you*" or "*I hereby convince you*". Therefore, the speaker is unable to guarantee the intended perlocutionary effect solely by making an assertive speech act, without certain additional mechanisms being involved. I would argue that the infamous efficiency of gaslighting results from the fact that the verbal manipulation in this case is governed by the intersection of the directions of fit. Specifically, gaslighters perform assertive speech acts that seemingly align with reality and thus follow the word-to-world direction of fit. They make statements based on past observations, either accurate or deceptive (for instance, "*You're usually so good at handling things*" or "*I've seen you handle stress before*", as can be seen in conversations above), which, together with other interpersonal factors, such as trust on the part of the hearer, render the statements produced by the gaslighter *felicitous*. (Searle 1979, p. 44) It must be precisely for this reason that these assertives acquire a world-to-word fit orientation, as the victim perceives them as reliable and adjusts his/her own perception accordingly. For example, the assertive speech act "*See, you're always putting too much pressure on yourself,*" made in conversation 1 appears to imply an encoded (indirect) command "*Don't put so much pressure on yourself*", thus entailing a world-to-word direction of fit and subtly prompting the hearer to unconsciously comply with this command.

Consequently, the linguistic pragmatics of gaslighting, as a distinct form of discourse, extends beyond the conventional framework of speech act theory. In this context, assertive speech acts exhibit a double direction of fit, a phenomenon to be explored in Chapter 5.2 of the given paper.

4. Methodology

The data were collected from the adaptations of the 1938's play "Gas Light" by Patrick Hamilton, namely, "Gaslight" (1940) directed by Thorold Dickinson and "Gaslight" (1944) directed by George Cukor. For the study, ten (10) conversation excerpts from the mentioned films were examined. The examples of utterances produced by the gaslighter, a total of forty five (45) lexical items, were selected based on their explicitness, then synthesized and analyzed in accordance with J. Searle's classification of speech acts. Particular attention was paid to the direction of fit of the utterances in question. The given approach enabled to categorize and interpret the observed linguistic behaviors in the dataset. It is important to notice that the paper primarily focuses on the language of the gaslighter. Therefore, the victim's linguistic behavior was not within the scope of the given study.

5. Gaslighting via Speech Acts: Findings and Discussions

5.1. *Explicit, Covert and Inclusive Assertives*

Observations indicate that within the context of gaslighting, utterances intended to manipulate the victim's perception of reality often align with assertive speech acts, both direct and indirect. However, these utterances frequently exhibit *two dimensions of meaning*: first, the *literal speech act* or what is being explicitly stated, and second, the *encoded message*, which may either be conveyed through the same type of illocutionary act as the literal one or represent a different speech act.

Based on this analysis, the examined examples have been classified into three groups. The first group comprises *explicit assertives*, where the encoded message represents the same illocutionary act as the literal one. The second group includes *covert assertives*, where an assertive speech act is indirectly performed through a different illocutionary act. The third group encompasses *inclusive⁵ assertives*, which communicate an encoded message through a different illocutionary act embedded within an assertive speech act. Observations indicate that the third type of illocutionary acts is less common than the preceding two. Among the examined examples, there were fifteen (15) explicit, twenty six (26) covert and four (4) inclusive assertives. Due to editorial constraints, only a few examples will be discussed in this paper.

Let us now examine the use of assertive speech acts in gaslighting within the excerpt of the film "Gaslight," 1940. The main character Paul engages in a flirtation with Nancy, the maid, creating *triangulation* (Holland, 2023) to undermine Bella's self-worth. In the following example and further, the speaker's utterances were emphasized, while the corresponding commentaries were indicated with hyphens.

Ex. 1.

Paul: Oh, Bella, **I was only trifling with her** (*An explicit assertive; the encoded assertion: "You are misinterpreting the situation". Word – to – world direction of fit*).

Bella: It's so humiliating for me. That girl laughs at me enough, as it is.

Paul: Nonsense, Bella. **You know perfectly well how you imagine things** (*An inclusive assertive, word – to – world direction of fit; the encoded directive: "Do not rely on your perception of reality", world-to-word direction of fit.*).

As illustrated in the example above, Paul employs explicit and inclusive assertives to manipulate Bella's perception of reality. Regarding inclusive assertives, encoded illocutionary acts may encompass directives, or other speech acts, depending on the context of the conversation. Determining the specific perlocutionary act encoded in an inclusive utterance is subject to interpretation, but the intersection of the directions of fit appears evident in such cases.

⁵ I opt for this term because I believe it accurately captures the essence of the speech act type under consideration.

The following example, demonstrating the use of covert assertives, depicts the situation following Paul's deliberate concealment of the envelope addressed to Paula, followed by gaslighting her into believing it never arrived, thus undermining her self-esteem.

Ex. 2.

Bella: Where's my letter?

Paul: **What letter?** (*A covert assertive within a literal directive, world – to – word direction of fit; the encoded assertion: "There has never been a letter for you", word – to – world direction of fit*).

Bella: I haven't had one for such a long time. I do hope it's from Cousin Vincent.

Paul: It isn't here. **Why should there be a letter for you?** (*A covert assertive within a literal directive, world – to – word direction of fit; the encoded assertion: "You are not in the position to expect letters from anyone", word – to – world direction of fit*).

Bella: Nancy told me there was one.

Another example, which portrays a dreadful and humiliating instance of gaslighting, is an excerpt from the 1940 movie (the scene is also featured in the 1944 adaptation), where Paul accuses Bella of stealing the picture, which he had secretly removed himself.

Ex. 3.

Paul: Oh, Bella!

Bella: What is it?

Paul: I've just noticed something. **If you put it right while I'm not looking, I will say no more about it.** (*A covert assertive within a literal commissive, world – to – word direction of fit; the encoded assertion: "You have misbehaved", word – to – world direction of fit*).

As can be observed from the examples above, the speaker's use of covert assertives can be conveyed through literal directives or commissives, illustrating a shift in the direction of fit. Consequently, within the context of gaslighting, assertive speech acts can exhibit a double direction of fit and thus affect the hearer's perception to the benefit of the manipulator.

5.2. Timing and Felicity Conditions

In terms of conscious gaslighting, *timing* is of exceptional importance, as the verbal manipulation in question often manifests itself not as a spontaneous linguistic action, but rather as a sophisticated, well-planned strategy of interconnected behaviors, that often unfold over time. Therefore, when considering gaslighting as an ongoing process, it becomes evident that in order for a manipulator to execute an assertive illocutionary act aimed at altering the victim's initially accurate perception of reality and consequently

achieving the desired perlocutionary effect, there must exist certain preceding *truths* that the manipulator can exploit to contradict the victim's perspective in the future. These truths are often fabricated by the manipulator in advance, as illustrated in example 3 discussed above. Timing in this sense contributes to felicity since it enables the speaker to create an illusion that his/her assertive speech acts meet the requirements of two important felicity conditions: *a preparatory condition* and *a sincerity condition*. According to Austin, a preparatory condition is necessary to determine whether the circumstances of the speech act and the parties involved are appropriate for its successful execution, while a sincerity condition entails that the speaker genuinely believes what he/she is saying (Austin, 1975:14f).

Examples 4 and 5 presented below were extracted from the 1944 film. These excerpts depict scenes where Gregory gaslights Paula into believing that she is inclined to lose things. He creates preparatory conditions by giving Paula his mother's brooch, placing it in Paula's purse, and subsequently removing it in secret.

Ex. 4.

Gregory: I'm afraid the pin is not very strong. [...] I'll have it mended. You better not wear it until I have. You might lose it. **You know, you are inclined to lose things.** (*An explicit assertive; the encoded assertion: "You are not reliable enough to control your possessions". Word – to – world direction of fit.*)

Paula: **I am? I didn't realize that.**

Gregory: Just little things. I'll put it in your bag for safekeeping. There. **Now, you'll remember where it is.** (*An inclusive assertive, word – to – world direction of fit; the encoded directive: "Do remember that the brooch is in your purse". World – to – word direction of fit.*)

Paula: Don't be silly. Of course, I'll remember.

Gregory: **I was teasing you, my dear.** (*An inclusive assertive, word – to – world direction of fit; the encoded directive: "Do not regard me as a threat", world-to-word direction of fit.*)

As can be seen, the speaker uses both, explicit and inclusive assertives, not only to make the hearer lower her defenses but also aid in establishing the preparatory conditions necessary for subsequent manipulation. Let us now explore the unfolding of this scenario in the following example.

Ex. 5.

Gregory: **Paula, didn't I tell you?** (*A covert assertive within a literal directive, world – to – word direction of fit; the encoded assertion: "I have a better understanding of your psychological state and behavioral tendencies", word – to – world direction of fit.*) **How did you come to lose it?** (*A covert assertive within a literal directive, world – to – word direction of fit; the encoded assertion: "You did lose it", word – to – world direction of fit.*)

Paula: I must have pulled it out with something, I suppose. I'm terribly sorry. Please forgive me.

Gregory: Forgive, my dear? It's not as serious as that. It's not valuable.

Paula: Your present to me, your mother's brooch. I wanted to wear it always. I don't remember opening my bag. I suppose I must have. You did put it in there?

Gregory: **Don't you even remember that?** (*A covert assertive within a literal directive, world – to – word direction of fit; the encoded assertion: "There are other things that escape your memory", word – to – world direction of fit.*)

Paula: Yes, of course, I do. But suddenly, I am beginning not to trust my memory at all.

As illustrated in the example above, the speaker uses covert assertives to manipulate the hearer. These covert assertives align with the felicity conditions discussed earlier in this chapter, as the listener is aware that the brooch was previously in her purse and is convinced of the speaker's sincerity.

Returning to the issue of preceding truths, it should be emphasized that, alternatively, these truths may actually be a part of an objective reality beyond the manipulator's control. In such instances, gaslighters frequently resort to denial and fabricate nonexistent facts to support their perspective. Let us explore the following example illustrating this.

Ex. 6.

Paula: No, it began before that. The first day here, when I found that letter.

Gregory: **What letter?** (*A covert assertive within a literal directive, world – to – word direction of fit; the encoded assertion: "There has never been a letter", word – to – world direction of fit.*)

Gregory: Paula: The one I found among the music... from that man called Bauer. Sergis Bauer.

Gregory: Yes, I remember. Yes, you're right. That's when it began. **I can see you still, standing there and saying: "Look at this letter," and staring at nothing.** (*An explicit assertive; the encoded assertion: "You are delusional, while the letter was a part of your imagination". Word – to – world direction of fit.*)

Paula: What?

Gregory: **You had nothing in your hand.** (*An explicit assertive; the encoded assertion: "You are delusional, while the letter never existed". Word – to – world direction of fit.*)

As demonstrated by the examples above, timing holds exceptional importance within the context of gaslighting, serving as a crucial factor in achieving felicity conditions for the successful execution of manipulative speech acts.

6. Conclusion

This study has shown that verbal manipulation within gaslighting relies predominantly on assertive speech acts. Through empirical analysis, three types of assertives prevalent in gaslighting discourse have been identified: explicit assertives, where the encoded message aligns with the literal illocutionary act; covert assertives, where an assertive speech act is subtly conveyed through a different illocutionary act; and inclusive assertives, which convey an encoded message within an assertive speech act through a different illocutionary act, such as a directive or a commissive.

Observations indicate that the third type of illocutionary act is less common than the preceding two, with covert assertives being the most frequently used type of speech act in the context of gaslighting. This phenomenon may be attributed to the fact that covert assertives permit the speaker to subtly influence or manipulate the listener without overtly disclosing his/her intentions, which aligns with the manipulative aspects of gaslighting. By using covert assertives, the speaker can indirectly undermine the victim's confidence and perceptions, thereby achieving his/her objectives more effectively while maintaining plausible deniability. Alternatively, explicit and inclusive assertives appear to be less prevalent in gaslighting due to their directness, which conflicts with the covert, subtle manipulative strategies inherent to gaslighting.

Furthermore, the study has revealed that the pragmatic dimensions of gaslighting extend beyond the conventional framework of speech act theory. In gaslighting scenarios, assertive speech acts exhibit a double direction of fit, a characteristic typically not associated with assertives. This, together with predetermined felicity conditions set by the gaslighter, contributes significantly to achieving the desired perlocutionary effect.

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