« 7 » By contrast, for the constructivist approach, the idea of a radical difference in nature between phenomenal consciousness and the physical world "out there" seems natural and is easy to formulate. Nevertheless, even constructivism, like any other approach, seems to have failed to account for *qualia* so far,[2] which suggests that this must be the deepest of all philosophical conundrums. In order to shed some light on it (assuming that this is possible at all, as it might be beyond the limits of human capabilities), an authentic *revolution* of thought is needed. Since no approach has provided any usable result so far, what accounts for phenomenal consciousness could be something *completely different* from everything we know, i.e., a "hidden" aspect of nature (still *natural* though, not supernatural) that we cannot even remotely imagine today.[3]

« 8 » In conclusion, a comprehensive discourse on euphemisms and dysphemisms needs to account for the distinction between good and evil. Since the latter distinction depends on the concept of "desire" (i.e., something that is part of phenomenal consciousness), the discourse also requires accounting for phenomenal consciousness or *qualia*.

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Giulio Benedetti was born in Italy and graduated in Medicine. He was a student of Silvio Ceccato (1914–1997), whose school was called *Scuola Operativa Italiana* [Italian Operational School]. Benedetti has revised, modified and further developed Ceccato's thought, resulting in a complete and systematic theory, which he calls Operational Linguistics. In terms of operations within cognitive functions (attention, memory, etc.), the theory accounts for the meaning of the fundamental grammatical

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2| At least Silvio Ceccato has never mentioned *qualia* in his writings, and Ernst von Glasersfeld, in his main oeuvre, had to admit, "I know of no one today, who has produced a viable model of consciousness [...]" (Glasersfeld 1995: 70).

3| Whether or not quantum physics, for example, can provide a solution cannot be decided yet.

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words/morphemes and concepts. His current research concerns phenomenal consciousness. Together with its founder Giorgio Marchetti, he maintains the web site http://www.mind-consciousness-language.com.

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Meta-Communicative Interactional Dynamics and the Construction of Meaning on Screen

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> **Abstract** • The use of fictional performances as data for the study of interactional dynamics is a legitimate research practice. However, it is crucial that, in cases such as the ones offered by Druzhinin, we do not lose sight of the highly constructed nature of the interactions we are examining. The lack of observation of non-verbal dynamics, in his example interactions, often bearing the structural hallmarks of the organizing and purposive intelligence of those responsible for their creation, leaves room for further important analysis.

Introduction

« 1 » Having been cited in support of viewing certain scenes from plays, films, and television shows as legitimate forms of data in the study of communicative interactional dynamics between humans (§47), it is, perhaps, unsurprising that I find considerable merit in Andrey Druzhinin's employment of such "recorded interactional dynamics" (ibid) in the analysis of the experiential dynamics of X-phemisms in his target article. At the same time, there are key features of

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these interactions that must be taken into account once we commit ourselves to the use of such data, i.e., the myriad non-verbal interactional dynamics not present when we are merely dealing with words on a page.

« 2 » While I am clearly in support of the use of fictional performances as data for the study of interactional dynamics, it is crucial that, in doing so, we do not lose sight of this highly constructed nature of the interactions we are examining. Even the most "naturalistic" piece of scripted drama will bear the structural hallmarks of the organizing and purposive intelligence of those responsible for its creation. Scripted drama will never stand in "one-to-one" correspondence with the emergent dynamics of everyday life outside "the frame." Great dramatic artistry often takes place when those involved manage to generate performances that are recognizable and relatable eigenforms of our lived experience while, at the same time, standing out in a new relief that allows us to identify patterns of meaning reflected in our "lifeworlds" that might, otherwise, not be observed (Scholte 2018). Whether or not the television series, *Desperate Housewives*, qualifies as an example of great dramatic artistry is irrelevant to the topic at hand. What I wish to make clear is that the constructed nature of the interactions of which it is composed should not disqualify it as a source of data, but, rather, open up other avenues of analysis that dovetail with maintaining a "responsible" position on the veracity of its portrayal of "real life" (whatever that might mean).

An alternate construction of Maxine and her *slave*

« 3 » In the example interaction offered in §51 through §53 of the target article, the reaction of the Guest sitting next to Bree who utters the lines, "I can't believe it. I just can't believe it" somewhat belies Druzhinin's claim that no one is offended by the word. Her sense of offence is reinforced by a look of strong disapproval on her face, an element of the performative dynamics of the interaction central to the work of actors and not captured by the mere words on the page. However, critically, the Guest's outrage seems to be connected to her "experiential construction" of Maxine and not that of Bree, who has simply revealed, in a justifi-

ably forthright manner, a highly unsettling state of affairs for which Maxine is responsible. Again, this interpretation is made "constructible" by the non-verbal dynamics of the interaction. In soft focus in the background, the Guest's gaze, still bearing the traces of her disapproval, remains fixed in the direction that Maxine and the FBI agents have just departed, thus, for the viewer, visually connecting her continuing cognitive activity to Maxine as the object of her displeasure. In sharp focus, in the foreground, a smiling and satisfied Bree takes a celebratory bite of plum pudding (that she knows takes six hours to make) and smiles privately. These dynamics are not accidental and bear the hallmarks of co-ordination between the director, actors, and cinematographer in the attempt to guide the viewer's construction of all of the assembled characters as well as the meta-meaning of the overall context in which they take place.

A second mobilization of the X-phemism, *slave*

« 4 » Although not covered by Duzhinin in the target article, another rich opportunity to analyze the interactive dynamics resulting from the deployment of the same X-phemism occurs in a subsequent scene from the same episode. Opening on the exterior of the Solis's elegant home, the camera pans past the characters of Carlos Solis and his family's pastor, Father Crowley, shaking hands and talking warmly on the front lawn. Behind them, Gabrielle Solis pulls into the driveway in a sleek convertible sports car. As she gets out of the car, she eyes the conversation between Carlos (her husband) and Father Crowley with some suspicion. She strides over and joins the conversation.[1]

Gabrielle: Hello. What's going on?
Father Crowley: Gabrielle, I want you to meet
    someone.
    (Cut to a close-up shot of the Asian woman who was rescued from Maxine's house in the previous scene. She has been standing there all along but is not seen until this cut.)
    This is Xiao-Mei.

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1 | All dialogue from *Desperate Housewives* has been transcribed from the episodes by me. Italicized stage directions are mine.

Carlos: *(leaning slightly towards Gabrielle)*
    She's the young lady who was forced to work for Maxine Bennett.
Gabrielle: *(surprised, to Father Crowley)*
    Oh, the slave!
    (She turns and looks at Xiao-Mei.)
    Wow. Looks well fed.

« 5 » Of immediate interest is the editorial choice to withhold the reveal of Xiao-Mei until Gabrielle's attention is directed towards her. This directorial/editing strategy invites us to construct Gabrielle's sense of surprise and intrusion when she finally becomes fully aware of an individual who, up until that moment, has been, literally, invisible as a participant in this scene.

« 6 » We are invited to construct Gabrielle as completely unaware of the dysphemistic nature of her utterance. At the same time, the dysphemistic sting of this dehumanizing term, *slave,* is fully mobilized on a meta-communicative level by the show's creators and is further underlined by Gabrielle delivering the word to Father Crowley without looking at Xiao-Mei. She does turn her gaze to Xiao-Mei immediately afterwards, but only to offer an assessment of her physical condition. In both sets of speech acts/physical actions, she utterly dehumanizes the young woman by, in the first instance, confirming her identity as an object as if she were not even present and, in the second instance, offering an appraisal of that object that in no way acknowledges her personhood and presence. If one looks closely, one can see a very subtle look of consternation on the face of her husband, Carlos, while she performs those actions. There is at least one person who we can construct as having a "typical" response to this dysphemism. However, he certainly stops well short of commenting on the inappropriateness of her actions, much less correcting them. Even without extensive familiarity with the series, one is able to construct his experience of this behaviour as the type he expects from his wife and something that he has learned to "grit his teeth" and bear. Once again, the dynamics of the actor's delivery, the other actor's non-verbal responses, as well as the framing techniques of director and camera, have been utilized to place the X-phemism, *slave*, on a particular position on the euphemism/dysphemism spectrum

for us as the viewers, and facilitates our own construction of the term that may be radically different from the apparent experiential constructions of the different characters (i.e., Gabrielle blithely unaware of her dysphemism and Carlos discomfited by it but willing to overlook it.) A description of the context itself is not sufficient to indicate the multiple constructions taking place on the screen and available to us as observers. These interactive dynamics are crucial to the meta-communicative acts being executed by the show as a purposeful "system" aimed, as most mainstream TV is, at a more-or-less desired convergence of experiential construction by members of the audience.

Constructing an experience of Desperate Housewives

« 7 » I experientially construct *Desperate Housewives* as a not-so-subtle satire on the kind of consumptive, self-centred behaviour at the core of capitalist democracies. The differing manners in which X-phemisms are deployed by its characters are part of the discursive strategies employed by the makers of the show that make this construction of satire possible. While Bree may, arguably, employ the word *slave* to ensure that the full extent of Maxine's blameworthiness will not be disguised under a veil of niceties, her scene-ending self-satisfied smile enables us, as viewers, to construct her character as being infinitely more invested in her takedown of a rival than in the liberation of the enslaved young woman. The dehumanization of the young woman in servitude, attributed to the word *slave,* may have also taken place with this utterance, whatever Bree's motivation may have been. However, this is only so much "collateral damage" as a result of Bree's deliberate takedown of Maxine and is, likely, completely unnoticed and, certainly, unremarked by the rest of the luncheon guests. Meanwhile, Gabrielle's flagrant dysphemistic employment of the term, underscored by the non-verbal dynamics of the performance as well as the framing and editing of the scene, serves as a set-up for her subsequent deep interest in Xiao-Mei that develops as the episode progresses and she discovers what an amazing housekeeper she has stumbled upon. While there may be a contrast in the range of experiential field

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construction made possible by these different utterances, these constructions are, on a deeper level, revealing of a similar underlying self-interestedness that permeates the entire world of the show.

« 8 » While my own construction above does not necessarily support Druzhinin's assertion in §53 that, the "'bad' word *slave* does not feel bad in the experiential fields of the communicating women" of his sample interaction, it does support his overall claim for a much greater interactional variety of possible meaning construction than that circumscribed by dictionary makers. At the same time, the ways these self-interested characters wield that variety as a tool in the pursuit of their own selfish ends are made available to us through non-verbal dynamics that enable us to construct this meta-communication of the show as a whole.

Further interactive phenomena of interest

« 9 » In supporting the employment of fictional work as data concerning human interaction, I wish to point to some other interactional communicative features on display in another scene quoted in the target article. My hope is that this will stand as an example of further possible constructivist/second-order cybernetic analysis of dramatic works.

« 10 » In §54, Druzhinin draws our attention to another instance when a term commonly understood as a dysphemism (*old lady*) is used to trigger increased emotional intimacy between the participants rather than offence. Other behavioural phenomena come into view by tracking this exchange as the climax of an interaction that began under conditions of extreme uncertainty.

« 11 » For Niklas Luhmann (1995: 103–136), building on, and revising, the work of his mentor, Talcott Parsons, all interactions between two psychic systems (i.e., humans) begin from a state of *double contingency* that also serves to catalyze the interaction itself. In this state, both parties (dubbed *ego* and *alter*) are uncertain about which possible utterances/actions/behaviours, might be selected and executed by the other. At the same time, each feels the need to connect their own actions and utterances to those of the other. Out of this seeming stalemate,

either ego or alter will attempt to reduce uncertainty through some form of opening gambit that will begin to establish the boundaries and code for the interaction. This opening should also offer some fairly obvious connection point to which the other can attach their next utterance. In this manner, ego and alter can secure the continuing autopoiesis of the interaction system.

« 12 » Beyond the usual conditions of double contingency catalyzing any interaction, the interaction in §54 bears the strain of being an attempted rapprochement for an estranged couple. In this situation of behavioural/communicative uncertainty, Roy makes the first offer. His opening gambit is of a particular nature that opens the space for his eventual inoffensive deployment of the usually dysphemistic *old lady*. Arriving in the doorway of Karen's hospital room and carrying a bouquet of flowers, he says:

Roy: What you won't do to get out of being married to me.

« 13 » This sardonic utterance, undercut by the flowers in his hand, quickly begins reducing the uncertainty of double contingency and, at the same time, serves as the kind of meta-communication discussed by Gregory Bateson (1972: 177–193) through which Roy is able to signal to Karen that "this is play." The frame established by Roy can be constructed as a boundary and code for the interaction through which the participants will use a form of "play-fighting" to ease their way back to some form of emotional intimacy. That Roy has managed to successfully reduce double contingency including the desired connection point for "alter" is evinced by Karen's response to Roy's opening gambit and the subsequent autopoietic unfolding of the interaction system that it has catalyzed.

Karen: Oh, crap. I knew I couldn't trust the jumping bean [Gabrielle] to keep her mouth shut.
Roy: *(Handing her the flowers, in a per-functory tone as if going through the motions or fulfilling an obligation)* These are for you.
Karen: Rushing things, don't ya think? *(with a brief smile)* Not dead yet.

Roy: Well, I'm about to kill ya. *(He sits on the bed and gently places his hand on her leg.)* What the hell were you thinking?

« 14 » All of the meta-communicative dynamical cues of tone and physical action enable us to construct the two participants as utilizing a form of "gallows humour" to move towards the point of genuine emotional contact that Druzhinin has underlined. As such, the interaction not only validates Druzhinin's hypotheses but also, even as a highly constructed work of fiction, provides us with a clear and relatable demonstration of both double contingency reduction and the meta-communication of "play fighting."

Conclusion

« 15 » In closing, I wish to position Druzhinin's pushback against those dictionary makers and language theorists seeking to demarcate normative distinctions regarding "good" and "bad" language within an even more radically constructivist onto-epistemological framework that might serve to clear even more space for the kind of investigation Druzhinin offers. Again, I turn to the words of Bateson, who urged us to try and abandon *all* forms of characterological description, insisting that *no* characteristics can be said to *inhere* within the objects of our cognition but that they are, rather, emergent phenomenological outcomes of what is *always* a systemic interaction. For him, even the claim that a rock is "hard" is more suitably expressed that the interaction between the human finger and the surface of the rock gives rise to the quality of hardness (Bateson 1979: 61).[2] At a conference convened by Bateson, Anatol Holt went as far as calling for us to "stamp out nouns" (Bateson 1991: 63). I, for one, find this provocation to be well worth considering. For as that great constructor of interactional dynamics, in *The Tragedy of Hamlet, Prince of Denmark*, William Shakespeare, said, through the mouth of one of his most famous characters, "[T]here is nothing either good nor bad but thinking makes it so."

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2 | When one thinks of the billions of subatomic particles passing through the earth on a daily basis, Bateson's position becomes much less pedantic that it might appear at first glance.

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Author's Response
X-phemisms and Radical Constructivism: From World-View to Whirled-Views

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Handling Editor • Alexander Riegler

> **Abstract** • Using the example of X-phemisms, I focus on the major epistemological difference radical constructivism makes to the theory of language and communication. Along these lines, I reflect on the relationship between values, affect and words as well as on the meta-communicative aspect of experience construction.

In favor of radical constructivism, or why linguists' world-view logic can fall short

« 1 » Given that some commentators feel critical about radical constructivism (RC) as applied to the theory of good and bad language (**Christophe Coupé** §6, **Andreas Gardt** §§9f), I would like to reaffirm that the model I propose is not meant to reject the traditional linguistic approach to euphemisms and dysphemisms, but eliminate certain epistemological contradictions. These arise as a result of a widening gap between what language is in theory and how language appears in practice. However, science is built on the understanding that "contradiction [between theory and observation] cannot be ignored" (Kosso 2011: 23).

« 2 » Why can we not be satisfied with the mainstream theory of good and bad words in which the conceptual role of complexity and experience is underplayed in favor of a more "straightforward" and "algorithmic" classification of linguistic interactions (**Coupé** Q2)? Firstly, this type of reductionism is not educationally viable. Foreign-language learners who expect to command what they think is natural language (i.e., one spoken in a natural environment) have to base their knowledge mainly on what linguists write, in particular, about derogatory and "pleasant" terms. Indeed, after finishing a language course, learners, in most cases, have to communicate

not with linguists or lexicographers, but with many different people who mostly do not use dictionaries to understand the quality of their feeling by the dictionary quality of the word. A stark case in point: Soviet students found it extremely difficult to communicate with English native speakers because Soviet textbooks, the only source of English-language knowledge at the time, taught speech in and through texts only. Secondly, how linguistics conceptualizes what is good and what is bad, disregarding the experiential context, leads us to misjudge other people and treat them unfairly. It is particularly noticeable today in the era of high media exposure. Screenshots or recordings of conversations where certain people utter bad words are often presented out of context, which can easily convince one that these people are bad just because the words they uttered are prescribed in books as dysphemistic.

« 3 » Hence, the main advantage of the radical constructivist view of X-phemisms is that it offers an epistemologically wider and scientifically more viable perspective. Methodologically, language cannot be investigated from within language – language is an abstraction that does not make empirical sense until validated by observation. For example, let us take the concept of light in physics. "We never experience light itself, but our experience deals only with things lighted" (Bridgman 1958: 151). Similarly, we never experience language itself, but *bodily behaviors through which it is* (or appears to be) *spoken*. To investigate these behaviors, we need to understand how they are constructed – and this is where the notion of experience steps in. Texts never provide us with fully reliable empirical data in the same way that medical records are not sufficient for doctors to diagnose, let alone treat their patients. As long as linguistics distinguishes itself from textology, it should study language and be based on interactional experience *with/between* people, which it is possible to gain through spoken communication only (**Coupé** Q1).

« 4 » To explain phenomena, RC uses relational and non-linear, dialectical logic (or as Edgar Morin 1992 put it, "dia-logic," to stress the importance of a special type of logical thinking to investigate complexity). In doing so, RC differs from other approaches to language and meaning, such

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