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**OBSTRUCTING THE DECEPTION IN HUMINT – THE
OBSERVER’S ROLE IN CONVERSATION**

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Abstract:

Everybody lies, but the reason differs from person to person, and from context to context. We daily deal with our lies and others’ lies but when you must face the enemy’s lies in a military operational environment, this becomes a life-and-death problem. In HUMINT domain, the enemy’s lie appears within conversation therefore generating a big paradox because the very same conversation concomitantly constitutes the weapon of choice. To identify lies and obstruct deception, HUMINT uses an observer – human being. The dynamics of conversation when somebody plays the role of observer has its particularities psychologically analyzed within this article. Besides the HUMINT related insights, the article’s underpinning idea is to provide an explanation why we all, no matter the environment, civilian or military, are more cautious with our words when we talk with two persons than with only one

Key words: HUMINT; behavioral; human; intelligence; deception; source; language, baseline.

1. HUMINT in Cognitive Environment

Whether conducted as part of an intelligence gathering operation or in a generic civilian context, three person conversations are unique in terms of dynamics, flow, and pacing of the discussion. In a one-on-one conversation each participant is expected, to a certain extent, to contribute equally to the discussion. In a conversation between groups of four or more, participants most often break into groups and reinforce one another’s point of view during the discussion. In a three-person discussion the third individual could reinforce one of the other two’s points of view, fall silent as an observer, or act as a bridge between the two parties. This dynamic is apt to change over the course of a conversation, but each of the three roles present an opportunity for the third participant to influence the course of the conversation. If the third participant in a three-person conversation is aware of their role and acting with purpose, he/she has a unique opportunity to orchestrate the course of the conversation because their primary task is not adding content to the discussion. Follow up questions, side comments, and reiterations of previously stated material can all serve to direct the course of the conversation. In the context of human intelligence source meetings, the secondary collector, acting as the third participant, can reinforce rapport building, take discrete notes, and observe deviations from baseline behavior in the source. In this way, the addition of a third participant in a source meeting creates an opportunity to alleviate pressure from the primary collector and increase the likelihood that information is collected accurately and naturally from the source. We focus our attention on the three-person interaction especially to the opportunity of the observer, as defined in the scenario below, to identify the deception, the lie. Many experts, defined the lie as a message consciously transmitted to another person, with the intention to encourage beliefs or false conclusions without a preliminary notification. [1]



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Scenario: Person 1 (P1) and person 2 (P2) are from the same institution having as objective to collect information from person 3 (P3) and P3 is aware of this objective.
Question: If P2 plays a role of observer rather than leading the discussion (which is led by P1), how could P2 identify deception along the discussion?

The diagram shows three stylized human figures: P1 (orange) at the top, P2 (orange) at the bottom left, and P3 (green) at the bottom right. They are arranged around a table with two chairs. A microphone is positioned between P1 and P3. P1 is connected to the microphone by a line, indicating they are speaking into it.

Fig. 1.1 – Article’s scenario set-up

Before detailing the role of P2, as defined above, during source operations, it is worthwhile to explore the reasons a source would try to intentionally deceive the operators. Intentional deception occurs when a deceiver acts with the intention that some deceived persons be in error at least partly due to that action (which may be construed as inaction in deception by omission). We retain a partial focus on the deceived since intentional deception succeeds when the deceived is in error at least partly due to the action or inaction of the deceiver [2].

Deception is by no means confined to HUMINT, being party of daily life of all humans. Therefore, deception is a common and complex phenomenon, a study showing that people use deception in approximately a fifth of their social interactions. Although diverse, the reasons why people use deception, human sources included, usually fall within three categories:

- To obtain something they want.* It can be financial rewards or other benefits, information about the operators and their interests (the source may be handled by an adversary) or some form of instant gratification (people who actually enjoy lying, like pathological liars).
- To protect / promote themselves or others.* It can be related to preserving their self-image, impress or boost their reputation, standing or power [3] elevating their status in relation to the operators, protect themselves or family / friends (security or interest related) or an attempt to not damage the relationship with the operators.
- To harm others.* It can include a revenge the source is trying to take on a perceived enemy or undermining a person he/she dislikes.

2. Behavioral Baseline

Building a behavioral baseline is an essential first step in detecting deception in the context of an interview or meeting with a human source. A baseline is a fixed point of personal reference resulting from the compilation of numerous data points which can be used for comparison when behavioral deviations are observed. Essential to identifying an accurate baseline is establishing psychological comfort within the interaction.

Cognitive load and emotional stress must be reduced in the event environment to obtain authentic physiological expressions from the participant. Beginning the collection and analysis process within a relaxed and synergistic environment allows for respondent’s patterns to be captured and analyzed for future deception identification. Elements of data collected to form a baseline include verbal (social cues, word choice, content, ticks, etc), paraverbal (pitch, volume, intonation, pacing, etc), and nonverbal (facial expressions, oculesics, chronemics, sensorics, haptics, proxemics, kinesics, etc). Novel means of baseline assessment include polygraph testing, layered voice analysis or lately the AI-leveraged tools, all of them compiling behavioral data in a controlled environment to highlight any deviation.

Baselines can be developed through numerous methods: conversation, open source analysis, surveillance, and the reporting of a third party. The nexus of this data collection must identify the



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behavior of an individual in an innocuous setting; however, a true baseline must also be tested in order to verify authenticity. Any alteration of the environment or conversational focus can reveal if an individual is behaving consistent with their typical baseline. If a deviation from the norm is observed, then the questioning party must ask themselves why and attempt to replicate the experiment. While a deviation in any of the observed behavioral indicators may not necessarily represent deception, the recorded outlier highlights subject matter for further attention.

Based on the psychological profile in harmonization with the information collection objectives, we could abstractly visualize the person discussion control area as depicted in the figure below. In the discussion context, the control area represents a baseline for person “P1”, regarding the capability to conduct a discussion with an interlocutor (P3), who has their own baseline (Figure 2.1).



Fig. 2.1 – P1/P3’s baseline – control discussion area

In a two-person discussion set-up (P1 vs P3), assumably P1 will not be able to control the discussion and concomitantly to identify deception in those areas where P3 exceed the P1 capabilities. By overlapping both discussion’s control graphs (Figure 2.2) we can identify those shaded areas where P1 may not succeed in discussion or deception identification. The goal will be to reduce the risk area, and from this perspective, the third person (P2 = observer) could easily help with this by their simple presence during discussion even without applying specific techniques that we will analyze later in this article. As we can visualize in the same figure below, once the P2 enters discussion, therefore adding different capabilities level in the dynamics of human interaction, automatically the risk area is reduced.

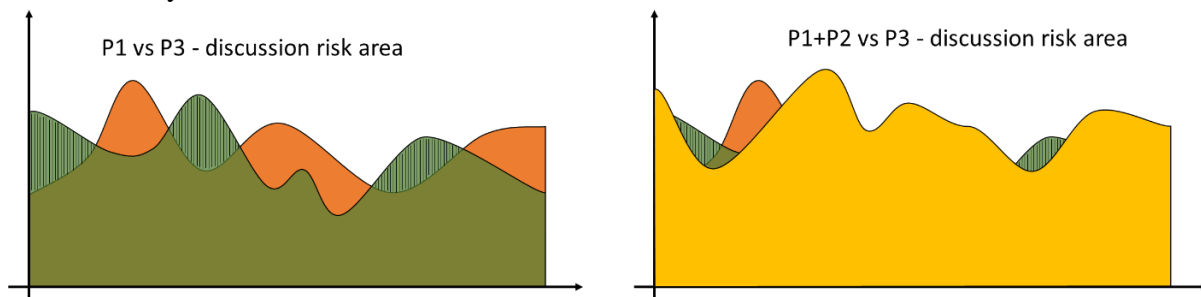


Fig. 2.2 – Discussion risk area in P1-P2 vs P1-P2-P3

The observer “intimidates” the P3 (potential deceiver) and obstruct him/her, because the psychological strategy of the deceiver should cope with two eyes pair, two sensors at the same time. It would be much easier for the deceiver to analyze only one discussion partner and to identify the



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modalities to accomplish their deception than to face two-persons at the same time, when the psychological “effort” is bigger and chances to fail are increased.

Emotions during deception

In general, the deceiver could experience three types of emotions as a consequence of lying: fear of being caught (most common), shame of the act itself, and last but not least, joy of deceiving the others. Of course, we may encounter at the same deceiver all three emotions and combinations of them. The table below depicts the signs of deception in correlation with the above-mentioned emotions associated with the deception.

Signs of deception [4]			Techniques to identify emotions in others [5]
	Facial expressions	Body language	
Fear A person experiencing fear may show the following:	- mouth open with lips tensed or stretched back; - white of upper eye showing; forehead covered with wrinkles in the center; - brows lifted together forming a flat line.	shaky voice, gasping, fidgeting, drawing in of body limbs, crossed arms and/or legs, avoiding eye contact, tensed muscles.	- connect with the person; - be objective; read the body language; - trust what you feel (based on your life experience);
Shame A person experiencing shame may show the following:	- inner corners of the eyebrows are raised so that the eyebrows slant downwards from the center of the forehead; - cheeks are slightly raised; - lip corners are down.	head lowered, eyes closed, down or hidden, and the upper body curved in on itself as if trying to be as small as possible (the bodily acting out of the wish to disappear).	- take note of your emotions; - observe people tone and voice; - note the feel with their handshake, hug or touch. [6]
Joy. A person experiencing happiness or joy may show the following:	- cheeks raised; lips drawn back and up at the corners; - mouth parted with teeth exposed; - crow’s feet on the outside of eyes; - lower lid wrinkled or tensed.	relaxed muscles, open arms and legs (not crossed), comfortable posture.	

Table 1 – Signs of deception for the specific emotions

Maybe the most encountered emotions out of the three above during deception attempt is the “fear”, that we briefly explain in the followings. In general, one of the lies that the operators want to spot is the “lie of fabrication”, the attempt to fabricate a lie regarding the information’s value that is to be delivered to the operators. The detection of this lie would significantly help in evaluating the reliability of the human source. Many suspects attempting to deliver fabricated lies are reluctant to tell the story more than once, fearing detection of contradictions. The lie of fabrication increases the



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subject's fear of detection, which will often trigger the autonomic nervous system response and its related physiological behaviors [7]. Here comes the observer's role of identifying the potential indicators of lies. In general, someone like the above-mentioned human sources (P3), has a pre-planned strategy to provide false information, and automatically such person would try to control his deceptive behavior. Again, one more reason for the observer to exercise their influence.

3. Observer's methods to identify deception

Before presenting and briefly analyzing different methods to identify deception, consequently revealing different ways of obstructing deception, we would like to draw attention to probably the most important thing regarding these aspects, nobody could lie unless you accept to be lied. The fact that we choose to believe what we are told, depends on the perspective we have about the world, the way how we judge the information is the filter raising a red flag or not, to analyze with suspiciousness or not. [8]

Classic methods

To identify the emotions, the duo P1-P2 needs to observe the alterations from the baseline. P2 has the possibility to observe the emotional hijacks and cognitive incongruence of P3. P2 can stimulate the variations from baseline, asking questions, intervening in the conversation, or disturbing it through faking incidents, such as dropping of a pen.

The baseline represents a state in which P3 stays inside the comfort zone. There are two types of interventions: A – If P3 follows the baseline, an intervention of P2 can create a variation and take him/her outside the baseline; B – If P3 does not follow the baseline, a variation can damage the conversation and make P3 adopt their natural behavior.

Traditionally, deception detection has been a highly scrutinized and sought-after school of thought. Deception detection methodology may be defined under various terms; however, three main technique areas are: control questioning, testing cognitive complexity, and building a behavioral baseline [9].

Control/repeat questioning continues to be one of the most successful techniques for detecting deception because it does not rely on the often-subjective assessment of numerous behavioral stimuli, but instead it develops a line of questioning to which the interviewer already knows the answer.

The technique of *testing for cognitive complexity* is seen in the in-depth question of a false narrative to deny the typically simple structure of source's input. A falsified account is not based on a readily accessible pool of memories and deception can often be identified by forcing complexity into the narrative and continually testing it. The testing of cognitive complexity can be exploited through the practice of repeat questioning or even reversing a structured timeline.

Lastly, an interviewer can test for a *behavioral baseline* by recognizing typical behaviors of a source in a comfortable environment and identifying alterations in behaviors when information is closely examined. Ultimately, how best to employ deception detection applies to each individual circumstance but presents a unique opportunity to a two-person duo. Other traditional cues in detecting deception refer to:

Source appearance does not match story. If the source's physical appearance does not match his story, it may be an indication of deceit. Examples of this include the source who claim to be a farmer but lacks calluses on his hands, or a supposed private who has a tailored uniform.

Source's language usage does not match the story. If the type of language, including sentence structure and vocabulary, does not match the source's story, this may be an indicator of



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deceit. Examples of this include a farmer using university level language, or a civilian using military slang.

Lack of technical vocabulary. Every occupation has its own jargon and technical vocabulary. If the source does not use the proper technical vocabulary to match his story, this may be an indicator of deceit. The HUMINT collector may require the support of an analyst or technical expert to identify this type of deceit.

Physical cues. The source may display physical signs of nervousness such as sweating or nervous movement. These signs may be indicators of deceit. The fact that an individual is being questioned may in itself be cause for some individuals to display nervousness. The HUMINT collector must be able to distinguish between this type of activity and nervous activity related to a particular topic. Physical reaction to a particular topic may simply indicate a strong emotional response rather than lying, but it should be key for the HUMINT collector to look for other indicators of deceit.

Failure to answer the question asked. When a source wishes to evade a topic, he/she will often provide an answer that is evasive and not in response to the question asked. For example, if the source is asked, "Are you a member of the insurgent organization?" and he/she replies, "I support the opposition party in the legislature," he/she has truthfully answered a question, but not the question that was asked. This is a subtle form of deceit since the source is seemingly cooperative but is in fact evading, providing incomplete answers.

To sum up this chapter and to provide a recommendation, once the deceiving process starts, the deceiver will try to cover its guilt, therefore we can expect some hints located in micro-expressions/behavior. Confronting the deceiver would force them into a denial position [10], so it's better to allow him to save face, to let him develop the overall deceiving strategy.

The benefit of the observer presence is especially emphasized in those moments when one of the operators takes note, which impede the human source to exploit such a moment as a distraction reason to cover their deception [11]. For this reason, with two operators, the observer role could switch from one to another, always maintaining an eye on the human source for analyzing their behavior.

Innovative methods

A frequent point of failure for planned deception comes in the proper repetition of false information. An individual tasked with passing false information may invent details to pad their story, or have trouble remembering essential bits of information because they are invented. Follow-up questions can be structured to test a source without revealing the true intent of the questions. It is normal to ask for clarification or repetition of some piece of information in the course of a conversation.

In a meeting conducted one-on-one, the solitary collector has a great deal of information to negotiate in their mind while maintaining the natural flow of conversation. Even with an extremely high level of fluid intelligence, a solitary collector may struggle to pinpoint and recall proper follow ups to test the veracity of information provided. P2, as a secondary collector, can take a backseat in the conversation and thereby better focus on key pieces of information that may be tested for accuracy at a later point in the meeting or in a future meeting. Instead of acting as a bridge as in the rapport building example, the secondary collector in this scenario plays the role of observer, listening attentively to the conversation but focusing on gaining an understanding rather than contributing to the discussion.

Often, if P3 plans on lying about a topic, he/she will memorize what is going to say. If the source always relates an incident using the same wording, or answers repeat questions identically



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(word by word) to the original question, it may be an indicator of deceit. In an extreme case, if the source is interrupted in the middle of a statement on a given topic, he/she will have to start from the beginning to “get his story straight.”

In addition to these basic techniques for identifying deception, a special method would be for the observer to react through different facial expressions or gestures to what the third interlocutor says. For example, if the observer seems very serious and annoyed, or he/she seems surprised by the answers of the third person, psychological pressure is placed on P3. Even if he/she was to tell the truth, a disgusted, curious, or angry look would make P3 provide further information, feel he/she is wrong or is disapproved, and will tend to talk more, to give additional details or try to change previous statements.

Another way we can use the observer to identify the deception, would be for it to adopt a nonconformist behavior during the discussion: move his/her chair, drop his/her pen, spill coffee, and constantly disturb the conversation. When a person creates a false story and is interrupted, there may be inconsistencies in what he/she says or may have difficulties fabricating a story (of course, such an approach by P2 requires a sophisticated preparation).

It is very important the format that we choose to stay at the table when discussing with P3. There are a various number of formats where we can choose from, to release the pressure or to increase it on P3. As an example, to increase the pressure on P3 to be more judgmental, P1 - P2 should stay in front of them, in order to confront it. To make a friendlier environment, P2 should position themself nearby P3, so in that way he/she perceives less stress due to a sense of closeness. The observer could sit quietly noting the exchange, or could intervene whenever it is considered to be relevant, depending on the pre-planned discussion execution between the team members [12]. At the same time, if there is a lack of rapport between the primary operator and the subject, there can be a switch to the secondary operator, who receives the benefit of any rapport established by the primary operator while avoiding any negative feelings the subject may have for primary operator.

Deception is not only practiced through the sin of commission, providing false information, but also through the sin of omission using economy with the truth, talking with care [13], leaving out specific information in an effort to obfuscate the truth. Detecting omissions is exceedingly difficult during a conversation, but in employing analysis after the fact, information can be stitched together across one or more collection platforms and gaps in intelligence identified. Targeted analysis of a particular source’s likely knowledge could reveal purposeful omissions and direct a collector to further test the source on certain topics.

P2 (ideally possessing analytical mindset and comprehensive knowledge on the topic) acting as the second collector (co-handler) in a three-person source meeting may attempt to identify omissions in real time as opposed to after the fact. In observing, as well as participating in the meeting, P2 will gain a better sense of the character of the source and better be able to offer their perspective on the veracity of the information provided. Developing psychological comfort for the source aids the collector in identifying deviations from baseline behavior and potential deception or cognitive stress due to other factors. Similarly, psychological comfort can be to the detriment of the collector as he/she himself/herself eases into a natural relationship with the source and develop a truth bias towards the information the source provides. The addition of an observer/analyst (P2) to the meeting may aid in identifying the collector’s own biases and help the collector gain a better picture of the appropriateness of the source for continued contact or higher priority contact.

4. Conclusion

The conclusion is also non-standard as the last chapter of this paper, by bringing into discussion the social media, eventually powered by artificial intelligence. Therefore, the advent of



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social media, both as an information sharing outlet and a social stimulator, provides an unprecedented role within the intelligence community.

While the basic tenants of deception detection remain mostly unchanged in the fundamentals, the addition of social media (maybe even powered by AI) to conversation provides unmitigated opportunity for deception detection if navigated appropriately. Consequently, determining an individual's drivers of interest and pattern of life are often property of the public domain [14], that offers an accessible open source opportunity for further analysis.

Many of the traditional techniques of detection can be bolstered by social media platforms. Access to an individual's curated social media account is often freely offered in a public and social sphere without raising undue scrutiny. Postings can verify dates of location, inform upon control questioning, and even assist in building a behavioral baseline of an individual. In a three-person conversation, P2 can consult a source's social media account as a form of rapport building while innocuously applying this research in real time for deception detection. At the same time, spontaneous real-time feedback leveraged by the use of artificial intelligence applications to identify patterns in verbal, para-verbal and non-verbal communication, tremendously help guiding the analysis towards the right direction.

To end the article in a realistic and modest tone, we must draw the attention to the following theory, partially experimented and validated, that the more confident we are in our capabilities to identify deception, the less we manage to spot it [15].

Most probable, the biggest hurdle in identifying the lie is the truth prejudice, according to which we have the tendency to believe the discussion partner more than a neutral observatory to the discussion. [16]. Nevertheless, without the prejudice of truth we, as humanity, will not be able to survive, human relationships would be full of suspiciousness and detrimental to any kind of interaction. [17]

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